

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT (under COVID-19 pandemic conditions)

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Because of the dynamic and rapid development of digital technologies, teachers are facing more than ever challenging issues related to coping with educational innovations. This situation has become ultimately evident under COVID-19 quarantine and the necessity to work remotely. Such requirements induce extra pressure on teachers, which causes excessive stress, often leading to emotional and professional burnout. In our paper, we aim to focus on the types of impact (positive or negative) of digital technologies in relation to foreign language teachers' age and experience and the level of professional burnout. Specific emphasis is put on the study of coronavirus-related remote learning mode circumstances. To reach the research goal, a mixed method was used, engaging 140 English language teachers from 18 Polish schools, Silesia region, with a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview as the tools used in the quantitative and qualitative stages of the study. The research findings show that even though teachers are ready to integrate technologies in the classroom, they are vulnerable to technical problems which often occur during the lessons, causing the feeling of disappointment, frustration, anxiety, and lowering the efficiency of teachers' professional performance. The implications of the study suggest that the professional support for teachers in technology use, better working conditions, and equipping language classrooms with good quality digital devices should serve as the best remedy against teacher burnout.

Keywords: digital technologies; information technology competencies; teacher burnout; foreign language teaching; COVID-19.

Introduction

Burnout is a well-known phenomenon that affects teachers worldwide, regardless of age, gender, or geographical location. Frequent changes in the system of education, increasing expectations and requirements for teachers inject some negative connotations into their profession, making them suffer from the effects of professional burnout. In the related literature, many factors are indicated to contribute to teacher burnout, among which the following can be mentioned: poor student attitudes towards compulsory schooling, problems with maintaining discipline in the classroom, excessive bureaucracy, poor communication between members of the teaching staff and school administration, the lack of social support from the superiors to name but a few. Needless to say, in the era of digitization and the rapid development of modern technologies, teachers face a new challenge: they must keep up with new technological innovations and successfully integrate them into the learning process. Since it is not an easy task, it can trigger stress and anxiety and contribute to burnout. The situation can be exacerbated if teachers do not have any choice among the alternatives in their professional activity, as has been the case with the COVID-19 pandemic conditions in schooling, where all teachers have been forced to use technologies online (e-learning, blended or hybrid formats) studies. Unfortunately, very few (if any) studies can be found illustrating the relation between the obligatory use of technologies by teachers and the level of their professional burnout.

Literature review

Our paper joins a growing body of literature that employs both theoretical and practical frameworks of identification, prevention and elimination of teacher burnout side effects to create favourable conditions for efficient professional activity of educators. Research results show that it is not only a cross-cultural phenomenon, but a very serious problem (Wieczorek, 2017). The stress may not only lead to health problems, but it can also affect the quality of teachers' work and their relationships with other participants of the educational process such as students, colleagues at work, and family members. Teachers who suffer from constant stress leading to burnout in a majority of cases escape from their duties, often take sick leave and

become less effective. Therefore, it seems crucial to focus on the roots of teachers' stress, try to understand the nature of burnout and find effective ways to cope with its negative consequences.

As indicated by Kocór (2019), teachers are at risk of burnout more than any other professionals. Because of the fact that in their work they are in close contact with students and their parents; it is teachers who educate, behave and solve problems. An educator's job requires not only comprehensive knowledge but also engagement and commitment. As a result, teachers have their students' problems in mind even when they do not perform their professional activity but are at home getting prepared for the next lessons. It can lead to the situation that a teacher may transform school problems into family life. It causes conflicts, a tense domestic atmosphere, and blurs the border between work and family life, violating all the more importance for decent health balance.

In a similar vein, Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021, p. 135) emphasize that working from home as an additional job obligation to working in the classroom setting exacerbates the stress response. One of the greatest factors in chronic work stress is working consistently in the evenings in addition to a full-time day shift, spending the supposed relaxation time planning and grading. Work that penetrates teachers' personal and family time is perceived as an additional hardship that was not meant by the initial "work agreement". Furthermore, working from home deletes the perception differentiation between home and comfort. The teacher's brain never feels "at home", the environment where it can relax and separate the educator from professional challenges and responsibilities (Herman et al, 2018).

