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Stress and Motivation in EFL Teaching-Learning Context

Abstract

This paper aims to shed some light on the correlation between teacher stress, on the one hand, and motivation of teachers and students, on the other hand – observed in an EFL environment. The data sample comprising responses given by EFL teachers and students from the primary education cycle was collected via the teacher stress measurement scale and motivation for learning scale, applied for teachers and students, respectively. Apart from the basic descriptive statistics used to describe the relationship between the variables, the paper's methodology is also characterised by applying the Pearson correlation coefficient. The results led to interesting conclusions; while, as expected, workload directly affects stress levels of teachers, who, following the results, are highly motivated to work with teenagers, contrary to what could be believed, teacher motivation is not directly related to student motivation, what could be further analysed in the future studies.

Keywords: *EFL, students, teachers, stress, motivation, teaching, learning*

Introduction

Motivation and stress we find in teachers and students represent some of the key factors in the teaching-learning process, which is why their characteristics should always be considered when this process is being addressed.

There are many theories of motivation which have helped us understand how and when students learn most effectively and confirmed, at the same time, the strong bond between teacher and student motivation (Andreman, 2020; Oga-Baldwin et al., 2017).

Along this path, stress is a rather influential factor and affects all those participating in teaching-learning exchange.

Relying on well-known definitions, theories and findings relating to student and teacher motivation, as well as causes of teacher stress, this paper aims to examine the interrelation between the phenomena, with a focus on young EFL learners and their teachers.

Motivation and Language Teaching-Learning

Motivation for learning a foreign language is reflected in a desire to learn a language, which can be measured by the effort made to achieve the previously mentioned goal (Quan, 2014). Apart from linguists Krashen and Schumann, American psychologist Gardner specified that a positive attitude towards learning a foreign language and a combination of effort and desire to achieve a goal motivate one to learn a foreign language (Keblawi, 2009).

Student motivation is directly influenced by the behavioural and evaluative attitudes of teachers (Pourfeiz, 2016), who should also be motivated for work; they should stimulate, develop and support student motivation (Guay et al., 2017). We usually differentiate between intrinsic motivation, the internal drive, what one does to satisfy themselves, and extrinsic motivation, which implies external factors, doing something to get rewarded, that is, to avoid punishment (Legault, 2016).

One of the most famous motivation theories is the one proposed by Maslow, i.e., the hierarchy of needs theory, based on the belief that people are motivated to meet their needs, arranged in 5 levels in hierarchical order (Maslow, 1943). To feel complete and accomplished, a person must be motivated to reach her full potential to satisfy her self-actualisation needs. It is this need which stands at the top of Maslow's pyramid of needs and implies a motivation to engage in arts, science, and literature, as well as the motivation to experience higher human feelings and qualities such as heightened emotions, understanding, tolerance, etc. (Neher, 1991).

Herzberg's theory considers two groups of factors that influence the motivation process, namely *motivating factors* and *hygiene factors* (Riley, 2005). The first group of factors consists of the work itself, achievements, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and growth. Hygiene factors include company policies, work conditions, salary, personal life, status, job security, and coworker relationships

(Ruthankoon, 2003). In short, this can be seen as a difference between intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect motivation, whereby motivational factors can be included under intrinsic and hygienic factors under extrinsic motivation sources.

B. F. Skinner, the American psychologist, in his *Reinforcement Theory of Motivation*, claims that the behaviour of an individual is conditioned by the type of reward, i.e., that the behaviour of an individual depends on the consequences of previous behaviours (Milošević & Čolović, 2019).

V. Vroom's expectancy theory explains that the force of motivation is the product of three factors: *valence*, *expectancy*, and *instrumentality*, that is, the choice of resources or activities that lead to the accomplishment of the goal (Kohli et al., 2018). He suggests that an individual will act in a way that they are motivated to choose because they believe that the outcomes of that particular way are what they expect (Zhabakov, 2017).

