
Functioning of Academic Teachers in the Conditions of the COVID-19 Epidemic in Poland in 2020 (Qualitative Test on the Basis of Self-Assessment)

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Abstract:

Purpose: This paper seeks the functioning of academic teachers in terms of the consequences of their remote work, based on their quality of professional life as well as the sense of well-being among the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article consists of two parts, theoretical, in which the authors explain the concepts of remote work productivity, quality of life and mental well-being of academic teachers, and empirical based on a qualitative analysis of the results of the research. The study was conducted in a group of 21 academic teachers, with the use of 21 structured in-depth interviews, addressing the issue of the functioning of the professional quality of life of this social group of people.

Findings: The conducted research showed a different level of academic teachers' assessments regarding their own productivity in digital competences for remote work, as well as assessments related to the quality of professional life and the sense of mental well-being in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though several statements indicate a negative assessment of their own productivity, quality of professional life and sense of mental well-being, and that in all statements, the feeling of stress in the situation was observed, the fact that some teachers revealed pro-social values, the implementation of the mission of the teaching profession and the search for coping opportunities yourself in the face of difficulties and inconvenient situations.

Practical implications: The conducted study will allow the use of its results in relation to self-assessment of professional life and well-being of academic teachers in relation to the acquisition of digital competences on the example of COVID-19 epidemic threat, especially among academic teachers' production age and non-post-production age.

Originality/Value: The article is an important contribution to the research on the remote work of academic teachers during the COVID-19 epidemic, their quality of professional life, as well as the sense of well-being, especially among teachers aged 60 and over.

Keywords: Remote teaching, digital competences, academic teachers, COVID-19, quality of life, mental well-being, work productivity.

JEL Classification: M2, J54.

Paper type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

The subject of considerations of this publication is the functioning of academic teachers in terms of their work productivity, in connection with their quality of professional life and mental well-being in the time of the COVID-19 epidemic in relation to having competences to work remotely. Therefore, a qualitative analysis of the results of the study was carried out. A noticeable phenomenon was that the COVID-19 epidemic changed the conditions of the functioning of the described professional group, thus significantly affecting the labor market in Poland (Flaszyńska, 2020). The introduction of the state of epidemic threat announced in Poland on March 12, 2020, and then of March 20, 2020, of the state of the epidemic (Medexpress, 2020), forced additional requirements regarding working conditions, implying a higher level of stress in the work environment, which had a negative impact on health and well-being of employees (Iacovides *et al.*, 2003; Ogińska-Bulik and Juczyński 2010; Stasiła-Sieradzka and Turska, 2019).

The aim of the article is to identify the quality of one's own professional life, as well as the sense of well-being among academic teachers in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing them to refer to their own level of digital competences.

This article is devoted to two aspects of teachers' lives: productivity and quality of working life — which relate to professional work and mental well-being — related to the subjective aspects of assessing the quality of one's own life (Ciechowska and Szymańska, 2018). The studied problem is also an important issue from the perspective of work pedagogy. As A. Bogaj pointed out by showing the meaning of work and changes related to it as a result of the transformations of human work, as well as in the perspective of changes in the labor market, the nature of work, the value that drives the undertaken work, the impact on the individual through the work performed, professional activity, tools used, education undertaken as part of the profession and importantly, education undertaken in connection with the performed work (Szlapińska, 2015). In addition, the article also refers to the pedagogical issue related to the changes that are affecting universities and their academic teachers on a global scale (Dama, 2020).

2. Teachers in the Situation of the COVID-19 Epidemic

The COVID-19 epidemic in Poland not only changed the professional functioning of many people, but also modified the professional situation of academic teachers in a special way (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2021). The closure of the university almost overnight forced the necessity to acquire new competences (Tilleul *et al.*, 2014) like the time when the Internet first appeared in the world (Wallace, 2001). Hence, academic teachers had to take part in a peculiar experiment, especially those who were 60 and more years old, (Williams *et al.*, 2020) related to remote learning, including online and digital competences (DigCompEdu, 2018).

Therefore, the situation of teachers at universities changed drastically within a few days, as in Poland the necessity to implement the core curriculum with the use of

distance teaching and assessment was imposed. It should be remembered that an important role was also played by the technical preparation of universities to organize classes on educational platforms, which not all had. This constituted an additional obstacle in the implementation of the classes and required adaptation to the variety of their services, as well as an increase in the standard of compliance with the legal requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation.

