

# **WELL-BEING OF TEACHERS IN THE CONTEXT OF REMOTE TRAINING OF FUTURE TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS**

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## **Abstract**

The study presents the results of current research in the field of mental health and well-being of university teachers in Europe and in Slovakia in the context of the ongoing pandemic and the transition to emergency remote teaching and training. In particular, it deals with the psychosocial aspects of remote training of future translators and interpreters. The study offers the results of a quantitative analysis of selected factors of remote teaching, which affect not only the course and the outcomes of education, but also the overall well-being of teachers. Most teachers state that remote teaching costs them significantly more mental energy and almost half of them feel that their performance has been significantly negatively influenced by social isolation. However, most of them have no difficulties with maintaining motivation for teaching in the remote mode.

**Keywords:** teacher, translation, interpreting, remote teaching, psychosocial aspects, well-being

## 1. Introduction

Based on the figures published by UNESCO, approximately 1.3 billion children and young people, or roughly 70% of students worldwide, have been affected by schools closing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> European universities have also experienced a significant disruption in their operations with most of them transitioning to remote teaching in March 2020.<sup>2</sup> The transition was sudden; it was not a systematic and long-prepared move, but ‘emergency remote teaching’ (Hodges et al., 2020). As such, it is necessary to research its impact on all of its actors in various contexts. In addition to the didactic, technical or financial aspects, it is undoubtedly important to note the implications that remote teaching and the circumstances surrounding it have on mental health and psychological well-being of students and teachers.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of psychological well-being in which a person is capable of using their abilities, coping with common stressful situations, working effectively, and contributing to society. This emphasises that it is not merely the absence of mental illness or disorder, but a state of physical, mental, and social well-being that allows a person to be productive, feel positive emotions, enjoy leisure time, and actively contribute to the life of the community (Kim, 2021). The sense of well-being thus reflects how people feel, act, and overall assess their quality of life, and it represents a key term in the understanding and defining of health as such.

The study focuses on mental health and psychological well-being of university teachers during the pandemic, and on the psychosocial aspects that influence psychological well-being of teachers providing training to future translators and interpreters (T&I), and thus have a potential impact on the course and outcomes of the training, as well as on the personality and mental health of teachers more broadly.

## 2. Mental Health and Well-being of Students and Teachers During the Pandemic

Current research somewhat intensely explores the changes that have occurred in higher education following the transition to remote teaching. Students’ perspective has been complexly mapped by scientists in a pan-European context. E.g., Doolan et al. (2020) surveyed a sample of almost 12,000 European university students in six key areas: academic life, social support network, skills and infrastructure needed for distance learning, life circumstances, overall level of adjustment, as well as mental and emotional well-being. Most students responded that with the transition to remote teaching, their workload has increased, and their academic performance has decreased. Many often felt frustrated, bored, and suffered from anxiety. Issues with adjustment to the new situation have more often manifested in younger students, students with a weaker social support network, lower level of digital skills, and students with psychological issues.

Similar surveys have been conducted in individual countries on a national level as well. Conditions of students at Slovak universities were surveyed in 2020 by the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education as part of the ‘Akademická štvrťhodinka’ (‘The Academic Quarter’) survey. Nearly 20,000 students from all Slovak universities have participated in the survey. Most evaluated the organisation of education during the pandemic positively, but many felt that the level

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<sup>1</sup>Available online: <<https://en.unesco.org/news/13-billion-learners-are-still-affected-school-university-closures-educational-institutions>> [Cited on 2021-14-09]

<sup>2</sup>Available online: <[https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/briefing\\_european%20higher%20education%20in%20the%20covid-19%20crisis.pdf](https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/briefing_european%20higher%20education%20in%20the%20covid-19%20crisis.pdf)> [Cited on 2021-14-09]

of knowledge and skills they had acquired was lower than during in-person teaching. More than a half of students did not feel as a part of the student and teacher community at their university, and a third were considering dropping out.<sup>3</sup>

The situation of teachers in the conditions of remote teaching tends to be mapped by a more general research focusing on teachers working at different levels of education (e.g. primary, secondary schools), or on comparing the working conditions of teachers with other professions.

