PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT THROUGH ICT AMONG SPANISH AND ITALIAN TEACHERS
A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The teaching profession is characterised by a high risk of stress and burnout. This qualitative study presents findings aimed at identifying how teachers perceive social support within a professional context, understanding how this influences their perception of teacher well-being, and exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the perception of this support through ICT and social media. Interviews were used as the method of data collection. The results underscore the importance of perceived social support for teacher well-being and a sense of belonging.

1. Introduction

Today's society presents teachers with new challenges and demands, which affects their health and well-being (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). The causes of this potential discomfort include excessive workload and bureaucracy (Cardozo Gutiérrez, 2017; Malander, 2016), managing large classes, salary, and relationships with families and faculty (Bauer et al., 2007; Burić and Frenzel, 2019; Gomila and Pascual, 2015; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007, 2011). In addition, teachers need to be competent in emotional management, especially in student-teacher and teacher-student relationships, because today they are not only concerned with the delivery of content but also have to take care of social competencies (Hughes et al., 2008, 2012).

All of these responsibilities can be a source of ongoing stress for teachers. In this sense, numerous studies show that exposure to work-related stress over a long period of time can lead to burnout (Cooper et al., 2001; Maslach et al., 2001). For example, Maslach (1976) identified the relationship between the work environment and burnout, and subsequent studies (Maslach and Jackson, 1981, 1981a) highlighted the link between the caring professions and work-related burnout syndrome (WBS). Subsequent studies (Arquero and Donoso, 2003) have emphasised the role of the work environment rather than individual factors.

 On the other hand, other studies stress the importance and weight given to a particular source of stress (Kyriacou 2001; Lazarus and Folkman, 1987; Spilt et al., 2011). The transactional model (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), i.e. the 'transaction' between context and individual, between demands and concrete or perceived danger, is situated within this framework. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel et al., 1979; Turner and Brown, 1978) and Theory of Self-Categorisation (TAC) (Oakes et al.,1987; Turner, 2010), studies have highlighted the importance of both a sense of belonging to an organisation and social identity (Haslam, 2004; Haslam et al. 2004, 2005; Topa et al., 2005).

The impact of COVID 19 on social support through social networks and on teachers' well-being deserves a separate chapter. As shown by Serrano and Azahuanche (2020) and Mora Mora, et al. (2021), the levels of burnout among teachers at different levels of education were high, especially during the period of closure, due to stressors such as work overload and the lack of time to manage demands, plan, teach at a distance, evaluate and give feedback, as well as to update themselves in a short time in the use of the computer medium.

1.1.   From a Sense of Belonging to Social Support in the Work Context

According to social exchange and equity theory (Adams, 1965; Buunk and Schaufeli, 1993), social group membership and social relationships have a positive impact on personal well-being. Similarly, the relationship between context and the individual is evident, including the influence of stressed teachers on non-burned-out teachers as a contagion of shared negative experiences with students (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2000). According to this theory, emotional and work-related stress may be due to a negative relationship between investment and effort and outcomes, without emotional and relational reciprocity in other people or organisations.

Later, since the 1990s, other studies have shown how burnout is also linked to the gap between commitment to the job and the success achieved (Gónzalez et al. 2008; Pines, 1993). In this regard, it is worth recalling the Job Demands and Resources (J-DR) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001), which in its latest version (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) emphasises the link between the well-being, motivation and social support of employees and the success of the organisation in which they work. In the same vein, Seligman (2003) shows how positive emotions, personal engagement and social support contribute to well-being. Finally, people's motivation, meaning and purpose.

In this model, 'social support' has been added, which in other studies is shown to have a positive effect on well-being at work (Greenglass et al., 1996; Greenglass et al., 1998; Jonge et al., 1996; Pascual et al., 2003). Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of this link (Jong, 2018; Ju et al., 2015; Marenco-Escuderos and Avila-Toscano, 2016; McCallum and Price, 2010; Miao et al., 2017b; Skaalvik and Skaalvik,2011). In this sense, Merida-Lopez et al. (2022) demonstrated the positive relationship between elements of emotional intelligence, such as positive communication or empathy, with social support and, consequently, with job satisfaction. In this sense, the COVID 19 period was characterised by high levels of burnout and low levels of personal fulfilment among teachers (Mora

Mora et al., 2021; Serrano and Azahuanche, 2020), but at the same time Tabares-Díaz et al. (2020) highlight social support as an important protective factor.