In addition, universities have been forced to increase financial outlays for the purchase of necessary technologies and taking other necessary activities related to it. This state required the lecturers to acquire the above-mentioned new competences, greater tolerance, increased effort related to excessive workload, as well as an open attitude towards the student and determination in achieving professional goals while consciously accepting one's own weaknesses, trying to overcome them.

Hence, it is assumed that the analyzed situation influenced the professional relations of the studied social group. The need to share knowledge may lead to tightening peer ties, creating new forms of cooperation, but at the same time to shaping a new hierarchy of professional position thanks to the possession of the necessary competences and diversification of people with a specific attitude to distance learning, who acquire new skills with greater or lesser difficulty. At the same time, the conditions of the psychosocial functioning of the analyzed professional group changed. Being in isolation and spending time at home with the family constituted a new challenge for academic teachers, as it was associated with a change in the work environment, and for the family with a change in the family environment.

One of the effects of this was the disclosure of previously unworked conflicts, both partner and professional. Of course, the need for mutual relations may also result in the tightening of weakened emotional ties. At the same time, the boundaries between professional work and family life have completely blurred (Bańka, 2001). The situation was aggravated by the disruption of the sense of health security, which was exacerbated by the mass media, and sometimes by people from the closest environment, and the awareness that the worst-case perspective — losing one's life — was becoming real.

The persistent sense of threat triggered behavioral syndromes on the verge of pathology, increasing the severity of the situation. It can be expected that in such a situation the recognized values will be modified. The realization of the "fragility of life", impermanence, uncertainty and volatility of the instrumental goals pursued so far may, on the one hand, lead to turning to ultimate values or lead to their complete rejection.

3. Theoretical Considerations and Definitions

In the study of the functioning of academic teachers in the pandemic, due to the above circumstances, three criteria were analyzed, own (teachers') productivity, quality of professional life and a sense of mental well-being (Ishak *et al.*, 2018). This assumption required making definitions relating to the concepts discussed as:

- a) The Level of Self-Assessment of Productivity (LSP);

- b) Working Life Quality (WLQ);
- c) Mental Well-Being (MWB);
- d) Working Life Quality and Mental Well-Being – WLQ / MWB).

3.1 Assessment of the Teacher's Work Productivity

The evaluation of the teacher's work both in Polish literature (where we can find mainly references to procedures and legal acts) and in English is full of controversy, and the presented ambiguous models were used in the above category. Some authors, when speaking about the productivity of academic teachers, pay attention to objective factors i.e., the level of preparation of students and their competences, as well as their time management during preparation for classes (Anisrah *et al.*, 2020; Ndugu, 2014).

Moreover, it should be emphasized that it is particularly difficult to define the work of a teacher, which would not only refer to the standards set by specific bodies but would focus on the mission of the profession. However, as a rule, research clearly emphasizes subjectivism in establishing such criteria (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2012).

Considering the fact, that the COVID-19 epidemic almost forced the necessity of remote work on academics, the project adopted so far unused subcategories of assessing own knowledge of the use of new technologies in the work of an academic teacher. Thus, the assessment of own digital competences in this area of using applications and the possibility of using educational platforms within which remote learning takes place is treated as an indicator of the academic teacher's work productivity (Betancourt-Odio, 2021).

3.2 Quality of Professional Life of Academic Teachers

The concept of quality of working life was first used by I. Bluestone, an employee of General Motors of America, in a program designed for employees, which allowed them to play an active role in deciding about the working conditions offered (Goode, 1989; Martel *et al.*, 2006). Intensive further work on the quality of working life was continued in the first half of the 1970s by the International Council for the Quality of Working Life, conducting extensive research on the mental health of employees (Martel *et al.*, 2006).

A decade and a half later, S.P. Robbins (1989) defined the quality of working life as: „[...] a process by which an organization responds to employee needs by developing mechanisms to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work” (Robbins, 1989). A slightly later definition by other authors (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001) indicated that the quality of working life: „[...] is associated with the impact of the workplace on satisfaction in non-work life domains, and satisfaction with overall life, personal happiness and subjective well-being” (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). The above-mentioned definitions initiated further considerations concerning the measurement of the quality of professional life. The first criteria for this were created earlier by Walton (1973) and then by Lippitt (1978).