Overall, during the pandemic, the teaching profession ranks among those with high levels of stress, mainly due to increased workload, more administrative duties, interrupted or limited contact with colleagues and school management, and also due to difficulties in maintaining work-life balance (Mercer – Gregersen, 2020).

When it comes to teachers' mental health and psychological well-being, for example Dempsey and Burke (2021) found that 70% of Irish teachers experienced higher levels of stress and 60% reported lower levels of psychological well-being during the first wave of the pandemic. The amount of stress experienced by teachers was mainly impacted by a difficulty to separate work and private life during remote teaching. On the other hand, teachers viewed positively improvement in their digital skills and most felt more competent to handle the technical aspects of remote teaching.

Mari et al. (2021) researched the psychological factors influencing different groups of workers (practitioners, managers, executive employees, teachers) and their functioning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of their research point to work-from-home having the biggest negative impact on the teacher group, especially with regard to the organisation of their work activities, and their overall mental well-being. Compared to other professions, the teachers also rated working from home as saving them less time and money, and reported the highest levels of experienced stress.

The above research is undoubtedly a valuable probe into the situation of teachers in general. Our study, however, focuses on specific psychosocial factors that influence teaching in study programmes aimed at training future translators and interpreters in Slovakia from the point of view of the teachers who provide it.

### **3. Psychosocial aspects of remote teaching of translation and interpreting from the teachers' perspective**

A survey of various aspects of remote teaching was conducted in early 2021 on students and teachers from all Slovak universities that offer programmes aimed at training future translators and interpreters (Hodáková – Perez, 2021). The quantitative-qualitative survey focused on key procedural, technical, and psychosocial factors that have a significant impact on the course and outcomes of education.

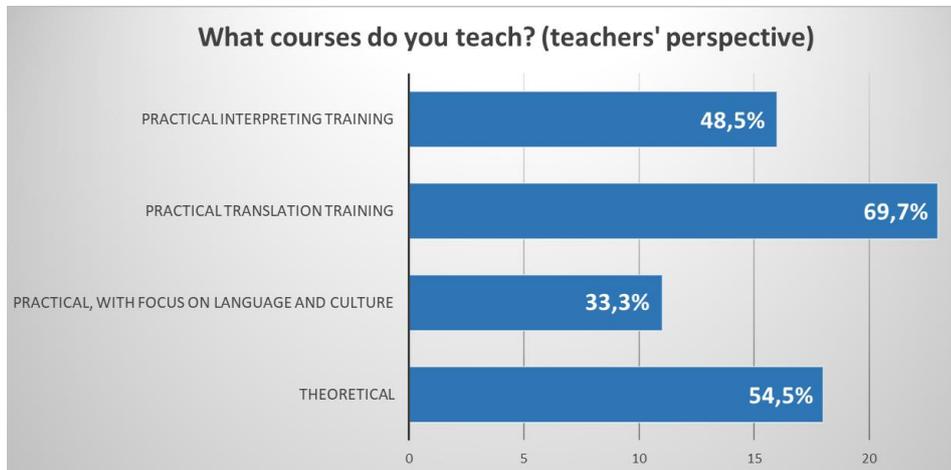
The pilot stage of the survey was conducted as a focus group, i.e., a semi-structured group interview with a small sample of teachers. Afterwards, data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed to Slovak universities. The questionnaire allowed for identifying and analysing diverse aspects at three primary levels: procedural (methods and forms of teaching, assessment methods, etc.), technical factors, and psychosocial factors. Overall, 33 teachers who

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<sup>3</sup> Available online: <<https://www.vysokeskoly.sk/clanok/vysledky-studentskeho-prieskumu-akademicka-stvrthodinka>>[Cited on 10/10/2021]

teach theoretical courses, courses aimed at language and culture, practical subjects aimed at translation as well as interpreting have participated in the survey (cf. Figure 1).