It is often claimed that educators are likely to suffer from dissatisfaction with their professional activity when focusing emotionally on their complaints about students' poor educational achievement, some negative aspects of their conduct in class, since "the habitual patterns in teachers' judgments about student behaviour and other teaching tasks may contribute significantly to teachers' repeated experience of unpleasant emotions and those emotions may eventually lead to burnout" (Chang, 2009, p. 193).

Furthermore, Tucholska (2008) adds up that the teacher's profession has been facing the problem of constant social expectations because of being responsible for educating young generations. However, these expectations are not supported by the corresponding financial and social status. As a result, the lack of decent remuneration combined with other detrimental factors like overloaded classes, students' inappropriate behaviour, and the lack of support from supervisors leads to frustration, loss of motivation, and, consequently to burnout.

Ravichandran & Rajendran (2007) believe that stress is inseparable and unavoidable in people's lives and it is impossible to eliminate it from everyday existence. Despite such bleak claims, stressful situations are known to be advantageous, motivating people to look for new coping strategies and as a result, reducing the level of anxiety created by challenging demands. As a consequence of positive personal or organizational growth, such a situation can lead to greater success at work. However, it is worth stating that excessive constant stress in most cases leads to burnout with devastating consequences for both teacher's life and the whole social surrounding of a person (Gembalska-Kwiecień, 2019).

Our analysis replicates the finding by Woźniak-Krakowian (2013) who claims that devoted and engaged teachers in particular lose motivation and energy to work. Such teachers become tired, frustrated and finally burnt out. The job once bringing satisfaction and enjoyment, becomes a source of sadness and disappointment. Instead of satisfaction, a teacher experiences indifference, the place of success is taken by the sense of defeat.

As observed by Wiczorek & Mitręga (2017), stress should not be discussed as a problem of individual teachers but rather as a social problem. Since occupational stress decreases efficiency and has a detrimental impact on work satisfaction and organizational engagement, it appears crucial to contemplate not only what teacher burnout is by definition but also what its sources, symptoms and consequences are.

Travers & Cooper (1996) indicate that the main sources of occupational stress are: teaching students who have a low level of motivation, problems with maintaining discipline, time pressure and workload (for example, too much additional, paperwork), being evaluated by others (teachers, headteacher, parents, society), dealing with colleagues' self-esteem and status, administration and management, poor working condition, role conflict and ambiguity, with all of them making teachers cope with constant changes.

As proposed by Wiczorek & Mitręga (2017), consequences of stress may include an emotional manifestation, behavioural manifestation, and physiological manifestation. With emotional manifestation in mind, it is necessary to mention that it may take the form of depression, anxiety, fear, and anger, eventually leading to burnout. Behavioural manifestation frequently triggers the following problems: eating disorders, sleeping disorders, smoking, drinking alcohol, and taking drugs. Withdrawal from social life, frequent absenteeism at work, early retirement, or the plans to leave the teaching occupation are often seen as consequences of behavioural manifestation as well. It cannot be denied, though, that frequent sick leaves

seem to be the way to escape from stress at work, but they prove efficient only for a short time. It should be mentioned that numerous consecutive sick leaves and absences at work disorganize timetables and have a destructive impact on the process of teaching. Consequently, when the teacher is absent, the students either do not make progress, or fail to achieve appropriate educational results, which, in turn, causes more stress for teachers lowering their self-esteem, thus making the vicious circle close and go on.

As Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2009) remark, there is a need not only to raise the awareness about this phenomenon, its causes and consequences, but also to find ways and methods to fight it successfully.

Teacher burnout in foreign language teachers. Innovations in the field of new technologies and language teaching have created a new role for teachers, especially the group of teachers who teach a foreign language in Polish schools. Language teachers are no longer the only knowledge and information providers within the subject they teach. In the era of globalization and advanced technology, where English is considered the main and common language in the process of communication, English teachers play a crucial role as a speaker of one of the most widely used languages in the world (Mousavi, 2007).