2. Methodology

The present study was conducted from an interpretive perspective, using a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research allows an approach to a topic or phenomenon and its description from a "natural" and meaningful perspective (Fernández, 2016, p. 34; Taylor and Bogdan, 1992). Likewise, it favours a better understanding of the phenomenon thanks to the participation of the participants (Ramírez-Elías and Arbesú-García, 2019), the previous experience and the experience of the researcher (Goetz and Lecompte, 1988). Through the interpretive approach, the object of study was studied, taking into account the environment, the actions and the uniqueness of each participant, both individually and collectively (Arnal et al., 1994; González Monteagudo, 2001; Sandín Esteban, 2003).

2.1. Research Objectives

Within this framework, the present study, which is part of a broader research project, has the following objectives:

- To identify how Spanish and Italian secondary school teachers perceive social support in the context of their profession.
- To find out how social support influences the perception of teachers' well-being among Italian and Spanish secondary school teachers.
- To deepen the influence of the pandemic generated by COVID 19 on the perception of social support by Spanish and Italian secondary school teachers through ICT.

2.2. Context and Participants

The participants in this study comprised 34 secondary school teachers (28 women and 6 men), with 18 originating from Turin and 16 from Zaragoza. It is noteworthy that the secondary education system in Spain encompasses a different age range than in Italy (Eurydice, 2021-2022). In Spain, the compulsory secondary education (ESO) phase begins at the age of twelve and extends to fifteen, after which students can opt for either vocational training (FP) or the Baccalaureate (Bachillerato) at the age of fifteen to seventeen. In Italy, the educational system is characterised by a different structure. Students in Italy typically commence their secondary education at the age of fourteen and continue until the age of eighteen, with the Selectividad examination being mandatory for completion of the course. Notably, the Selectividad examination is not compulsory in Spain.

Table 1. Comparison between the Spanish and Italian systems

	SPANISH EDUCATION SYSTEM		ITALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM	
Stages	**Levels**	**Age**	**Levels**	**Stages**
Children's	Children I	3-4		
	Children II	4-5		
	Children III	5-6		
Primary	First	6-7	First	
	Second	7-8	Second	
	Third	8-9	Third	**Primary School**
	Fourth	9-10	Fourth	
	Fifth	10-11	Fifth	
	Sixth	11-12		
Compulsory Education	First	12-13	First	**Secondary School – First Grade**
	Second	13-14	Second	

	Third	14-15	Third	
	Fourth	15-16	First	
				Secondary School – Second Grade
Baccalaureat Y Vocational training	First	16-17	Second	
	Second	17-18	Third	
		18-19	Fourth	
			Fifth	
	Selectivity		*Esame di Stato*	

Note: adapted from the Ministry of Education and Training, 2016.

The participants from Zaragoza are enrolled in five public high schools across the city. Conversely, the participants from Turin are employed in four institutes (Licei, Istituti Tecnici and Istituti Professionali) situated in diverse geographical locations and social contexts.

A "snowball sampling" approach was employed for the selection of participants (Atkinson and Flint, 2001; Vogt, 1999). This method involved the use of personal contacts for the Spanish group and indirect contacts for the Italian group. Potential participants were offered communication with a brief explanation of the present study and its objectives, as well as the researcher's own contacts, so that they could participate on a voluntary basis. It was emphasised to them that they were at liberty to withdraw from participation at any time, in accordance with the ethical principles of research. The criteria of privacy and anonymity of the participants were respected, and any personal references were eliminated.

2.3. Information Collection Strategies

The semi-structured interview was utilised as a data collection method, facilitating the convergence of the participants' and researcher's perspectives (Bolseguí and Fuguet Smith, 2006). Consequently, the researcher functioned as an instrumental component of the study. Although the interview script was derived from the scientific literature, it was overseen by three experts in research and teacher well-being. Consequently, the interview is characterised by a series of questions that have been meticulously developed in advance, yet this does not preclude the possibility of further dialogue between interviewer and informant, which may result in the formulation of additional questions or the exploration of further topics (Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2021).