These included:

- sense of safety;
- relationship with others;
- sense of personal usefulness;
- experiencing recognition for achievements;
- opportunities to improve one's competences (Walton, 1973).

3.3 Mental Well-Being

Fifty years ago, the World Health Organization defined health as: „[...] a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Ryff and Singer, 1998). The relationship between physical health and mental health was characterized by a systemic approach to the above-mentioned aspects; each first factor influences the second as both cause and effect (Barr *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, over the past 50 years, psychologists have discovered that psychological well-being does not only refer to the elimination of pathology, but also includes the study of growth, optimism, hope, insight; interpersonal skills, predictive thinking, courage, work ethic and other factors (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

It is a field of positive psychology, which was first initiated by a representative of humanistic psychology in 1954, A. Maslow, and 40 years later developed M.E. Seligman (Lopez and Gallagher, 2009). This branch of psychology focuses on the subjective level of well-being, contentment, and satisfaction with past accomplishments; hope and an optimistic attitude towards the future and experiencing happiness in the present (Vazquez *et al.*, 2009). For this reason, the literature on the subject devoted to factors determining mental well-being, in recent years, places greater emphasis on mental well-being and well-being than on disorders and dysfunctions (Huppert, 2009).

In the adopted research project, in accordance with the assumptions of positive psychology, well-being (leaning towards the eudemonistic approach, represented by, among others, M.E. Seligman) means optimal human functioning, acting in accordance with oneself, i.e., the recognized system of values, self-realization, balance between working time and time private (Chirkowska-Smolak, 2008; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). One of the most popular types of mental well-being is model by C.D. Ryff (2008). It is composed of six dimensions, i.e.:

- autonomy;
- the “possibility of “controlling” the environment;
- personal development;
- positive relationships with others (based on trust);
- awareness of values (life goals);
- self-acceptance (Ryff and Singer, 2008).

The above model was adapted to the research planned in the project.

3.4 The Quality of Professional Life and Mental Well-Being

The relationship between the quality of professional life and mental well-being in the studies usually takes the form of a coexistence, and although the fact of its occurrence is beyond doubt, it is difficult to unequivocally define the relationship between these two variables. Thus, in the opinion of some authors, mental well-being is associated with a subjective sense of happiness, including at the same time satisfaction with work as a causative factor (Garg and Rasogi, 2009).

On the other hand, well-being is a factor that increases employee productivity and is the result of a sense of job satisfaction (Envick, 2012; Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). The lack of compliance in the studies carried out so far led to the inclusion of the relationship between the quality of professional life and mental well-being in the planned studies.

The aforementioned categories were adapted to the research on the quality of teachers' professional life (Igan *et al.*, 2015; Ishak *et al.*, 2018). The research carried out so far has shown that teachers' sense of professional life is conditioned by many factors, including the sense of security, motives for making decisions about choosing a profession (Day *et al.*, 2005). Another study conducted in the teaching community in Turkey showed a relationship between commitment to work and the sense of quality of life (Erdem, 2010). In view of some variation in the results obtained, as well as considering the situation of the COVID -19 pandemic, the authors of the article undertook their own research.

4. Research Method

The aim of the presented research was to identify their own level of digital competences for remote learning and assessment of the quality of their professional life, as well as the sense of well-being among academic teachers in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. In undertaking the implementation of the above plans, it was necessary to formulate certain research problems:

1. How academic teachers assess their competence in the use of new technologies in the case of the necessity of remote learning (P1)?
2. How academic teachers define their level of mental well-being during the pandemic (P2)?

To obtain an answer to such formulated problems, it was also necessary to operationalize the measure, partly using the model quoted earlier by Ryff and Singer (2008). To the research project, an in-depth interview was planned, the needs of which were arranged into specific instructions. Individual of the latter included, as part of an in-depth interview, the following content:

1. How do you rate your level of knowledge of the software you used for remote work?
2. How do you feel when working remotely?
3. To what extent relationships with friends and other people are a condition for feeling mental well-being?
4. How can you define your attitude to the world?