From a perspective solely related to teachers, we should not forget two important aspects of their motivation. The first one is *the motivating force to be a teacher*, referring to why someone is engaged in teaching, what their teaching environment is like, how satisfied and enthusiastic about their job they are, and how exhausting and frustrating their job is. The second one refers to the teacher-student relationship, how much autonomy teachers provide to their students on the one hand and how much authority they have over them on the other hand (Gagné, 2014).

In the age we live in – characterised by the hectic pace of activities and omnipresent changes in education – one may wonder what motivates teachers to work. What may first come to a teacher's mind are students who are teachers' biggest inspiration. Also, the teaching profession per se, i.e., the process of passing on knowledge, work environment, autonomy in the workplace, positive feedback, career success, professional development, positive classroom atmosphere etc., are all important motivators for a teacher.

Teacher Stress

Society's expectations of teachers and schools as educational institutions have changed a great deal over the years. Changes in the education system are visible and very dynamic. The times we live in, the pace of technological development, recognition of children's rights, education opportunities, inclusive education, etc., are just some of the factors with which the teacher is directly related and the ones that have changed his traditional function as someone who passes on knowledge (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018). All of this contributes to increased stress in the teaching profession, and it has been concluded that the commonest causes

of teacher stress are inappropriate student behaviour, the need for professional recognition and workload (Sorić, 2004).

It can be extremely difficult for a teacher to get through a 45-minute class in a classroom where in addition to all the curricular and co-curricular activities, they constantly need to deal with disciplinary problems. Misbehaving students often influence other students in class, thus creating a learning environment that is very difficult and unproductive. In addition, not all teachers have the same capacity to be authoritative enough when dealing with students with severe behavioural problems (Lewis, 1999).

Some teachers spend more time coping with students' misbehaviour than teaching them, leading to teacher burnout. As the level of burnout increases, teachers impose increasingly strict discipline rules. The mentioned upward trend is the major cause of stress (Sezer, 2018).

Owing to the fact that, apart from their roles and responsibilities, teachers are under the constant supervision of experts, there are many other potential conflict situations related to teachers' professional recognition (Fajardo Castaneda, 2014).

Regarding the teaching profession, it seems that the need for professional recognition is greater than in other professions because teachers work with children, the most vulnerable and important part of any society. In their book *Language Policy*, Eggington and Wren (1997) point out that teachers find affection for their students much more important than peer recognition or earnings.

According to a study in Arizona, USA, teachers have become much less enthusiastic and eager to teach in the classroom due to their unsatisfied need for professional recognition and low incomes. It is students who face the direct consequences of this, all their capacity to learn and succeed notwithstanding (Mertler, 2016).

Teacher Workload

Lesson planning, additional assessments, reports, professional development, education policies, inclusive teaching etc., are all putting more and more strain on teachers with each passing day. The most pleasurable part of work takes place in the classroom. What happens in the classroom can often cause stress and problems, but it can be challenging and stimulating, too. Nevertheless, it seems that no matter how responsible and diligent teachers may be, there is virtually no opportunity for professional development.

Research has shown that workload-induced stress negatively affects teachers' eagerness, enthusiasm, and willingness to be creative when teaching children (Larson et al., 2018).

Workload and having less and less time to attend to the main tasks of the teaching profession have made this profession less attractive. If teachers had more administrative support regarding the amount of paperwork, if there was positive peer social interaction and a good relationship and atmosphere in the classroom, then teachers would have more opportunities for professional and personal development, which would certainly lead to reduced levels of teacher stress (Haydon et al., 2018).

Methodology

The observed sample consists of 131 students attending fifth to eighth grades in three schools from semi-urban areas in Serbia and 19 English teachers teaching there.¹

Considering the research objectives, we used *The Teacher Stress Measurement Scale* (Sorić, 2004), consisting of 25 statements about possible causes of stress (for the teacher's sample). The respondents give their answers by circling a number on a five-point Likert scale, with number 1 indicating the lowest degree of agreement with a given statement and number 5 indicating the highest degree of agreement.

As for the student sample, the respondents were exposed to the motivation for learning scale, designed specifically for the study, comprising 10 items, 5 of which addressed external and 5 internal motivations.