2.4. Information Analysis

Following the collection of information, the data underwent analysis using Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000), a methodological framework that emphasises the pivotal role of the researcher's immersion in the field, constituting an integral component of the investigative process. This approach acknowledges the researcher's active involvement in the construction of the phenomena under study, thereby integrating the researcher into the investigative process. Furthermore, Grounded Theory does not delineate a clear distinction between the collection of data and its subsequent analysis; rather, it emphasises constant comparison and reconstruction, which also entails systematic contrast of the data (Gómez, 2011; González Echevarría, 2006).

Initially, the interviews were analysed openly, whilst maintaining the necessary independence (González-Ávila, 2002), attributing analytical codes to the categories, and subsequently progressing to axial coding in the phase of comparison and constant revision. Following the verification of the possible and existing relationships, the definition of macro categories and the respective subcategories was undertaken, which were refined through selective coding (Charmaz, 2013; López-Suárez and Bonilla-García, 2016). Triangulation was carried out through constant comparison and review with two external experts. The study was conducted between 2020 and 2023. Due to the emergency situation in the early stages of the study, interviews were conducted by video call between October 2020 and February 2022.

3. Results Discussion

Following the collection of data, the categories were definitively organised as follows: a) Support from co-workers, which refers to the relationship between colleagues and the perception of support received; b) Support from management and organisation, in relation to the support perceived from the institutions and from the management of the centres by the teaching staff; c) Relationship with families, referring to the type of interaction with families and the type of relationship that is established; and d) Relationship with students, the interactions established between teachers and students.

Figure 1. Influencing factors on teacher well-being
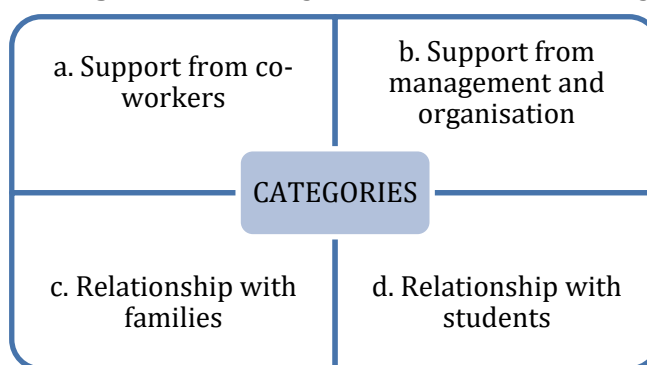
Source: own elaboration, 2025.

3.1. Support from Co-Workers

This term refers to the quality of the relationship between colleagues, and the perception of the support received or the lack thereof from colleagues throughout the teaching career, including the particular relationships established during the COVD-19 era. As evidenced by some studies, teaching is not characterised by being a purely individual endeavour (Himmetoğlu et al., 2022). Teaching involves a high degree of commitment within an organisation. A collaborative relationship between colleagues fosters the perception of appreciation and support from others, which has a positive impact on the well-being of teachers, while reducing stress and the incidence of staff turnover (Mérida-López et al., 2020; Pomaki et al., 2010; Rey and Extremera, 2011; Vaamonde et al, 2018). In this vein, a teacher from Turin articulates her sentiments regarding her colleagues, stating, 'We share a remarkable rapport with our colleagues. I find great camaraderie among my colleagues, where we engage in open dialogue concerning our shared concerns, anxieties, and irritations' (31_Tur_Ref.1).

Among the testimonies of the participants, collaboration, empathy (Goleman, 2018; Mayer and Salovey, 1997) and positive communication between colleagues (Martínez, 2010) were identified as favourable elements for teacher well-being and the establishment and maintenance of a good working environment. A teacher from Zaragoza provides the following explanation:

> We are very comfortable, we collaborate, we work when we have to work together, there are no problems. However, there have also been personal frictions, there have been differences and when there are certain discrepancies that become personal, it complicates the work. (...) if you've argued with someone in the department for some reason, then don't have a problem sitting down when we're preparing a project as a department, a party, to commemorate an event in the auditorium or something like that (...). I always wanted to put that first, even when I have argued with a colleague (...) (19_Zar_Ref.1).