5. What values do you consider as important?
6. What life goals would you like to achieve in the closest future?
7. How do you assess your level of mental balance? How do you manage to maintain a balance between professional work and family responsibilities in free time?
8. What does personal development mean for you and to what extent do you implement it?

To obtain an answer to this question, a study was planned, with the use of an in-depth interview, with the participation of 21 academic teachers, conducting remote classes in the above-mentioned period 12 women and 9 men participated in the research. The age of the participants in the research procedure ranged from 31-67 years ($\bar{x} = 48.8$). The selection of teachers participating in the research was deliberate. The research involved both people (10 people) with a doctoral degree and with habilitated degree (9 people) and the title of professor (2 people).

The research took place in the period from May to November 2020. People presented humanities and social disciplines (11 people) and the fields of engineering and technical sciences, exact and natural sciences, and polytechnic sciences (10 people) and were also employees of public (12 people) and non-public (9 people) universities.

Before starting the study, the individual content of the questions was coded. On their basis, after obtaining the results, specific categories were created, which allowed the operationalization of the obtained research material. The category was created using the method of competing judges⁴.

5. Research Ethics

The study was conducted in accordance with the research ethics of social sciences. The research problems posed took into account ethical problems of social and individual nature, i.e., with regard to the content of their formation and presentation to respondents (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2001). In the conducted research in action, some activities were undertaken, which were conscious in nature, i.e., the respondents knew what, with the help of the presented research, would happen in relation to their life situation and undertaken research activities through specific goals, paths and tools used in the research (Pilch and Lalak, 2006).

Each of the respondents knew that they could resign from participating in the research at any time. Moreover, the anonymity of the research and the security of personal data was ensured (GDPR). The conducted research did not in any way endanger the respondents' sense of freedom, security, and respect for the law in every aspect. (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2001).

⁴The competent judges were two psychologists, a sociologist, and a teacher with over 10 years of experience.

6. Findings

The results of the study presented below a subjective assessment of the level of teachers' productivity in terms of the use of new technologies in remote work. Analyzing the statements of the respondents, the types of academic teachers surveyed, were generated in the table presented below (Table 1).

Table 1. Rating categories of self-assessment of productivity by academic teachers (LSP) in condition of remote work

| ON. | The category of self-assessment of productivity in conditions of remote work | Self-assessment category symbol of remote work | Examples of self-assessment of productivity in remote work technology within a specific category |
|-----|---|--|--|
| 1. | People who are particularly involved in remote work and highly value their digital competences as an indicator of productivity, being people up to 35 years of age, still working on improving their workshop. | LSP1 | L1: "I'm glad that I can finally do what I like, I am inventing ways to work in group on „Teams”. I may be immodest, but I know a few more programs than my colleagues, because I live a bit of it... (Male, 33) ”. |
| 2. | People who assess their competences well in remote work , show interest in improving in learning to use new forms of remote work software. Most often they are people aged 36–60. | LSP2 | L2: "Currently, I am doing better and worse I did not know that I would be able to learn so many new things and I am still learning... I try to explain every difficulty and mistake ... and I do it with every occasion ... (Female, 55) ”. |
| 3. | People who work remotely but are not motivated to learn the possibility of using new types of software , do not accept remote learning. Most often they are people over 60 years of age. | LSP3 | L3: "I'm sick of remote work," I'm just waiting to get mixed up with this activity, it's not for me. " I know I'm bad at these things, but I'm also in my age (Male, 67) ”. |

Source: Own research.

In the presented study, in connection with the first problem regarding competences (P1) in the field of the use of new technologies, the surveyed academic teachers in terms of the level of productivity in remote work (LSP) presented three types of assessments. The first type was a positive assessment, characterized by teachers who were particularly involved in remote work, focused on acquiring new competences, using new applications, with optimism about remote work (LSP1) and in terms of their competences, which was strengthened by continuous learning of new skills (LSP2).

The second group of assessments from academic teachers interested in acquiring new competences presents a similar, although less optimistic, position. The third group of assessments has become the department of teachers much less involved in improving their digital competences and treating the analyzed form of classes as not very acceptable to them out of necessity (LSP3). The fact is noteworthy, that the assessment of one's

attitude to acquiring the above competences seems to be correlated with the age of the respondents. The analysis of the statements showed that older teachers (over 60 years of age), i.e., in post-working age, felt less motivated to acquire competences related to remote work and a low level of their productivity (LSP3).