However, if foreign language (FL) teachers want to be experts in their field and role models for contemporary students, they have to constantly improve their language skills, develop their vocabulary to make their language authentic, updated, and true to life (Tichenor&Tichenor, 2005). It means that modern FL teachers not only teach the young generations, but they become learners themselves, they are obliged to be creative, open to innovative ideas and suggestions, and eager to learn new things. What is more, they should be ready to search for new techniques and methods of teaching foreign languages successfully even if they are long-serving teachers. Such a situation can have a few advantages, for example, it helps teachers look at their students from a different perspective and understand the students' needs and fears. However, the need to learn all the time and spend their free time developing their skills and language competence can be time-consuming and can cause stress and frustration among FL teachers.

According to Mousavi (2007), FL teachers are expected to motivate and engage the learners to participate actively in language learning, especially when speaking in a foreign language is concerned. This requires teachers and students to constantly interact with each other, involving the emotional commitment not only from students, but also from the educators. Such engagement can cause emotional exhaustion and have a negative impact on the teachers' overall well-being.

The fact that the prevailing majority of FL teachers in Polish schools and universities are non-native teachers, affects the level of stress among these professionals. It is believed that all language teachers should know a foreign language perfectly. However, it cannot be denied that language learning is a continuous lifelong process, with language developing and changing constantly, compelling the teachers to improve their communicative skills non-stop, trying to approach the native-speaker level of communicative competence. As a result, non-native FL teachers may experience a lack of sufficient language knowledge and experience low self-confidence in their professionalism. All this invokes negative emotions in relation to the duties at school and the intention of quitting the job because of too high emotional costs. Apart from teaching and continuous professional development, FL teachers may feel inundated with other tasks and duties, paperwork, student assessment procedures, maturation exam preparation responsibilities, as well as some extra-curriculum activities as part of any teacher's job.

The relation of new technologies to teacher burnout. It is commonly believed that being a teacher is not an easy job, however, it is rarely recognized as a difficult and stressful job, although posed with ever-increasing expectations.

While many papers investigate the overall sources of teacher's stress and professional burnout (like those mentioned above), few look at its roots in the application of new technologies in the process of teaching. There is some evidence in the literature that "teacher's stress can be explained by the fact that the requirements (internal and external) prevail for a long time over the resources (also internal and external), thus the person experiences the condition of losing balance" (Morska, 2017, p. 18), our *paper* contests this claim, proving that external requirements in the realm of innovation technologies implementation often lead to a more intense negative impact on psychological well-being of teachers, exacerbating the burnout problem.

As Mashhadi & Kargozari (2011) indicate, nowadays, the dynamic and rapid development of new technologies encourages people to use the internet to share information, look for new ideas and communicate with each other, with students worldwide being particularly eager to spend a lot of time on the net for educational and entertainment purposes.

Using new technologies in education is considered to be not only a crucial but also an effective way of improving the process of learning and teaching (Rodinadze and Zarbazoaia, 2012). As far as students are

concerned, information technology helps them to acquire new knowledge easily because of the fast access to international libraries and other sources of information. With regard to teachers, information technology provides them with a wide range of multimedia devices, different applications which have proved helpful in planning, designing and conducting exciting and interaction-rich lessons.

Furthermore, new technologies provide an unprecedented opportunity to utilize cloud computing to store different documents, edit or modify, if necessary, and then share with other educational process participants, since both teachers and students can have immediate access to them. This allows educators to design group work and collaborative assignments for students, which does develop both the content area skills and some essential soft skills necessary for future professionals (leadership, argumentative and persuasive skills among them).

Therefore, information technologies have a significant effect on teaching and learning and, if used properly, can increase the level of motivation among learners as well as the pace of learning. This means that the teachers have to face another challenge: the requirement to teach students how to use technology as a tool in their study process. However, for many teachers, especially those who have been working at school for many years, the necessity to use new technologies can be a real barrier and often unfavourable new task in their career, bringing about difficult and stressful experience into their professional activity (Mashhadi & Kargozari, 2011).

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the virus hit – first in China in December 2019, then spreading rapidly to other countries in the early months of 2020, the education sector was facing unprecedented problems in proceeding with delivering educational services, and educational leaders were more than ever concerned about overwhelmed teaching staff and increased stress, as well as increased mental health needs of both staff and students, which at the same time had to be addressed remotely (Arundel, 2020), exacerbating all the more drastic issue. Although a lot of educational institutions introduced special virtual educational environments aimed at facilitating the institutional society in their endeavours to cope with the urgency of turning on-line (Melnychenko & Zheliaskova, 2021, p. 4), for most educators the necessity to use technologies daily became quite a challenge.