Collaboration and positive communication have been identified as protective factors against teacher discomfort and burnout syndrome (Granados et al., 2019; Kanjee, 2020) and have been shown to improve the sense of belonging and involvement at work (Calogero et al., 2019; Merino Tejedor and Lucas Mangas, 2016; Reyes Hernández, 2018). These factors also favour the creation of connections and the strengthening of teacher identity (Buitrago-Bonilla & Cárdenas-Soler, 2017).

Conversely, a paucity of support, in conjunction with divisive attitudes among colleagues, has been shown to engender stress (Guerrero Barona et al., 2018; Marenco-Escuderos & Ávila-Toscano, 2016; Marqués Pinto et al., 2005).

During the period of the COVD-19 pandemic, teachers were required to adapt to a novel teaching context with unprecedented rapidity and, in many cases, without the requisite skills and tools. This predicament has been shown to result in work overload and difficulties in balancing personal and family life with work (Robinet-Serrano and Pérez-Azahuanche, 2020; Santiago Ribeiro et al., 2020), i.e. managing the balance between demand and resources (Lee and Ashforth, 1996). In this context, support from colleagues through ICTs, as well as the cultivation of emotional competencies, emerged as a pivotal factor in mitigating burnout and enhancing the effectiveness of coping with these moments (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Matteucci et al., 2020; van der Spoel et al., 2020). A teacher from Zaragoza offers the following perspective:

> For instance, the confinement has resulted in a notable increase in unity and empathy among the teaching staff, as perceived by the teacher. There has been a spontaneous development of awareness regarding the work of others, accompanied by a significant enhancement in unity (3_Zar_Ref.1).

Within the context of Turin, the teaching staff's perception was similar:

> We would say that there was, there was almost always a brief exchange of ideas with a colleague who taught the same subject as me, so we cooperated a lot. We had been working together for a considerable time prior to the closure, but it was during this period that we collaborated most extensively. We engaged in telephone communication, conversed, exchanged news, and shared ideas, thereby providing mutual support during challenging times. (12_Tur_Ref.1)

The rapport with colleagues is thus recognised as a pivotal component of teachers' well-being. Those entrusted with management and organisational responsibilities are seen to have a distinct role, one that entails the making of decisions that can exert a significant influence on the professional organisation of the entire teaching team.

3.2.   *Support from Management and the Organisation*

The provision of support from management and the organisation is understood to refer to the support perceived from them and the manner in which this affects teaching staff. A substantial body of research has emerged on this topic, with studies by Calatayud Salom (2015), Sánchez and Barraza (2015) and Serpieri and Vatrella (2017) demonstrating the pivotal role of managerial support in fostering collaboration and assistance. These studies have shown that when management fosters an optimal system of collaboration and support, relationships are consolidated and strengthened, as well as the sense of belonging and teaching identity. Advocating participative leadership (Calatayud Salom, 2015) by management fosters organisational justice at the distributive level, in every type of procedure related to the functioning of the institute, at the interpersonal level and in terms of information (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al. 2013).

On the other hand, there is a feeling of unease when management does not support but rather feeds division. Despite the fact that the figure of the director is not assimilated by the form of selection (European Commission, 2023), the testimonies from both countries confirm these aspects:

> In our case we have the best headteacher, at least he gives me autonomy, that is to say he believes in me 150%, he encourages me, he motivates me every day, he totally believes in everything I teach the teachers, in everything I do with the pupils, he says yes to everything, it's impossible to have a bad relationship. (...) Yes, I think the headteacher has to be a kind of coach who manages a team, a football team, who wants to get the best out of that team (...). So, a headteacher has to be able to break down the walls between departments and make sure that subjects work together, to make learning global, functional, meaningful, skills-based and, on top of that, to create a positive school atmosphere. (5_Zar.Ref. 2,3,4)

> There was this director who was almost like a mother, in the sense that she had this quality of making you feel protected, but in a good way. And always very attentive, always with an open door, so you'd walk by, you'd say hello, she'd give you a smile, and then you felt you were welcome for a little chat, a problem to discuss... so I have to say that was an important reference point and played a lot in my favour that year and the following year. On the other hand, I also met some terrible managers who lived off the commitment of others.... Yes, very bad managers, incapable of understanding the work. (27_Tur.Ref. 3)