It can be expected that the observed attitude to working remotely and the assessment of one's own productivity are caused both by the diversified motivation to learn, acquiring digital competences and the previously observed effectiveness of undertaken activities.

6.1 Modification of the Level of the Quality of Professional Life of Academic Teachers in the Situation of COVID-19

People participating in the research and providing their answers most often emphasized that the source of lowering the standard of living of values is the loss of the sense of safety in terms of health security, in relation to themselves and their relatives, and the loss of safety related to work, in relation to people employed in higher education non-public schools (Table 2).

The responses of respondents regarding the quality of life can be classified into two categories: negative (WLQ1, WLQ2) and partially positive (WLQ3, WLQ4). It is optimistic that some teachers commenting on the quality of their professional life, regardless of the perceived nuisance, saw improvement in the situation in acquiring new competences useful in remote work and in the implementation of scientific and research plans. Equally optimistic, although consistent with the mission of the teaching profession, seems to be the concern for the quality of the teaching process as an element of professional fulfilment (WLQ2).

Table 2. Categories of assessment of the quality of working life (WQL) of the surveyed group of academic teachers

| ON | Category of evaluation of the quality of professional life of academic teachers | Symbol for the category of self-assessment of professional life quality | Examples of self-assessment of professional life quality |
|----|---|---|---|
| 1. | Negative assessment. A certain group of surveyed teachers, due to their current workplace and the situation related to the epidemic, is concerned about their future life situation, and this situation negatively affects the assessment of the quality of their professional life. | WLQ1 | W1: "Besides the fact that we have Covid, and I may not survive, I regret switching to non-public school, after each semester I'm afraid I might be fired from my job (Female, 45)". |
| 2. | Negative assessment. Some teachers were skeptical about their sense of usefulness, which translates into a lower assessment of the quality of their professional life, suggesting that | WLQ2 | W2: "I often wonder if it would not be better for students to read the texts themselves and they do not listen to us ... and due to the size of the groups, |

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|----|--|------|--|
| | contact with students is basically limited, which means that they can only seemingly participate in classes, while the possibility of checking knowledge due to the size of the groups is limited. | | we do not have the opportunity to ask them how to feel professionally fulfilled here? (Male, 47)". |
| 3. | Partially positive assessment. Among the teachers giving statements, there were some suggesting that working from home and not wasting time commuting, they could spend more time on research, finish an unfinished monograph or articles, which, despite all the negative aspects, rated less time-consuming distance learning higher. | WLQ3 | W3: "Finally, working at home, I can finish my research, I waited a year and a half... I also have an article started, I'm going to write it right away. This Covid also has its strengths (Female, 51)". |
| | Partially positive evaluation. Few of those who participated in the research indicated participation in webinars extending the possibilities of using more advanced forms of remote work and pursuing professional interests. | WLQ4 | W4: "I follow Polish and English-language webinars to find out something else ... I have a little more time to research what I like, not what the money is for. (Female, 31)". |

Source: Own research

6.2 The Level of Experienced Mental Well-Being Among Academic Teachers

Assessment of mental well-being (MWB) as a more general indicator of the subjectively perceived quality of life among people who gave statements during the in-depth interview, it showed differentiation both in terms of assessment criteria as well as personality and demographic issues characterizing the people. At the same time, irrespective of it, the ability to achieve life goals that had been set earlier turned out to be an important factor (Table 3).

Table 3. Experienced category of mental well-being (MWB) assessment in relation to taking up remote work

| ON. | Assessment category of experienced mental well-being | Category symbol | Examples of the assessment of experienced mental well-being |
|-----|---|-----------------|---|
| 1. | Decreased level of well-being (a). Units assessed as extroverted based on the interview complained about the limited possibilities of social and work-related contacts. | MWB1 | M1: "I feel very bad when I can't meet my friends and students ... I can't imagine it going to last longer (Female, 56)". |
| 2. | Decreased level of well-being (b). Some of them lamented the difficulty in carrying out the intended research, which ended prematurely, presenting non-personal values as significant. | MWB2 | M2: "I was so anxious to complete the research ... I think about the insertion material that would be enough for patients for several years (Male, 62)". |
| 3. | Decreased level of well-being (c). Some experienced academic teachers | MWB3 | M3: "I sit in front of the screen all day and sit... and take root, there is |