The topic of digital technology implementation in teaching did not seem to be new for educators before the pandemic, for the mere reason that they were supposed to deal with learners of the 21st century, being the children of millennials – zoomers, who are the first generation to be considered digital natives (also known as a net generation) or digitally savvy self-starters born in the early 2010s (Selwyn et al., 2020). In the technology-oriented age and the age of individualism requiring teaching professionals “to strive for teaching in personalised ways that would promote intrinsic motivation, agency, self-direction, self-regulation, life-long learning and continuous development in posthuman higher education” (Laskova, 2021), it is fundamental to understand how an educator can strike a balance and encourage sustainable and interdependent learning model, known as Education 4.0 framework (Hussin, 2018) and grow into an individual human learner in the present society being ‘on the doorstep’ of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (or Industry 4.0) (Schwab, 2016), or probably already inside.

Aim and research questions

Hence the question arises if, under such urgent unexpected conditions, there is a correlation between technology use and teacher burnout. In our study, we pose the following research question: Does the necessity to utilize new technologies in the classroom environment make the teachers stressed and influence the development of the burnout syndrome? At the same time, we aim to find out whether the stress and tension turn them into professionals being more motivated and involved in the process of gaining new competencies.

The aim of this article is to examine the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers being required to use distance/online/hybrid/blended learning technologies on demand (without any personal consent or the possibility to choose the alternative options and modes of teaching) and discuss the possible implications of these impacts on how the educators value the use of technologies in teaching. Because of the fluidity of the situation, it relies mainly on the information derived from the accessed educational institutions as the pandemic unfolded. These sources frequently changed as the pandemic evolved and may not have remained consistent for future reference. In the light of these limitations, the intention of this article is not to provide a definitive assessment of the impact of technology application on the welfare of the education sector during the pandemic. Rather, it provides a preliminary framework for a closer examination of the urgent problem in responding to the stresses of an unprecedented global crisis.

Methods

Research Design

To reach the research goal, a mixed research methodology has been used. In the quantitative study, the research tool was a questionnaire specifically designed for the purpose of the study. The qualitative part implied the application of a semi-structured interview.

Research sample. The research started in January 2021 and finished at the end of February 2021. The study participants were 140 English language teachers from 18 Polish schools, Silesia region. The participants of the study were divided into four groups according to the number of years of work experience. This provided us with information on whether there is a correlation between the level of burnout and the years in teachers' performance on the job. All the groups were made equal. Each of them consisted of 35 teachers. Group 1 consisted of teachers whose teaching experience is the lowest because they have been working as teachers for less than ten years. Group 2 included these teachers who have been working at schools for 10-15 years. Group 3 included the teachers who have been teachers for 15-20 years. Group 4 consisted of teachers with more than 20 years of experience.

Instruments and procedure. A questionnaire consisting of 29 questions (an adapted version of Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, 2001) was used to provide information about how teachers perceive new technologies (the set of questions was divided into two parts, clarifying the information on whether teachers utilize new technologies as a tool to reduce the level of stress or whether the necessity of using them increases their stress levels) was sent to research participants by email.

In the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to describe their attitudes towards using new technologies in the classroom and the feelings and emotions connected with technology implementation in the process of teaching. We used the Likert scale, and the teachers were requested to express their opinions in the range from strongly disagree, agree, neither agree nor disagree up to strongly agree.

In the qualitative part of the study, semi-structured interviews with 20 randomly chosen respondents were conducted (five teachers from each of the four groups) to obtain relevant data about how the necessity of implementing new technologies as a didactic tool influences the development of teacher burnout. The interviews consisted of 8 open-ended questions, and all the respondents were given the same set of questions. The purpose of the interviews was to see the differences in answers of teachers with a different number of years of teaching experience.