During the period of the COVD-19 pandemic, it was imperative for teachers to have access to reliable sources of support and guidance. Those in managerial positions who, through the utilisation of ICTs and social networks, were able to demonstrate sufficient effectiveness in this regard, exhibited a certain degree of well-being among teachers, despite the prevailing crisis context, thereby alleviating the effects of the prevailing malaise (D'Angelo, 2021; Matteucci et al., 2020).It is evident that numerous decisions had to be made autonomously by management, although the relationship between intention and outcome was not always consistent. A similar discrepancy was observed in the communication processes:

> There's a flood of information, we miss things, we can't keep up with everyone and all the information (...) So I mean... anxiety, excitement, we're always in contact and we ask ourselves: 'But you...? Am I missing something? You are doing this... Is there another option? Where did you find it? .... I don't remember, I don't know where I saw it, if I saw it on Gmail, if I saw it on the notice board...', all that. (31_Tur. Ref.1,2)

> So, as things stand, what was promised in the summer and so on has not been fulfilled. When the school year started... I'm not talking about us, the management teams, everyone had to make do and they were absolutely lost. There was a feeling of abandonment on the part of the administration. This September, the teams have had to work hard to make their contingency plans and solve everything, and we are keeping our fingers crossed, because this week, for example, there are more cases, so we are scared. (29_Zar_Ref.1)

In addition to teaching professionals, the relationship with the rest of the educational community emerges as an influential factor in teachers' wellbeing.

3.3. *Relationship with Families*

This category refers to the support and respect that teachers perceive from families and how this can affect their well-being. In this sense, according to previous studies, the teaching profession no longer enjoys the prestige it once did, and teachers feel increasingly defenceless and questioned, even by people who have never crossed the threshold of a classroom (Belmonte et al., 2020; González 2014; Luperini, 2013). This is what a teacher in Turin says:

> I think we have gone through a historical moment in which families have increasingly moved towards a low regard for the teacher's ability to manage his or her profession. On many levels, not only in terms of what you have to teach, but also in terms of relationships. So, there were things that made me suffer a lot over the years: realising that the family also wanted to replace you at the level of teaching, "but why are you teaching like that? I would do it differently". I was totally shocked because it seems that when you have studied in this field you shouldn't question what you are doing unless you are doing stupid things, but in fact I was moving very solidly on certain bases and therefore it hurt me to receive this kind of criticism in this area. If it's motivated criticism, fine, but it wasn't, then you have to defend yourself against something that really shouldn't be questioned. (27_Tur_Ref.2)

In Spain, the status of being a high school or university teacher in public education is still considered to have a certain prestige. However, this is not perceived as such by some teachers (Fortuny and Rodríguez, 2015; Pérez-Díaz and Rodríguez, 2013). Conversely, in Italy, the status of the teaching profession is lower than in other countries in terms of perceived social prestige (Dolton et al., 2018). This disparity has had repercussions on the relationship between teachers and families, which has been

characterised by a shift towards defensiveness, aggressiveness, or a lack of involvement in educational discourse (Allah, 2020, 2022). This dynamic has the potential to influence job performance (Burić and Frenzel, 2019; Gomila and Pascual, 2015; Luppi, 2018) and the well-being of professionals (Bauer et al., 2007; Forlin, 2001; Romagnoli and Gallardo, 2008; Travers and Cooper, 1997). The present study explores these perceptions in both the Turin and Zaragoza contexts.

> Then we go from there to another extreme, which I don't think is positive either, which is families who deceive each other, who are perhaps too competitive, families who think they have future Nobel Prize winners in their children, and they see more than there really is, so they blame the teachers for the results, instead of perhaps blaming their own children's abilities or study skills, because they spoil them more or because they look after them more. (5_Zar_Ref.1)

> (...) Families have changed a lot in the sense that the child should bring honour to the family, so they should not be a problem. If you are a problem, you have to change, not the child. (...) they don't listen to the other person's point of view or advice, because it might destabilise them. (26_Tur_Ref. 2,3)

However, in both Spain and Italy, there are still families who mutually support and respect the work of teachers and with whom there is a process of collaboration and shared values, which has an optimal impact on the work of teachers (Calvo et al., 2016). While this dynamic may be less prevalent, there are notable instances of teachers in both contexts reporting similar relationships with families:

> In general they are supportive, because the parents who come are either parents who have been warned by you about the problem and are grateful, or parents who are there out of self-interest, that is, I want to talk to you to see what you have to say, and then there are many parents of the most problematic children who never come, I don't know, out of shame or whatever (1_Zar_Ref.1-3).