| | | | |
|----|--|-------|---|
| | emphasized the inability to maintain a balance between work, private life, and free time. | | no time for anything... as long as I can do it (Female, 60)". |
| 4. | Decreased level of well-being (d). Still other people concentrated solely on taking care of their own health and that of their loved ones, i.e., children and grandchildren. | MWB4 | M4: "My spine hurts everyday..., my children are in constant contact with clients..., my grandchildren are so sensitive, they can get sick easily..., I don't see the light in the tunnel... (Female, 61)". |
| 5. | Decreased level of well-being (e). While analyzing the attitude of the academic teachers participating in the research, it was possible to observe the attitude of a frustrated person, skeptical about people's lives and the surrounding reality. | MWB5 | M5: "I do not know what to say, I am disappointed and even angry, after all, it was possible to predict a pandemic earlier, we are driven by incompetent people, I can see everything in black..., I do not understand my wife... (Male, 61)". |
| 6. | Reduced well-being (f). Negative self-reflection related to one's own mental well-being (depressive attitude) combined with an attempt to cope with difficulty. Philosophical and pessimistic considerations. | MWB6 | M6: "I often feel very depressed, and it is really difficult for me... I work in our association...there is always something going on... without it would be difficult for me (Female, 67)". |
| | | MWB7 | M7: "Now I understand what the term fragility of life means ... (Male, 68)". |
| 7. | Well-being, unchanged (g). Some mature teachers, speaking about the meaning of their lives, especially in the professional aspect, claimed that they did not notice any changes in relation to the period before the epidemic. | MWB8 | M8: "I don't see any drastic changes in my life during the covid period, I do what I always did, I probably like it ... and I will continue to do so... (Male, 67)". |
| 8. | Pointing to the way of coping with difficulties (h). The respondents emphasized the importance of life values that allow them to survive the most difficult situations, such as love, friendship. | MWB9 | M9: "In the present situation, my wife and my closest friends allow me to survive) and pursue other goals that are subordinated to permanent values (Male, 64)". |
| 9. | Coping by immersing yourself in responsibilities (i). People with shorter work experience at the university, perhaps due to a greater preoccupation with everyday matters and the burden of family responsibilities (regardless of gender), and professional work seemed to be less burdened with the risk of COVID-19 than their older colleagues. Academics have repeatedly stated that they are so preoccupied with everyday | MWB10 | M10: "I don't have time to think about Covid, my son has an eight year grade exam, my daughter is in kindergarten and I run... I don't feel particularly threatened... (Female, 35)". |
| | | | M11: "I don't know what to put my hands into ..., I don't think about a pandemic ..., I have so many things and responsibilities ... and I have to finish the project (Male, 39)". |

| | | | |
|------------|--|-------|---|
| | life that considering the meaning of their own activity they treat as "a luxury that does not suit their lifestyle, which has a rather demotivating effect". | | M12: "I try not to think about the threat, it doesn't mean that I deny it exists, but I really can't afford to think about it ... because then I lose my energy (Male, 34)". |
| 10. | Coping by through using emotional support (j). In the case of people who gave statements, one could also observe, but only among mature academic teachers, an attitude of affiliation aimed at maintaining positive social relationships from which emotional support can be derived. | MWB11 | M13: We have to endure it, be together and support each other, this is the only way to deal with the nasty virus (Female, 62)". |
| 11. | Focus on supplementing competences as a source of maintaining well-being (k). When considering their personal development, academic teachers in most cases focused on improving their digital competences, although there were people who currently found time to improve their passions. These people undertook a number of activities, e.g., painting portraits. | MWB12 | M14: "Finally, I can paint portraits of my children ..." related to household management, such as cooking (Female, 54)". |
| | | | M15: "Now I cook my favorite dishes twice a week, bake a cake ..." for which I did not have time before (Male, 41)". |

Source: Own research.