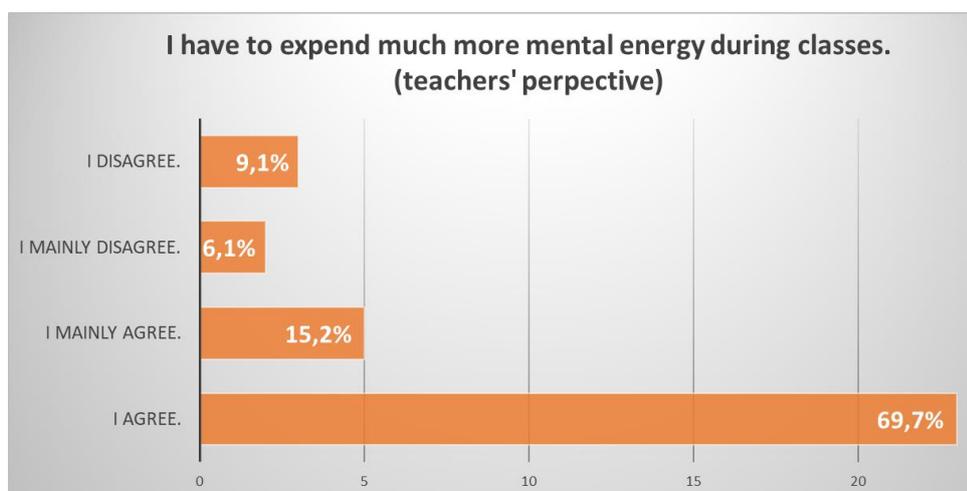
The study focuses particularly on the psychosocial aspects that influence teachers' psychological well-being and as such potentially have an impact on the course and outcomes of education, as well as on teachers' experiences and behaviour in a broader context.



**Figure 1. Research sample of teachers in the questionnaire survey by taught courses**

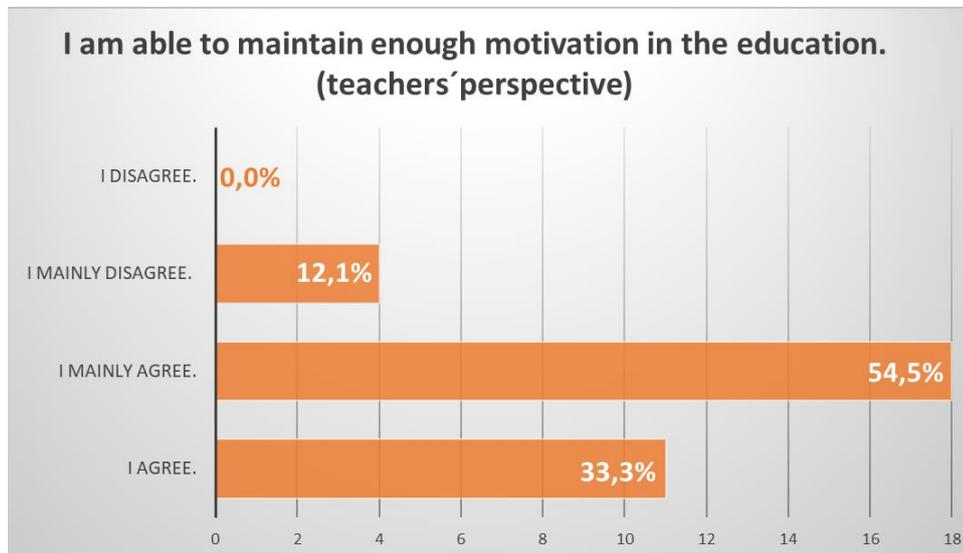
### 3.1 Quantitative analysis of psychosocial factors from the point of view of teachers of T&I

Before carrying out the actual analysis of psychosocial factors, it is important to mention that all teachers in the survey have stated they primarily teach synchronously (i.e., teaching online via a communication platform), and most are satisfied with their level of digital skills. Nevertheless, most teachers in the survey have stated that remote teaching places a higher psychological burden on them. 69.7% fully agreed with the statement “I have to expend more mental energy during lessons.”, and 15.2% mostly agreed. At the same time, 6.1% mostly disagreed, and 9.1% fully disagreed (Figure 2).