> Then, little by little, from the first to the fifth year, you noticed that the families changed their attitude because they started to say, 'but this is a great teacher (...)' and at that point they would let you take their child anywhere. In secondary school (...) the families maintain an attitude of appropriate distance from you (...) they listen to what you say and then perhaps try to intervene in the balance with the son or daughter in order to correct the situation a little. (27_Tur_Ref.1,2)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the relationship with families has become more visible, especially through ICT and social networks. In some cases, in a positive sense (Matteucci et al., 2021.

> Well, for me lately, perhaps the most significant thing is that there is a high percentage of families who recognise it and say so openly and congratulate us; they encourage and recognise the effort that is made, and I find that to be a recognition on the part of the families. There are always those on the other side who think that everything is insufficient and don't like the way things are done, but, in general, I find that there is a high percentage who recognise it and value it and, what's more, say so. (2_Zar_Ref.1)

> In other cases, the absence of dialogue or even negative or defensive dialogue is confirmed:

> (...) None of the parents contacted us. In the final assessments, we had to write a report, we were the ones who had to contact some of the parents, but most of them responded 'it's that time of the month', 'it's the same for everyone'. Then the second comment 'but you know, the boy was actually [unintelligible] that day', all kinds of excuses. (25_Tur_Ref.5,6)

3.4. Relationship with Students

According to the scientific literature (Feiman-Nemser, 2001), the teaching profession is global, going beyond the teaching of theoretical and/or technical content. Teaching through spaces that allow co-construction with students also favours the development of teacher well-being (Valenzuela, 2021). When teachers feel appreciated or valued by their students, for their commitment or for the stimuli they

provide, the necessary motivation is generated, and a mutual exchange is created from which both benefit. In this context, it is more likely to achieve a high level of job satisfaction (Bianchi, 2016).

I'm always very happy to go to work because I think I give a lot, and I receive a lot. I think the students, the teenagers, are very generous with me. I really like the interaction with them. It makes me feel very alive. Most of the time the laughter, the connection, the complicity that happens in the classroom fills me up, satisfies me, and every day I feel like going to receive that. (21_Zar_Ref.3)

However, when dialogue fails or does not take place, this exchange tends to disappear, leaving room for demotivation and a negative attitude on the part of teachers, which also affects the teaching-learning process (Alvites-Huamaní, 2019; Villardefrancos Pol et al., 2012). Moreover, since the relationship with students is a key aspect for teachers, the lack of a positive teacher-student relationship can lead to a state of discomfort (Chang, 2009; Spilt et al., 2011). This is expressed by a teacher in the city of Turin:

I didn't feel comfortable with Distance Learning, because I'm one of those people who never sits still, I try to be dynamic too, to stimulate the students' interest a little. So, to be in front of a black screen, because when you close the webcam, you can't see the person you're talking to... In fact, I said, "I'll keep explaining every day anyway. You do what you think is best, I'll talk to the screen". It's clear that something like that is not at all motivating. (25_Tur_Ref.1-4)

In the COVID19 era, the relationship between teacher and pupil was managed exclusively at a distance in the confinement phase, with the use of social networks and ICT. This forced distance made it possible to reflect on the value of communicative dynamics and interaction, which allowed mutual support and a greater rapprochement between the two parties, thanks to an authentic and effective communicative exchange. This type of relationship was a motivating and protective factor for teachers (MacIntyre et al., 2020; van der Spoel et al., 2020), as demonstrated by a male and a female teacher in Turin:

I have joked with the kids many times. If I'm terrible at computers, then I'm terrible at computers. They are more competent at it and they help me... it's a reciprocal relationship, and in the end, this solution is appreciated too. In fact, I have to say that the class has matured with distance learning. A more mature, more responsible behaviour that I had not seen before. (16_Tur_Ref.4)

It was quick with the students, as they were in fourth and fifth year. As the students were already adults, I immediately opened a WhatsApp group. So, we used WhatsApp for the immediate term and then moved on to Meet or Skype. The communication was beautiful, there was a spirit of solidarity. (26_Tur_ Ref.1)