The analysis of the posted categories of assessments of mental well-being by academic teachers allows for the observation of a reduced level of well-being due to factors such as limited social contacts (MWB1), inability to maintain a balance between work and private life (MWB3) (which seems to be typical of remote work, carried out at home) thoughts of a depressive nature (MWB6) threat to one's own health and loved ones (MWB4) more common in people over 60 years of age; inability to complete undertaken tasks related to goals other than personal goals (MWB2), difficult to identify life frustration, perhaps resulting from personality conditions, a sense of the fragility of existence (MWB7). In the statements of the respondents, another category of assessments of experienced well-being also appeared, emphasizing the "specific stability" of this feeling, regardless of the presence of the pandemic (MWB8). Improving your well-being also referred to mutual support as a way of coping with the difficulties arising from a pandemic (MWB11).

This condition indicates the resilience of a certain group of academic teachers and a strong attitude towards the achievement of life goals (possibly including professional ones). Noteworthy are the proposals suggesting the possibility of coping with a reduced sense of mental well-being as a remedy for the difficulties resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These include emotional support as an effective measure against mental strain, satisfying relationships with friends as a significant life value (MWB9), indicated by people over 60 years of age, as well as a popular method of coping with stress, devoting to numerous duties that, by absorbing mentally, allow to forget about the threat

(MWB10) and focus on the development of digital competences, as well as the development of own passions (MWB12).

Summarizing and referring to another problem (P2) related to mental well-being (MWB) the opinions of academic teachers participating in the survey were divided into positive ones, in relation to the existing situation; most often among people of working age and negative ones most often among people of post-working age, who did not show optimism in this matter. Hence, despite the difficult situation, having activity or support from relatives or other people allowed not to break down because of the situation. Regardless of the justifications provided, all persons indicated that they felt stressed by the situation.

7. Summary, Discussion of the Results, and Conclusions

7.1 Summary

The conducted research showed a different level of academic teachers' assessment of their own productivity in digital competences for remote work as well as assessments related to the quality of professional life and the sense of mental well-being in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although several statements indicate a negative assessment of their own productivity, quality of professional life and sense of mental well-being, and in all statements, the feeling of stress in the situation was observed, the fact that some teachers revealed pro-social values, the implementation of the mission of the teaching profession and the search for coping opportunities in the face of difficulties and inconveniences.

Some of the respondents, advanced in age (over 60 years of age), regardless of the discomfort caused by remote work, showed concern for the quality of education and its effectiveness, demonstrating the willingness to implement the honorable mission of their profession, still others emphasized the role of permanent values of the sense of closeness and friendship as antidote to threats to health or life.

Noteworthy is the willingness to use the pandemic period to supplement one's digital competences or professional interests. For another group of people, as a method of coping with mental stress, it turned out to be "beneficial" to focus on numerous duties, which distracted the reflection of negative scenarios of events.

7.2 Discussion of the Results

The conducted research allowed to observe a lower level of self-productivity assessment, assessment of the quality of professional life. Some authors point to the difficulties resulting from the need to learn a new way of teaching also by academic teachers, the need to introduce organizational changes at universities, in conjunction with learning digital competences, what implicated the need of new self-perception (Osiro and Jairo, 2021), and forced change of learning outcomes, what was caused by COVID-19 pandemic situation. However, in a smaller number, the studies conducted so far have indicated a change in the quality of life of academic teachers in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic (González-Nieto *et al.*, 2021).

Referring to the obtained results, it can also be indicated that the quality of professional life was within the definition of M.J. Sirgy, D. Efraty, P. Siegel and D.J. Lee on the strong influence of the workplace on the sense of professional satisfaction and happiness than the intentional actions of a specific organization, in this case universities, as suggested by J.P. Martel and G. Dupuis, or I. Blueston's definition indicating the active role of employees in the working conditions offered by employers. In connection with the above, the adopted model of mental well-being according to C.D. Ryff allowed for the analysis of the above-mentioned attitudes of the respondents in the above-mentioned dimensions.

The confrontation of the achieved research results with the results of previous research partially confirmed the conclusions formulated by other authors, although at the same time it triggered controversy.

Based on research carried out by S. W. Parker, M.A. Hansen and C. Brendowski, researchers found that academic teachers were assessed on average by their students regarding their digital competences (Parker *et al.*, 2020) thus, in the above study, students also indicated greater involvement of academic teachers in the preparation of offline classes than online (Parker *et al.*, 2020). Regardless of this, the understanding of teacher productivity adopted by the authors of this article was a completely subjective category and these results did not coincide with the self-esteem of these respondents.