Data analysis. We used the Likert scale for the questionnaire, in which the teachers were requested to express their opinions in the range from strongly disagree, neither agree nor disagree up to strongly agree. The Pearson correlation coefficient was defined to describe the correlation between the level of technology and the level of burnout in teachers.

Ethical issues. All the participants gave their informed consent for participating in the study (were informed of the possibility of withdrawing, with no other consequences on their status).

Results and discussion

The study results indicate that FL teachers, regardless of their age and duration of teaching experience, accept new technologies as a helpful and sufficient tool in their professional activity. The majority of them teach English using new technologies and traditional coursebooks. In their opinion, using a combination of methods allows for reaching the best results. The teachers express quite clear awareness that implementing new technologies in the process of teaching is a necessity, often a must if one wants to keep up with the generation of the young students, referred as "cyber/digital natives". These findings are consistent with those reached by the other authors worldwide, for example, in Saudi Arabia (Almaki, 2020; Lytovchenko & Voronina, 2020), which confirmed a positive attitude of teachers towards applying new technologies during English language lessons while mentioning it was time-consuming and challenging process.

Our study revealed that the youngest teachers are the most creative in terms of implementing new technologies into classroom teaching (almost 80% of respondents). In contrast, about 20% fewer long-serving teachers (with more than 20 years of experience) declare that they have many ideas about integrating them into their lessons. A possible explanation for this finding is that young teachers, with up to 5 years of work experience (the mean age in this group is 28 years old), are close to the generation of "cyber natives", being taught IT at schools, and thus being comfortable with constant IT evolution and development since their childhood. Whereas long-service teachers have to learn IT from scratch, forced by the necessity to meet the expectations of contemporary students and deserve respect and admiration in this regard, rather than being intrinsically motivated by the technologies themselves. Based on our findings, it is possible to conclude that most teachers are interested in applying new technologies during their lessons, considering them an advantageous and efficient way of teaching a foreign language (many of them underlined that

unlimited access to authentic materials online motivates students and helps them develop their language skills, especially speaking and listening), but motivated to do so by different types of motivation.

Another finding of this study is that all teachers declare a high intensity of integrating the online activities as a part of their lessons. More than 80% of the respondents express the idea that the Internet is a helpful tool in classroom language teaching. What seems to be surprising in this regard is that the largest number of responses on using the Internet during their lessons comes from the teachers who have been working at school for more than 20 years (constituting 94% of the group voting in favour of the Internet use in the lessons). This finding is consistent with the findings of the previous studies, confirming that teachers over 40 are more willing to use the Internet because it is a new and innovative tool. This situation can also be connected with the supposition that such teachers are on the stage of their professional promotion, so they are obliged to use new technologies to be considered innovative and thus promoted successfully (Iwanicka, 2019).

When it comes to the research question aimed at clarifying how teachers perceive new technologies in terms of avoiding stress/teacher burnout, the findings show that new technologies could be related to the fight with the teacher stress and burnout, but not for all teachers with equal intensity.

The findings suggest that the majority of the surveyed teachers consider new technologies as a tool that supports the didactic process and makes the work at school more manageable and more convenient. More than 70% of the respondents declared the use of the Internet both at school and while planning and designing the next lessons at home. The majority of the teachers pointed out that the Internet is a beneficial source of information in the content area as well as for new ideas on how to make lessons more engaging and inspiring for the students.

Moreover, the prevailing number of FL teachers involved in our study declared that having the competence in using new technologies minimizes or helps to reduce the level of stress in their professional activity. All the four groups of respondents claimed that they implement online games, a number of educational applications such as Kahoot or quizzes during their lessons. The average score for the three groups is more than 80% and reaches 75 % in the group of senior teachers.

Surprising results have been found concerning the use of interactive boards. Only 29 % of the teachers from Group 2 (with 10-20 years of work experience) declare that they use them in the classroom. At the same time, 37% of the teachers from Group 1 (the youngest teachers) indicate the use of interactive boards.

There might be two possible explanations for these findings. Firstly, classrooms in Polish schools are inadequately equipped with such facilities, with limited access to them. In other words, if the classrooms are not equipped with interactive boards and if the teachers have an opportunity to use them only occasionally, they will not be willing to use them, merely because of the necessity to overcome additional barriers. The lack of equipment availability, and, as a result, the lack of competence in operating it obviously makes the teachers unable to integrate it into the lessons.

