

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' SATISFACTION WITH THE PROFESSION IN BULGARIA AND MACEDONIA

*Original scientific paper*

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### **Abstract**

*The satisfaction in a profession is one of the key elements for productivity, quality working results but its also important from a personal point of view in the sense of motivation for work and persistence in overcoming difficulties. Satisfaction in the teaching profession is also very important for the overall quality of the educational process and its issue that should not be neglected. Therefore, considering many educational reforms that are occurring, our particular interest was focused on exploring the satisfaction of being a teacher in the context of primary school teachers in Bulgaria and Macedonia. Based on this, this study aims to examine primary school teachers' satisfaction with their professional activity. The subject of study are 232 Bulgarian and 123 Macedonian primary school teachers who teach different school subjects. A modified questionnaire, with 22 items related to the satisfaction with the teaching profession, is applied. Obtained data were analyzed using factor analysis, analysis of variance and non-parametric Mann-Whitney test. The results show that the items with the highest values for the primary school teachers' satisfaction in both countries are: the duration of holidays, the professional relations with colleagues, and the professional relations with the school management. There are no significant differences between Bulgarian and Macedonian primary school teachers in terms of satisfaction with most of the factors related to their professional activity.*

**Keywords:** professional satisfaction, primary school teachers, Bulgaria, Macedonia, job satisfaction factors

### **INTRODUCTION**

One idea that applies to all segments of social life and professional satisfaction states "Satisfied worker is a productive worker". The phenomenon of job satisfaction for decades attracts the attention of researchers. According to Hanaysha, Abdullah & Warokka, (2011), it is an indicator of a healthy institution, in which the proposed quality of services is directly related to people who work in it. An important indicator on which the quality of life depends, a factor that affects the quality of work of the individual is job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction is seen as one of the main attitudes in every professional activity (Hristakieva (Христакиева), 2019). It is difficult and ambiguous to define it without a clear definition. Referring to Locke, Gospodinov highlights job satisfaction as "a positive emotional state as a result of the evaluation of his/her own work experience" (Gospodinov (Господинов), 2013). Job satisfaction can be considered as a general attitude toward work or satisfaction with five specific dimensions of work such as: salary, work, opportunities for promotion, superiors and co-workers (SuSnjar & Zirnanji, 2005). Job satisfaction is not only a result, but it also has a significant impact on a person's future activity and his/her personal, social and professional development.

Regarding job satisfaction in the context of the teaching profession, it is defined as a construct that reflects the emotional and cognitive attitude of the teacher towards different aspects of school work (Stamouli, cited by Grassl, 2013). Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the factors of satisfaction, the dissatisfaction with the work of the teachers. In the study of Perrachione, Rosser & Petersen (2008) several extrinsic and intrinsic factors are considered that define satisfaction in work. Extrinsic factors include: school climate, support from fellow teachers and classes with a small number of students. Intrinsic variables are defined as: working with students, satisfaction with the nature of teacher work by itself and the effectiveness of the teaching process. The study also considers other extrinsic variables such as: work overload, low income, lack of parental support, student misbehavior and classes with a large number

of students which in turn are more related to dissatisfaction with the teaching profession.

Satisfaction with the teaching profession is most often associated with the quality of education and its outcomes, which are addressed to all participants in the training process. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the modern global society raises the question of quality of life and in this connection, the satisfaction of teachers is influenced by many social factors in the contemporary living conditions (Doychev (Дойчев), 2019). In the social space of macro and micro level, various relationships between the state policy and the institutions in the field of education take place, on the one hand, and the various entities that implement this process like schools, teachers, university professors, on the other hand (Chavdarova-Kostova (Чавдарова-Костова), 2015; Borisov (Борисов), 2017).

In the recent years, several positive reforms have been carried out in Bulgaria and Macedonia, and numerous regulations and acts have been adopted in the field of education, which significantly increases the status of the teaching profession in the society. In Bulgaria, the teaching profession is regulated with the Law on Pre-school and School Education (2016), Regulation No.12 from the status and professional development of teachers, principals and other pedagogical specialists (2016) and Regulation No. 15 (2019) for the status and professional development of teachers, principals and other pedagogical specialists (2019). Accordingly, the teaching profession in Macedonia is regulated with Law on Primary Education, Law on Teachers and Professional Associates in Primary and Secondary Schools (Official Gazette of RSM, no. 161/219), Rulebook on basic professional competencies of teachers, 3/2020, Rulebook on the form and content of the personal plan for the professional development of teachers and professional associates in primary and secondary schools 18/2020.