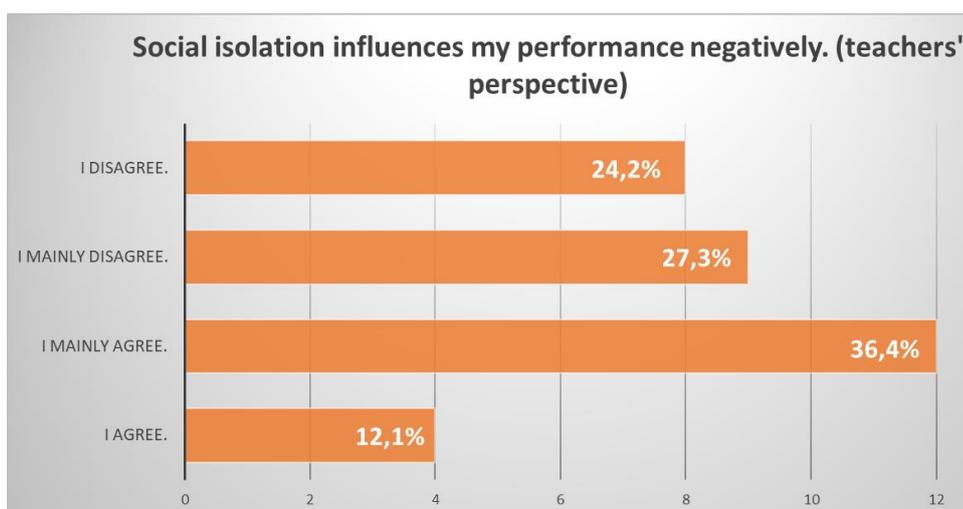
**Figure 2. “I have to expend much more mental energy during classes.”**

Despite having to expend more mental energy, most teachers state they successfully maintain a sufficient level of motivation during remote teaching. 33% of teachers fully agreed with the statement “I successfully maintain a sufficient level of motivation to teach.”, and 54.5% mostly agreed. Only a few teachers reported issues with maintaining motivation – 12.1% of teachers mostly disagreed with the above statement (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. “I am able to maintain enough motivation in the education.”**

We were also interested in how much of an impact the limited social contact during the pandemic has on teachers’ performance. Overall, 51.5% of teachers does not see an adverse effect of social isolation on their work performance. To be precise, 24.2% of teachers fully disagreed with the statement about social isolation having a negative impact, and 27.3% mostly disagreed. 12.1% fully agreed with the statement “Social isolation negatively impacts my work performance.”, and 36.4% of teachers mostly agreed (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. “Social isolation influences my performance negatively.”**

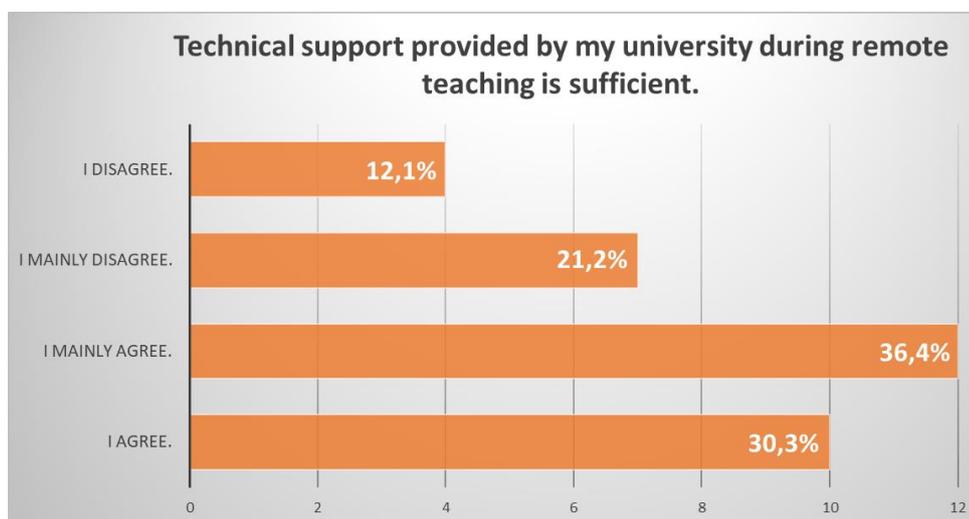
The quantitative analysis of psychosocial factors in the questionnaire shows that the majority of T&I teachers have to expend more mental energy when remote teaching. Despite this,

87.8% of teachers are (mostly) successful at maintaining a sufficient level of motivation. Negative impact of social isolation on their work performance was (mostly) felt by 48.5% of teachers.