In addition to the basic descriptive statistics used to describe the relationship between the variables, the Pearson correlation coefficient is used.

Basic hypotheses

1. It is assumed that there is a correlation between the main types of motivation and the causes of teacher stress.
2. It is assumed that there is a correlation between motivation and causes of teacher stress, on the one hand, and specific types of student motivation, on the other hand.
3. It is assumed that there is an interrelationship between motivation and the causes of teacher stress.

¹ The data illustrated in the article were gathered for the purpose of the third's author final thesis (defended at Singidunum University) preparation (as a part of a larger-scale research), and the article itself has been inspired by some of the chapters/conclusions used from the mentioned research.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the basic variables on teachers' sample

	N	Rang	Min	Max	AS	SD
Teachers' intrinsic motivation	19	6	9	15	13,79	1,87
Teachers' extrinsic motivation	19	12	3	15	9,11	3,05
Stress caused by students' inappropriate behaviour	19	15	14	29	20,89	3,93
Stress caused by the need for professional recognition	19	22	11	33	23,05	5,32
Stress induced by workload	19	27	21	48	38,26	7,76

It can be seen from the table that teachers are generally well-motivated to perform their professional practice. That is so due to various sources of personal satisfaction that working with children provides them (AS=13.79; SD=1.87), as well as the external awards, salaries, job security, and other forms of material rewards (AS=9.11; SD=3.05). When it comes to potential causes of stress, the teachers are the least aggravated with inappropriate students' behaviours (AS=20.89; SD=3.93), then the stress related to lack of opportunity for career development as well as the stress because of the lack of recognition and appreciation of their role within society (AS=23.05; SD=5.32), whereas workload is the greatest cause of stress (AS=38.26; SD=7.76).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the basic variables on students' sample

	N	Rang	Min	Max	AS	SD
Intrinsic students' motivation	131	12	3	15	9,81	2,96
Extrinsic students' motivation	131	14	6	20	13,30	3,32

Regarding students' subsample, out of which there are 131 in our research, the descriptive statistics results in both intrinsic (AS=9.81; SD=2.96), and extrinsic motivation (AS=13.30; SD=3.32) are around average, i.e., they are slightly above average.

Correlations

We will present the correlations in the remainder – the relationship and the main types of connections gained between the main examined variables on the sample of teachers and students.

The correlations in Table 3 regard our initial goal and the first hypothesis. There is a positive correlation between the main types of motivation and specific causes of teachers' stress.

Table 3. Correlations of the basic variables on the sample of teachers

	Intrinsic teachers' motivation	Extrinsic teachers' motivation	Stress caused by inappropriate students' behaviour	Stress caused by the need for professional recognition	Stress induced by workload
Intrinsic teachers' motivation	1	-,219	,472*	-,049	,153
	19	,367	,041	,842	,531
Extrinsic teachers' motivation	-,219	1	,089	,181	,001
	,367	19	,717	,458	,996
Stress caused by inappropriate Ss' behaviour	,472*	,089	1	,365	,604**
	,041	,717	19	,125	,006
Stress caused by the need for professional recognition	-,049	,181	,365	1	,584**
	,842	,458	,125	19	,009
Stress induced by workload	,153	,001	,604**	,584**	1
	,531	,996	,006	,009	19
	19	19	19	19	19

*correlation is significant at the level 0,05

**correlation is significant at the level 0,01

The previous table indicates that the teachers' intrinsic motivation positively correlates with stress caused by inappropriate students' behaviour ($r=0.472$, $p<0.05$). It further indicates that teachers are more motivated to work with students with certain behavioural problems. Hence, it can be assumed that this presents a challenge to teachers and provides them with purpose within their profession. In addition, stress caused by workload is in positive relation to stress caused by students' inappropriate behaviour ($r=0.604$, $p<0.05$), as well as stress caused by the

need for professional recognition ($r=0.584$, $p<0.05$). By obtaining these results, our first general hypothesis may be confirmed.