On the other hand, due to the subcategory of the assessment of their own productivity, they coincided with the research of T. Huk, who based on the theory of withdrawal, indicated that people over 45, fearing about the pace of changes and the inability to adapt to them, limit their activity in specific areas of social life (Huk, 2014). Similarly, demonstrating motivation to act in other areas of activity coincided with the theory of activity and correlated with the theory of withdrawal (Huk, 2014).

According to it, people who are already mature and immobile age, unable to fulfil themselves in certain areas of life through having experience and knowledge that is already out of date in some dimensions, which is a typical element of human development, limit their participation in social life. But on the other hand, avoiding old age is possible by carrying out certain forms of activity, e.g., through training in work related to remote education or in other spaces of life, as above in the examples provided in art or cooking.

By conducting research related to the phenomenon described above, similar research results could be observed among 216 academic teachers from different regions of Ecuador who participated in the study. The results of the study performed in this study also showed differences in acquiring digital competences depending on age. The younger teachers worked much easier, than their older colleagues (Jorge-Vázquez *et al.*, 2021).

On the other hand, in the qualitative study presented in this article, people with longer work experience indicated a lower sense of mental well-being than younger people. At the same time in the study K. Prasad, R.W. Vaidya, M.R. Mangipudi the results of the analyses did not confirm the fact that the stress of the respondents was related to the

threat posed by the situation regarding work in the epidemic time, it was in no way related to age (Prasad *et al.*, 2020).

Similar research results were obtained out in research conducted in Mexico (González-Nieto *et al.*, 2021), in which special attention was paid to the psychological burden experienced in the academic environment, caused not only by the need to conduct remote classes, but also by psychological factors caused by isolation in the home environment. The presented results are not free from limitations, which, even though the research is qualitative, certainly includes a small research sample, preventing the generalization of the obtained results.

Regardless of this, the conducted research will certainly bring closer to the functioning of Polish academic teachers in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus pointing to the situation of academic teachers whose experiences of the pandemic and the need to adapt to new working conditions, especially in connection with remote work, force them to take action in psychological support and training of academic teachers in acquiring digital competences and adapting to working conditions imposed by mode of remote work.

7.3 Conclusions

Above results also coincided with the results of the research carried out for the purposes of this article on Polish academic teachers. Therefore, referring to the definition of health quoted above, it can be concluded that the researched academic teachers in Poland experienced a health impairment in connection with the situation related to the introduction of the COVID-19 epidemic.

However, the situation related to the last one also influenced the disclosure of other phenomena related to it, a lower sense of self-perception, difficulties in remote work, especially in relation to digital competences, which was a difficulty for academic teachers of 60 and more years, same as for this social group a feeling of fear of anxiety, what also had an effect in change in self-perception, which implicated lowered self-esteem, lowered level of work and worsened state of well-being. Similar results were also noticed among others presented here researchers.

On the other hand, the conducted research on Polish academic teachers showed changes in level of self-assessment of productivity (LSP) due to the state of the epidemic COVID-19. The respondents showed three types of attitudes. Positive in connection with remote work, less optimistic to acquiring new competences and less involved in improving their digital competences and not accepting the remote learning as a form of conducting classes.

However, the surveyed teachers presented positive and negative attitudes regarding mental well-being. In the first case the surveyed teachers usually aged 60 years and more threat to their health and the loved ones, limited social contacts, inability to maintain a balance between work and private life, thoughts of a depressive nature,

inability to complete undertaken tasks related to goals other than personal, life frustration in conjunction with fragility of existence.

The second case, that is positive attitudes of mental well-being was a mutual support as emotional support from friends and family, which was a way of coping with the difficulties arising from epidemic situation and which was also seen as significant life value (especially for teachers 60 years and over) and as positive was seen a development of digital competences and own passions (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2021).

In connection with the above, it is advisable to continue observing and examining the group of academic teachers in connection with the need to conduct remote work in the era of the COVID-19 epidemic. Long-term studies could be of particular interest, compared to studies by other researchers and those conducting quantitative studies that also analyze the consequences of the impact of the epidemic in the longer term. More so because, apart from the issues presented above, the changes that are taking place affected already the functioning of universities and the profession of academic teacher, which will also be observable in the future (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2021).

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