All of the above factors (expending mental energy, motivation, impact of social isolation) are to a significant degree subjective and dependent not only on external factors connected to pandemic measures and transitioning to emergency remote teaching, but they are also to a significant degree reflecting the individual teacher's circumstances (family background and life circumstances, available space and technical equipment, social environment, overall health, etc.). Last but not least, the assessment also reflects the teachers' personal attitudes and characteristics (e.g., performance motivation, social skills, workload management). All of this plays a role in the teachers' overall perception of this critical period, i.e., whether they perceive the crisis situation more as a challenge and an opportunity to learn new skills, use new approaches to teaching, use strategies of effective time management, etc., and thus see mostly positives, or whether they perceive it as a difficult-to-overcome obstacle.

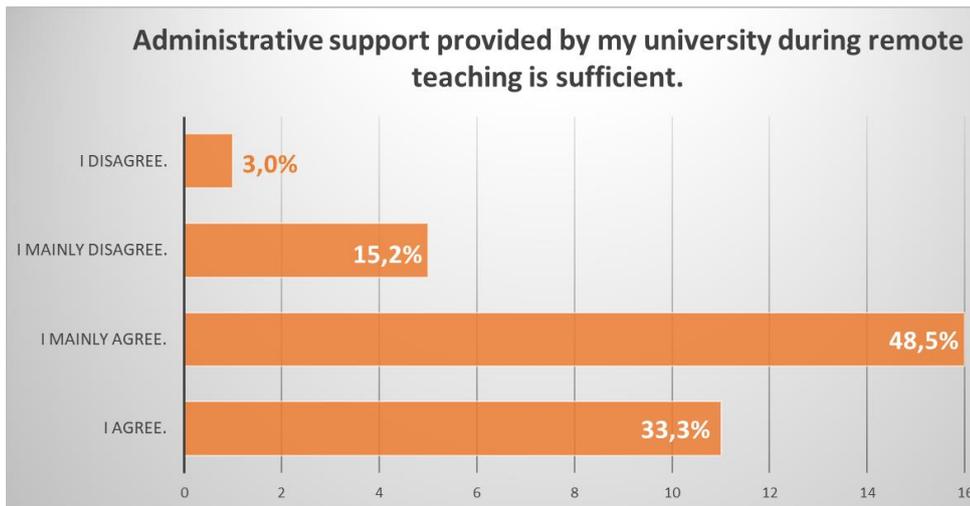
In any case, it is no doubt important to also find external sources of support. In addition to social contacts with family and friends or colleagues, it is also important to perceive support from the institution on both personal and professional level, because it is the institution's support that often plays a key role in coping with the burden of adapting to new working conditions for teachers. As such, we also asked in the survey how the teachers perceive the technical, administrative, and methodical support provided by their universities.

Two thirds of teachers consider the technical support provided by their university sufficient. Overall, 66.7% of teachers fully or mostly agreed with the statement "Technical support provided by my university during remote teaching is sufficient." (Figure 5).