In both Balkan countries, the interest of young people in pursuing the subject of the teacher began to increase (Petkova (Петкова), 2018; Malcev & Popeska, 2019). The pedagogical activity of primary school teachers is significantly different from that one of spe-

cialist teachers in different school subjects in post-primary school education. There are two main reasons for this statement. The first reason is that primary school teachers provide education in all school subjects. This fact places high demands on their vocational training and the formation of professional skills and competences for teaching the concrete subjects taught in the initial stage of the educational system (Mileva (Милева), 2018; Ivanova & Mileva, 2019; Malcev & Popeska, 2019). The influence of the teacher's personality and the level of his/her professional skills on the quality of the educational process is an indisputable fact (Rasheva-Merdzhanova & Bogdanova (Рашева-Мерджанова & Богданова), 2012; Engels-Kritidis (Енгелс-Критидис), 2017). The second main reason that makes the work of the primary school teacher difficult, stressful and different is the specificity and the age characteristics of the primary school students. The most frequently mentioned in the literature are impulsive reactions, instability of attention, emotional retardation, low self-esteem, failure to comply with the rules and order at school, fear of the teacher and others (Zheliakova-Koynova (Желязкова-Койнова), 2002).

We assume that certain factors have a significant influence on the prestige of the pedagogical work of primary school teachers in Bulgaria and Macedonia greatly determines the satisfaction of teachers with their professional activity. Determinations of those factors and possible differences that occur between primary school teachers from Macedonia and Bulgaria are the subject of research of the presented study.

## METHODS

The purpose of the study was to compare satisfaction with their professional work of primary school teachers from Bulgaria and Macedonia. The study was conducted on a total sample of 352 participants, generalist primary school teachers from Bulgaria and Macedonia. In both countries, generalist teachers teach all subjects, including Physical education as well and also have similar requirements for educational background. Particularly, 232 primary school teachers from Bulgaria and 123 generalist teachers from Macedonia participated in the study. From the sample of Bulgarian primary school teachers, 229 (98,7%) were female and only 3 (1,3%) were male. From the subsample of Macedonian generalist teachers, 112 (91%) were females and only 11 (9%) were males.

A modified questionnaire originally developed by Tosheva (2012) and later modified by Ivanova & Mileva, (2019) was applied. Besides general information for gender, level of education, years of working experiences it conducted 22 items related to the satisfaction with the teaching profession. The Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 – lowest level and 5 – highest level) for evaluation of different levels of teachers' satisfaction was applied. The items were directed to many aspects of the profession that correlated to the teachers' satisfaction including personal satisfaction, material facilities for work, satisfaction related to relations with students, parents and school staff, possibilities for personal and professional development. etc. An identical survey procedure was applied in both countries. The study was conducted in May 2019 and schools from different cities in Bulgaria and Macedonia were included.

Obtained results were analyzed using factor analysis (principal component analysis), analysis of variance and non-parametric Mann-Whitney test. Data were processed using the SPSS package.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study included a total of 352 participants, from which 341 were females and only 14 were males indicating that a high 97% of

study participants were females and only 3% are males. Analyzed by countries, only 3 participants from Bulgaria and 11 from Macedonia were males. This evidence for one tradition of the exceptional feminization of the profession - primary school teachers and the lack of willing men to work with pupils in the early and mid-childhood period. From the aspect of educational background, it should be noted that 83.2% of the surveyed Bulgarian teachers had a Master's educational degree and only 16.8% had a Bachelor's educational degree. There was a tendency towards acquiring a higher level of education, which was probably related to the new normative documents and regulations adopted in Bulgaria in recent years. For the sample of Macedonian teachers, 116 participants (6%) have a Bachelor's degree from four – years of university studies, which is compulsory to be employed as teachers in school and only 7 participants (6%) have completed Master studies in Education. The age profile of the surveyed teachers in both countries was diverse due to different regulations for retirement. It was in the range from 21 to 67 years for a subsample of Bulgarian teachers and from 24 to 64 for Macedonian teachers. The number of older teachers was predominant in both countries and the total sample as well suggesting that greater efforts for making the profession more attractive should be needed.

Using factor analyses (Principal component analyses), the following four factors related to the satisfaction of the profession were identified: organization and professional environment – 40,13% sum of factor loading; social working conditions – 8,72% factor loading; reforms in education – 6,01% factor loading and education and personal development – 4,94% factor loading.

The analysis of the results for the satisfaction of the primary school teachers with the professional activity in Bulgaria and Macedonia, and after the variation analysis with the highest degree of significance the following variables were outlined (Figure 1):

- duration of holidays,  $M = 4.12$ ;  $SD = .93$ , and  $M = 3.98$ ;  $SD = .88$
- relations with colleagues -  $M = 3.94$ ;  $SD = 1.03$ , and  $M = 3.70$ ;  $SD = 1.00$ ;
- relations with school management -  $M = 3.90$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ , and  $M = 3.96$ ;  $SD = 1.11$ .