The correlations shown in the following table pertain to our third general hypothesis and show the interconnection between different types of motivation and the causes of teachers' stress with different types of motivation of their students.

Table 4. The relationship between the basic variables in the sample of teachers and students

	Intrinsic students' motivation	Extrinsic students' motivation
Intrinsic students' motivation	,171 ,485 19	,412 ,079 19
Extrinsic students' motivation	,111 ,651 19	-,107 ,663 19
Stress caused by inappropriate Ss' behaviour	,147 ,549 19	,114 ,643 19
Stress due to professional recognition	,458* ,049 19	,449* ,030 19
Stress caused by workload	,208 ,392 19	,209 ,390 19

*correlation is significant at the level 0,05

**correlation is significant at the level 0,01

It could be seen from the table that teachers' scores on variables of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are not related at a statistically significant level with the basic types of their students' motivation ($p>0.05$).

Teacher stress caused by students' inappropriate behaviour is not related to any of the basic types of students' motivation ($p>0.05$). It is certainly an unexpected result since, as previously mentioned in the theoretical part, the trend known as "burnout", which assumes overcoming students' problematic behaviour is the main cause of stress and is directly related to teaching and the time spent teaching (Sezer, 2018). Thus, the results were expected to show the relationship between teachers' stress and the basic types of students' motivation, but the result is missing. On the other hand, the results show that teachers' stress caused by the

need for professional recognition is positively correlated with intrinsic ($r=0.458$, $p<0.05$) and extrinsic motivation of students ($r=0.449$, $p<0.05$). The data confirm the conclusion by Eggington and Vren (1997), claiming that for foreign language teachers nurturing love towards their students is far more important than the need for professional recognition.

An interesting fact from the research is that intrinsic motivation is positively interconnected with stress caused by inappropriate student behaviour. Regarding the theoretical part of the paper, the research confirms the already known – that all causes of stress are interconnected; that the intrinsic and extrinsic students' motivation are related; that the teachers' stress induced by professional recognition is positively correlated with the intrinsic and extrinsic students' motivation.

Conclusion

The conclusions we partly drew in the previous section comply with previously set theoretical foundations. It is also worth noting that one of the main causes of teachers' stress is the amount of workload and that teachers like to work with problematic students (intrinsic teachers' motivation is related to stress caused by inappropriate student behaviour).

In addition, the relevant information gathered is that teachers' extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are unrelated to students' extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. The starting assumption was based on the fact mentioned in the theoretical section of the paper – that an important aspect of motivation is the teacher's attitude towards the student. However, the research did not confirm the expected. It can be assumed that the absence of this relationship was due to a large disparity in the number of students and their teachers and that the situation would probably be different if the subsample of teachers increased, which was not possible in the current research.

Certainly, one of the most interesting data obtained by this research is the fact that extrinsic teachers' motivation is related to their students' grades and that it is the strongest in working with eighth-grade students – because it presents a challenge, proven to be a very important factor in a teacher's job. They are already more mature and independent at the beginning of adolescence, and they begin to form their personalities. They also begin to have their own opinion and oppose the authorities more openly, which relates to the fact that teachers perceive working with inappropriately behaving students as especially stimulating and challenging.

The obtained results are very useful. Some findings may seem somewhat unexpected and could thus be used to improve teachers' performances. At the same time, the results can be used in planning strategies to increase student intrinsic motivation and possibly eliminate or reduce teacher stress.

When it comes to potential future research on the topics, it should be devised to include a larger sample of teachers to obtain a larger quantity of statistically significant data and hopefully create the possibility to carry out some more detailed statistical analyses, which would give a more precise and clearer picture of the current situation in teaching-learning cycle. Comparing urban and rural areas, differences in teachers' attitudes towards each, techniques they use to increase their motivation, and their students' motivation might also lead to some eye-opening results. It could allow teachers to build strong senses of competence and personal self-efficacy and develop appropriate coping mechanisms and strategies to battle the – undoubtedly different, but always present – causes of stress.

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