This finding appears to be consistent with that obtained by Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2009), which emphasize that school administration and local authorities should pay more attention to the working conditions of teachers and make more effort to improve the availability of modern facilities. The researchers argued that good working conditions and good quality educational equipment could help the teachers adapt to constantly changing occupational requirements and rapid technological development. It could be a favourable factor to help diminish stress and burnout among teachers.

The same opinion has been shared by Ravivchandran & Rajedan (2007), whose survey results indicated that the lack of support from school administration and poor facilities at schools are the two major factors that highly impact the level of stress among teachers.

The result of our study suggests that FL teachers in most cases are interested in implementing new technologies in classroom teaching, but quite a sizeable number of educators somewhat avoid integrating them in their professional activity. The findings show that the teachers with the amplest working experience (Group 4) are the least eager to opt for technology use. Almost 14 % of the respondents from the aforementioned group provide the reason for their reluctance, which sounds as follows: implementing new technologies requires extra preparation time at home. Almost 6% of the participants are put off by numerous technical problems and their inability to solve the possible obstacles; 9% of the teachers are not excited by the prospect of being laughed at by their students who are by far more competent in the technological realm. The questionnaire findings correlate with the analysis of the interviews carried out with the teachers. It was revealed that even though teachers are enthusiastic about new technologies, they find it hard to cope with technical problems. At the same time, they expressed dissatisfaction with their knowledge and skills in handling educational information technologies, complaining about the lack of technical support provided by their school administration.

Being enthusiastic about new technologies, the teachers are open to learning new things and express willingness to get trained by professionals. Thus, professional training and workshops in the field of new

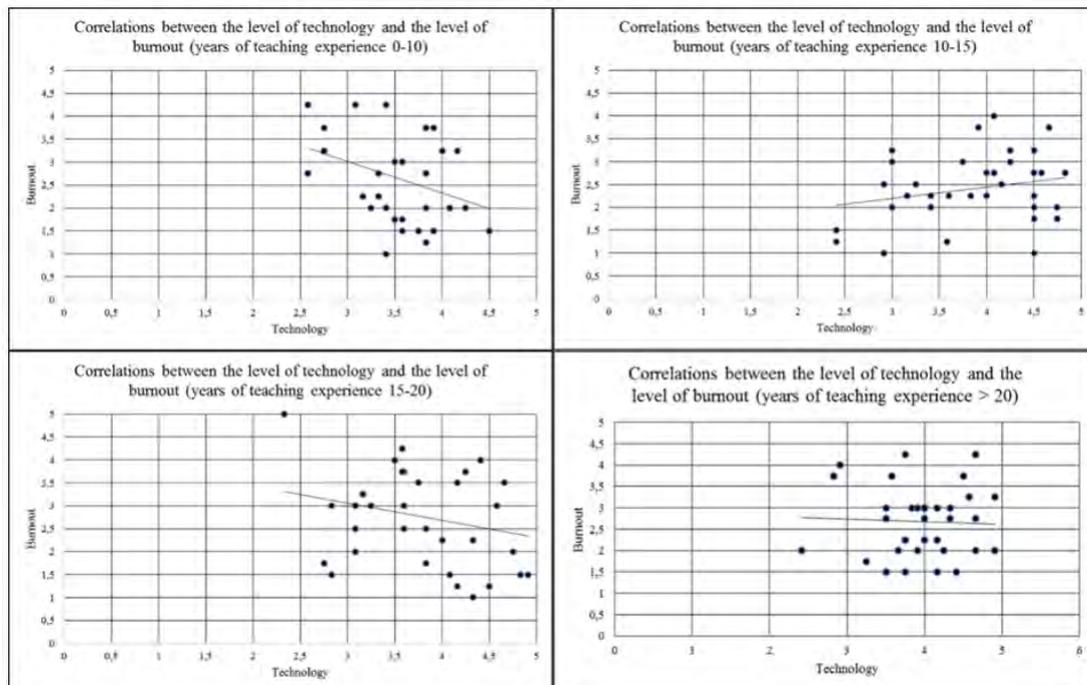
technology implementation may offer an excellent solution to the prevention of teacher burnout. This idea correlates with the study conducted by Bonfield et al. (2020), who found that attending workshops and training sessions appears favourable and sufficient in the fight against fatigue and the syndrome of burnout, in motivation increase, boosting self-confidence and positive feelings which contribute to well-being on the job. Almalki (2020) came to a similar conclusion, while carrying out the research with teachers in Saudi Arabia.