It is clear that, concerning the variable's duration of holidays and relationships with school management, there were no differences in the satisfaction of primary school teachers from Bulgaria and Macedonia. Bulgarian teachers were slightly more satisfied with the relationships with their colleagues than Macedonian teachers, but no statistically significant differences were found.

It should be noted that the relationships with the participants from the internal environment of the surveyed teachers prove to be an important factor in their job satisfaction. Creating a comfortable and successful work environment is a basic prerequisite for successful professional activity.

The lowest level of satisfaction of the surveyed primary school teachers in the two Balkan countries, was determined for the following variables (Figure 2):

- prestige of teachers' profession -  $M = 2.12$ ;  $SD = 1.07$ , and  $M = 2.10$ ;  $SD = 1.05$ ;
- social and health insurance -  $M = 2.84$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ , and  $M = 2.75$ ;  $SD = 1.18$ ;
- relations with the Ministry of education -  $M = 2.50$ ;  $SD = 1.17$ , and  $M = 2.64$ ;  $SD = 1.24$ ;
- reforms in education -  $M = 2.06$ ;  $SD = 1.17$ , and  $M = 2.10$ ;  $SD = 1.24$ ;
- combining work with personal engagements -  $M = 2.96$ ;

SD = 1.15, and M = 2.80; SD = 1.06.

No significant differences were observed in the satisfaction of primary school educators from Bulgaria and Macedonia with these indicators. In both countries, the prestige of the teaching profession is still low and does not meet the attitudes and expectations of the teaching professionals. This is probably related to the ongoing education reforms in the two Balkan countries. Despite the efforts of the Ministries of education and science to make positive changes and to seek new approaches in the school field, satisfaction with the links and relationships with this most important executive body in the educational field is not fully implemented.

Combining work with personal engagement was a difficult task for both Bulgarian primary school teachers and their Macedonian colleagues.

The most variables in terms of job satisfaction of the primary school teachers were with medium importance. Various variables were involved here, but the emphasis was given on the organizational and working conditions (Figure 3):

- amount of payment - M = 3.01; SD = .96, and M = 2.74; SD = 1.05;
- duration of working day - M = 3.21; SD = 1.23, and M = 3.15; SD = 1.17;
- weekly schedule - M = 3.40; SD = 1.22, and M = 3.36; SD = 1.18;
- possibility to participate in education and personal development of youth – M = 3.40; SD = 1.10, and M = 3.35; SD = 1.07;
- possibility for expression of personal qualities on your working place – M = 3.70; SD = 1.04, and M = 3.38; SD = .97;
- opportunity for career development in the profession - M = 3.37; SD = 1.17, and M = 3.15; SD = 1.07;
- general organization of work at school – M = 3.50; SD = 1.06, and M = 3.30; SD = .90;
- working conditions and facilities - M = 3.37; SD = 1.10, and M = 3.40; SD = 1.05;
- style of school management - M = 3.45; SD = 1.26, and M = 3.15; SD = 1.13.

It is noteworthy that primary school teachers were relatively satisfied with the salary. This is probably the result of the measures taken by the Ministry of education and science and the adopted important normative documents, which invariably related to the remuneration of teachers in the country.

The teachers were relatively satisfied with the organization of work and work in the respective school, as well as with the specific working conditions. The career opportunities in the professional field were increasingly being evaluated (Господинов (Gospodinov), 2013; Петкова (Petkova), 2018).

Three of the variables examined showed significant differences in the level of the satisfaction of Bulgarian and Macedonian teachers. These were participation in making decisions for schoolwork, as the satisfaction among Bulgarian educators was being higher - M = 3.50 and for Macedonian teachers M = 2.90 (p < 0.05, Mann-Whitney). Therefore, Bulgarian teachers have more freedom concerning different decisions about their professional activity, which is probably related to the legislation, as well as to the specific conditions of the educational environment.

Bulgarian primary school teachers were significantly more satisfied with their relationship with the parents of the children and the

school board - M = 3.78; SD = 1.09, at M = 2.90; SD = .81 (p < 0.05, Mann-Whitney). This is probably related to school management, particularly the organization of activities, the involvement of parents, established channels of communication, the election of school and parents boards, etc. These aspects can vary from school to school even in the same community. In addition to this, more frequent contacts and meetings between teachers and parents, and timely sharing of potential problems and conflicts could be also some of the factors affecting the level of satisfaction in this segment.