On the other hand, there was a part of the student body that 'reproduced' online some of the disruptive behavioural dynamics of face-to-face classes. This increased the difficulty of establishing educational dialogue and decreased the motivation to carry out teaching work in this time of crisis. In this case, the lack of support perceived by the students was a factor that undermined teacher well-being (Santagati and Barabanti, 2020). This is the view expressed by teachers in both Turin and Zaragoza:

I think it was more frustrating than a group of students who just ignored it. I even remember taking the trouble to write emails one by one to those students who were missing, and some never even replied, without necessarily being in a complicated situation from a socio-economic point of view. So, it does leave you with a rather bitter feeling. (22_Zar_Ref.3)

So, being in front of a screen, often black because, when you close the webcam, you can't even see the other person. In fact, I said, 'There's no regulation on DAD (Didattica a Distanza/Distance Learning) but I'll keep talking every day. Do what you want, I'll talk to the screen.' So, it's clear that it's not stimulating at all. (25_Tur_Ref.2)

4. Conclusions

In the present study, we have investigated the perceptions of Spanish and Italian teachers regarding the social support they perceive in the context of their profession and the manner in which this can influence their well-being. Given that the research is being conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning and the role of ICT and social networks as a means of maintaining communication and promoting social support are recurring themes.

In this context, the present study, which is part of a broader research project, has the following objectives:

- To identify how Spanish and Italian secondary school teachers perceive social support in the context of their profession.
- To understand how social support influences the perception of teacher well-being among Italian and Spanish secondary school teachers.
- To analyse in depth the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the perception of social support through ICT and, therefore, social networks by Spanish and Italian secondary school teachers.

The study demonstrates the significance of support from colleagues in fostering group spirit, collaboration, appreciation of activities undertaken, and assistance in challenging circumstances, thereby enhancing the well-being of teachers and offering protection against exhaustion and stress. The findings of the study indicate that collaboration and an empathetic attitude among colleagues enhance and strengthen the creation of connections, the sense of belonging to the institution, a greater professional involvement and the development of the teaching identity. The findings further underscore the importance of support from management, with effective and positive communication and trust being highlighted as aspects conducive to teachers' well-being.

Teachers also perceive that when the relationship with students and families is satisfactory, teacher well-being is greater. Conversely, in circumstances where student outcomes are favourable and educational discourse is sustained in a constructive and reciprocal manner, a virtuous cycle of enriching collaboration is initiated, thereby functioning as a protective factor against work-related stress. Conversely, when the relationship is characterised by an arrogant and closed attitude, the perception of support is reduced, and with it, teacher motivation, sense of belonging and well-being.

In the COVID-19 era, ICTs and social networks were the almost exclusive means of communication, especially during periods of closure. In this context, they emerged as a pivotal conduit for the exchange of support among colleagues, a factor that was instrumental in sustaining motivation and mitigating feelings of isolation. Conversely, the management's presence was predominantly evident at the organisational level, encompassing the management of distance communication and security measures, as it was bound by ministerial provisions. In the context of family dynamics, educational discourse and effective communication were found to be deficient during the health crisis, attributable to the challenges posed by the period or, in some cases, a lack of interest. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that a considerable number of families endeavoured to engage in the educational discourse through ICTs and social networks, expressing their appreciation for the teaching efforts, which served to enhance the motivation of the teaching staff. The support of the students, as in face-to-face teaching, was evident in the relationship established with the teachers, in their participation in the activities and in their response to the stimuli received. The utilisation of distance dialogue facilitated, in certain instances, a heightened sense of proximity with the teaching faculty, accompanied by a notable enhancement in openness, a phenomenon that can be attributed, at least in part, to the employment of more familiar modes of communication. This shift in the teacher-student relationship, influenced by the support from colleagues, has been identified as a significant factor in mitigating stress and preventing professional burnout among educators. Conversely, a segment of the student body, due to a paucity of familial counsel or the requisite instruments, participated sporadically or ceased to engage in the educational discourse, thereby engendering a factor of teacher demotivation.

In light of the ongoing educational reform in both countries, further research with a larger number of participants would be beneficial to expand upon the findings of this study. In addition, it would be beneficial to involve management teams in order to obtain richer and more consistent information.

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