The focus on whether the implementation of new technologies can reduce/increase stress in teachers allows for the conviction that the teachers willingly utilize new technologies to make their work less time-consuming and more efficient, which, in its turn, ensures job satisfaction. More than 50 % of the respondents declare that they create multimedia presentations at home to use them later in the classroom; 70% of the survey participants use projection devices. Therefore, we may conclude that technology-rich classroom teaching of foreign languages should not be viewed as a source of stress and negative emotions for most teachers.

In addition, the analyses of the interviews confirmed the aforementioned findings. Teachers indicated that the requirement of implementing new technologies is not only a necessity for them, but a challenge as well: "Exploring new technologies is the next step in our career", such were the ideas expressed by some of the long-service teachers. Being faced with the obligation of learning new things, improving their skills in educational digital technologies, encourages many of them to look at the process of teaching from a new perspective, refreshing their self-esteem as teachers.

Another interesting finding of this study showed a correlation between the intensity of technology implemented while conducting foreign language lessons and the level of burnout experienced by the teachers. The findings show that the teachers with the reported highest intensity of technology use manifest a low level of burnout. However, there is a significant correlation between the intensity of technology implementation and the level of burnout as far as Group 2 is concerned (which included the teachers with 10 to 15 years of working experience, and the average age of 38 years old (see Fig. 1). The findings display that the higher the intensity of technology application, the more the teachers are at risk of burnout. Such findings seem to be confirmed in the research carried out by Tucholska (2008). According to her studies, the highest level of burnout is reported as experienced by teachers aged between 30-39 years old. A possible explanation for these and our findings might be connected to the social and family status of FL teachers, who are predominantly female professionals. It seems obvious that women teachers under 40, apart from occupational functions, have the most intense time of their lives in relation to family duties and roles, being responsible for the proper growth and development of their children, mostly teenagers, who need care and attention. Furthermore, these teachers are on the path to professional promotion, which may cause additional pressure on their performance. However, our findings are not consistent in this aspect with some previous studies, according to which, Norwegian long-service teachers are more at risk of burnout in comparison with their younger colleagues (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

Figure 1. Correlation between the level of technology and the level of burnout in four groups of teachers



*Source: own research

To sum up, work experience of teachers does not appear to stand out as a factor that has a negative impact on the level of burnout in the majority of the teachers covered by our study. All the groups of our respondents indicated a relatively similar level of occupational stress, and there are no significant differences between groups (see Table 1). These findings correlate with the results for Polish teachers from different types of schools in Poland (Korczyński, 2014). No evidence confirming the influence of teachers' age and working experience on professional burnout was obtained. However, quite the contrary findings are presented in the paper by Grayson & Avarez (2007), who carried out a study with educators in Hong Kong. Their findings indicate that the young teachers are more to burnout than their older and more experienced colleagues. Moreover, the aforementioned scientists' findings also correlate with research results obtained by Ozdemir (2007), who studied burnout in European teachers and concluded that young teachers, those with little experience in teaching, are more at higher risk of burnout than the teachers who report more experience. Therefore, we can assume that the years of experience cannot be considered the only or the most salient factor responsible for the development of teacher burnout. This brings us to the conclusion that further and more profound study is necessary.