Much higher was the level of satisfaction of teachers in Bulgaria than the evaluation of the school management of their work - M = 3.95; SD = 1.00. The teachers in Macedonia were relatively less satisfied with the assessment of their activities by their principals - M = 2.85; SD = .71 (p < 0.05, Mann-Whitney). This can be due to different manners and criteria for evaluation of teachers' work in both countries and different national legislations which indicates, that for a comparative study such as the presented one, more detailed observation will be needed.

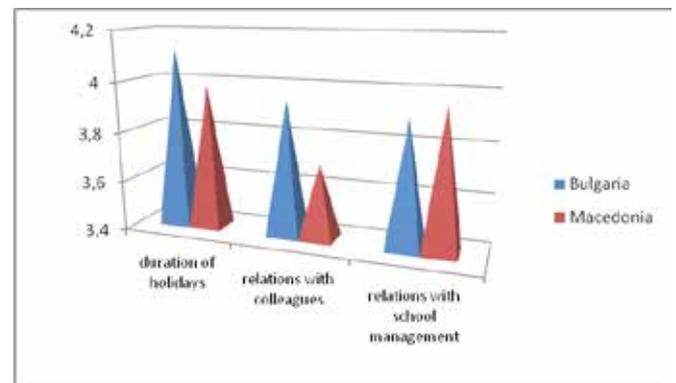


Figure 1. Items with highest degree of teacher's satisfaction

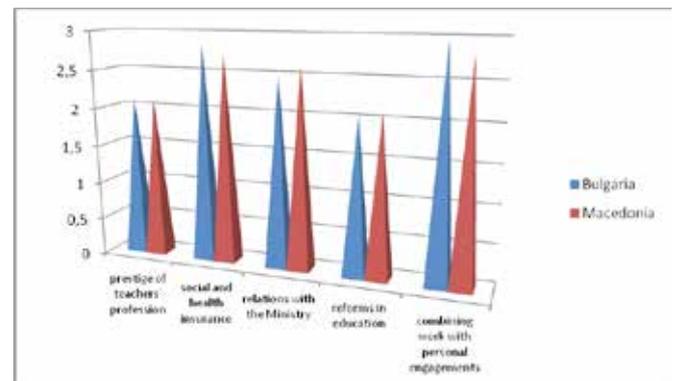


Figure 2. Items with lowest degree of teacher's satisfaction

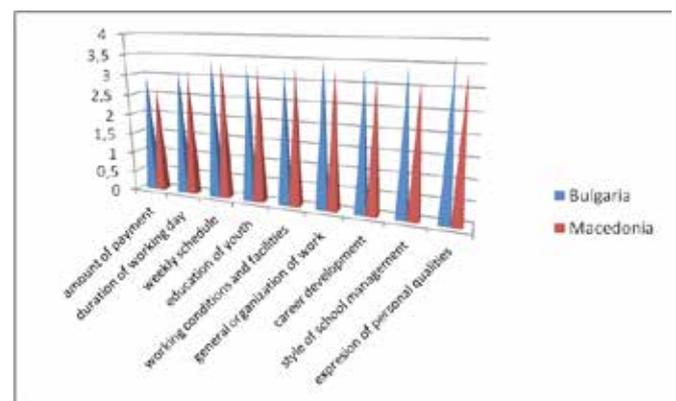


Figure 3. Items with average degree of teacher's satisfaction

## CONCLUSIONS

Satisfaction from the profession is an important issue that has a huge impact on personal motivation for work as well as the delivery of quality work results. Results from our analyses this issue in two neighboring countries with similar educational traditions. According to the obtained results, we could conclude that:

- The level of satisfaction with work as a teacher is greatly affected by four different factors, with the highest contribution of the factor organization and professional environment
- Primary school teachers were satisfied with the factors of the specific internal social environment associated with different types of professional relationships and interactions but mainly refereeing to the duration of holidays, relations with colleagues and relations with school management
- The low attractiveness of the profession and frequent reforms in the educational system had a negative impact on satisfaction with the pedagogical work.
- There were no significant differences between Bulgarian and Macedonian primary school teachers in terms of satisfaction with most of the factors related to their professional activity.

Based on the presented study results, we recommend that it can be extended to establishing teacher satisfaction in other Balkan countries, to conduct a larger comparative study. Such an approach will give the possibility to join efforts to improve the prestige of the profession, exchange and implement good practices related to policy and improvement of the profession as well as to find common solutions for overcoming issues that decrease the level of satisfaction and work together to create possibilities that will ensure greater engagement in teaching profession and greater satisfaction as an important step for excellence and quality.

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