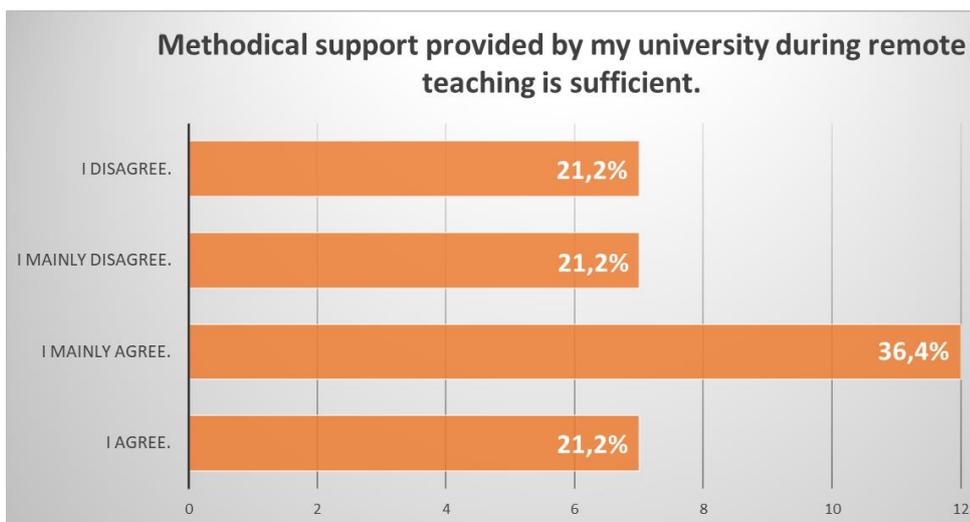
**Figure 5.** "Technical support provided by my university during remote teaching is sufficient."

When taken together, 81.8% of teachers are fully or mostly satisfied with the administrative support provided by their university (Figure 6).



**Figure 6. “Administrative support provided by my university during remote teaching is sufficient.”**

Overall, 57.6% of teachers fully or mostly agreed with the statement “Methodical support provided by my university during remote teaching is sufficient.” On the other hand, insufficient methodical support was felt by overall 42.4% of teachers (Figure 7).



**Figure 7. “Methodical support provided by my university during remote teaching is sufficient.”**

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis focuses on psychosocial factors that can have an impact on the course and outcomes of training of future translators and interpreters from the perspective of teachers’ who provide the training. Most teachers stated that to provide remote teaching, they have to expend significantly more mental energy. Despite this, the majority of teachers are successful at maintaining a sufficient level of motivation. The explanation can be looked for in the fact that most teachers in the survey expressed satisfaction with their digital skills. Also, qualitative analysis of answers in the group interview and to open questions in the questionnaire shows that the teachers perceive positively that the application of various technical resources and platforms allows them to

perform certain teaching processes more efficiently. Overall, a significant focus on the needs of students and a desire to provide them with full-fledged education can be seen in the teachers' answers, which likely had an impact on their motivation.

A relatively large group of teachers (48.5%), however, see a negative impact of limited interpersonal contacts and social isolation on their work performance, which confirms the findings of previous research (Mercer – Gregersen, 2020; Mari et al., 2021). Since in addition to administrative tasks, preparation of text materials or analysis of submitted assignments constitute a key element of T&I teacher's work along with contact and interaction with students and colleagues, limiting of social contacts can have a significant impact on the teacher's performance. At the same time, overall limiting of social contacts in private life as well can have an impact on the teachers' psychological well-being and be reflected in their work performance.

In any crisis situation, it is important to search for external sources of support. In this regard, most teachers are satisfied with the administrative support provided by their university. Two thirds of teachers are satisfied with the technical support provided by their institution. While the greater part of teachers feels satisfied with the methodical support provided, 42.4% are dissatisfied in this regard. As we have already mentioned, the transition to remote teaching due to the pandemic represents emergency remote teaching. It is also because of this that some teachers can feel inadequate in their methodical competence despite their technical competence. As such, it is important for the institution to take into consideration this aspect of remote teaching and to provide teachers with systemic methodical support.

It is quite natural for every teacher to have an individual experience in a new situation that has an influence on their work as well as personal lives. Thus, the psychosocial factors surveyed by us are highly subjective. Nevertheless, we believe it is possible to identify core tendencies pointing to a relatively frequent negative impact of social isolation on teachers' work performance, and to a need to strengthen methodical support provided to teachers by their universities. To end on a positive note, however, the majority of teachers remain motivated with a goal to provide their students with quality and full-fledged education even in the remote mode.

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