Table 1. *Correlations between the intensity of technology use and the level of burnout in FL teachers*

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Teaching seniority	0 -10	11 – 15	16 – 20	>20
Technology implementation index	3.55	3.88	3.82	3.92
Level of burnout	2.64	2.40	2.75	2.69
Correlation	-0.34	0;23	-0.25	-0.04

*Source: own research

In our research, we have found that the highest intensity of technology implementation in FL lessons was reported by long-service teachers, whereas the lowest one by the youngest educators. Such results may seem out of the ordinary and in discordance with the commonly held view (the younger the teachers, the more proficient with technology they are, and the more willing they should be to use modern educational innovations in their professional activity), but they correlate with the findings of Iwanicka (2019). Her latest research confirmed that the young generation of teachers, known as cyber natives, does not manifest high digital competencies, or they are rather digitally passive. However, the findings of this study are inconsistent with the ones obtained by Almalki (2020), where it is argued that there is no significant correlation between the teachers' age and the years of experience with the intensity of technology they implement in the classroom.

Since the study has been carried out with Silesia region teachers, it would be reasonable to investigate the geographical, economic, and social factors that might have some impact on the correlation between technology use and the level of burnout in foreign language teachers. Further research could bring about the findings answering the question of whether richer regions in the west of the country experience a similar pattern to that described for Silesia. Furthermore, the scientific endeavours might reveal some interdependence between the subjects taught by teachers, their technological competency, and the level of burnout. We assume that background education might also serve as a significant variable in further studies in the same vein.

Limitations

At the same time, we are aware of the fact that a few limitations can have an impact on the final results of the study. First of all, the population of the research consisted only of female teachers (we didn't mean to exclude male educators; it is quite uncommon for men to opt for the job of a FL teacher in Poland). Those male teachers, who were available at schools, unfortunately, were not willing or interested in expressing their opinion on the reasons for teacher burnout. The participation of male teachers in further research might bring about the understanding of the issues behind teacher stress from a broader (gender-related) perspective.

The second limitation of our study is connected with the COVID-19 pandemic situation. It was impossible to meet respondents face to face in order to collect the data, our questionnaire was in the online mode. As a result, the questionnaire may not have reached many teachers who avoid using new technologies

or may have developed burnout. Furthermore, those teachers, who reported some signs of burnout, may have been anxious because of the pandemic hardships both in family and occupational life. In the case of qualitative research, it can be concluded that because of the inability to meet respondents and carry out interviews in person, we had to rely on semi-structured interviews only. Additionally, a few respondents agreed to participate in the interview but did not express consent to have their answers recorded. As a result, there were no possibilities to ask additional questions, which could help us to collect more information or better understand the feedback. Collecting the data via the Internet instead of face-to-face conversations can cause many respondents to be partially reserved. In our further scientific endeavours, we intend to eliminate the aforementioned limitations and replicate the study, assumably under the post-pandemic conditions, and compare these and future findings.

Conclusions and implications of the study

The results suggest that teachers are generally interested in integrating new technologies in the process of teaching foreign languages. They appreciate the importance and the role they play in the lives of the young generation of learners, especially those who are called "cyber natives". As our findings show, teachers are open to innovative technologies and ready to learn new things to make lessons appealing and attractive. However, they seem to be left alone in this process, lacking support from school administration and local communities.

The teachers complained about being lost and anxious because of the fast pace of changes and development of modern educational digital technologies, at the same time, lacking the necessary skills to operate. As a result, even though the teachers are ready to integrate technologies in the classroom, they are vulnerable to technical problems which often occur during the lessons, causing the feeling of disappointment, frustration and anxiety, lowering the efficiency of teachers' professional performance. With an average teacher's age in Poland of 50 years old, in most cases a female, it can be assumed that the majority of contemporary teachers in Poland had been born before the digital technologies were introduced into schools, resulting in limited knowledge and low technological skills. Therefore, such teachers need support from professionals, individual and group training aiming to help to cope with technical problems and implement new technologies successfully, without stress and anxiety. Our research shows that teachers lack professional training in the IT field, which might have helped them find out more about the use of technology in their professional activity and how to cope with various technical problems.

Moreover, introducing "teacher hotline" (a particular telephone line or platform for teachers in need) seems to be a good solution when teacher stress and burnout are concerned. Here teachers can call, talk about stress-related problems and receive advice from professional counsellors. This method of helping teachers suffering from stress or facing burnout problems should be seriously considered by local authorities and those responsible for education in Poland on an all-country scale.

To sum up, the professional support for teachers in technology use, better working conditions, and equipping language classrooms with good quality digital devices should serve as the best remedy in the fight against teacher burnout.

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