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The first years of the teacher's work: risks for the head of the school and risks for an early-career teacher

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Abstract

When hiring a young specialist the head of the school knows that he or she must provide support for the young specialist to prevent or at least reduce the problems that the school staff might face. Based on the foregoing, the study aims to analyze the current situation in a rural school that hires an early-career teacher. The article examines the risks faced by the head of the school when hiring a young specialist as well as the risks faced by early-career teachers. This study will help identify gaps in the methodological support provided by the school management aimed at developing the professional skills of early-career teachers. In this study, we used the analysis of scientific papers on the problem highlighted, the survey method, the questionnaire method, the method of comparative data analysis and mathematical methods. The paper presents the result of a survey and questioning of school heads of the republic who have recruited young specialists over the past three years. It also provides the survey results of early-career teachers who have been working in schools of the republic for less than three years. Our research helped identify the risks faced by an early-career teacher in a modern school, to distribute those into groups, depending on the location of the school (urban or rural). The research results can be used to work out special modules, training courses or optional courses for curricula in the teacher training programs.

Keywords: leader, school, an early-career teacher, risks, professional skills, methodological support.

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Introduction

Education is a key priority area of any state policy. The quality of general education is always the prime focus of researchers. Scientists, statesmen, public figures, education authorities, teachers, parents, schoolchildren are concerned about the quality of general education. This problem is relevant at all times, therefore it attracts the attention of researchers. The head of the school needs to have a teaching staff of professionals. The quality of general education largely depends on the professionalism of teachers and school leaders. However, before a teacher or head of an educational organization achieves the highest levels of proficiency, certain time passes. At the beginning of the career, a teacher, as a young specialist, goes through such a period. The problems faced by early-career teachers have also caught our attention.

The ageing of the teaching staff has been observed recently. The average age of the faculty is more than 40 years-46,3 (Zair-Bek, Mertsalova & Anchikov, 2020). Early-career teachers are not eager to start working at school. When the head of the school recruits a teacher who has just graduated from a university, it becomes an important event for the school and all participants in educational relations, since the teacher is a key figure in the school. An early-career teacher becomes a member of a team, where each member works for the end result, i.e. to equip the school-leaver with a high-quality education. When hiring a young specialist, the head of the school expects the school staff to have risks. He/she knows that must provide support for the young professional to prevent or at least mitigate these risks to help an early-career teacher's professional development. The young specialist comes to school with a great desire, confident that they can cope with any problems at school, but he/she also assumes that may face problems in the first years of work. It seems that both sides are full of determination and are confident of success, but for some reason, there are fewer young specialists at school every year, young specialists quit school in search of a better life. In order to keep an early-career teacher at school (especially in a rural school), the head of the school needs to expand the forms of work with early-career teachers. Choose forms of methodological support aimed at developing the professional skills of early-age teachers, taking into account the opinion of early-career teachers. To do this, the head of the school should regularly get acquainted with the opinion of an early-career teacher on the forms of methodological support aimed at developing professional skills.

Purpose and objectives of the study

In our study, we tried to identify the risks faced by the head of the school when hiring a young professional as well as the risks faced by early-career teachers.

An attempt was made to analyze the current situation in a rural school that hires an early-career teacher; we also compared the risks faced by an early-career teacher and the head of the school in the groups we studied.

We determined the preferences of school principals and early-career teachers on the forms of work aimed at developing professional skills.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks were solved: 1) studying literature on the theory and practice of modern higher education, on the problems of social adaptation of an early-career teacher in an educational organization, on the methods of scientific research; 2) determining the basis for the study and the study groups for the research; 3) developing questionnaires and other tools and materials for the study groups; 4) drawing up conclusions based on the results of the study.

Literature review

Scholars explore the problems faced by early-career teachers from different perspectives. It is noted that aspiring teachers tend to lack ways of expressing their own needs to colleagues, so the problem of “doing your job” следует рассматривать в школах как работу коллектива should be considered in schools as the work of a team, and not as the fate of an individual teacher (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014). For example, aspiring Norwegian and Turkish teachers in both contexts learn from their challenging situations and use their problem-solving skills based on either their experience gained during school practice or their own strategies developed over time (Çakmak, Gündüz & Emstad, 2019). This initially motivated an early-career teacher to teach in order to gain experience. At the same time, this may be the reason why they quit or may think about quitting school in future. It is known that due to the small number of children, in rural schools all teachers have a small teaching load, so early-career teachers named it as the most frequent reason for quitting or intending to quit in future. But there is also a study finding that for an early-career teacher teaching process is actually worse than expected, and the nature (rather than the number of academic hours) of the teaching load (учебной нагрузки) is the determining factor (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

The process of teacher training is considered in even more detail by researchers. Each university has its own unique experience in this matter. At Kazan Federal University, future teachers have school practice each semester over four years of bachelor’s degree. We also studied the conditions that would enable to prepare teachers for successful adaptation at the very beginning of their careers (Yachina, Khuziakhmetov & Gabdrakhmanova, 2018; Gabdrakhmanova et al., 2019; Sibgatullina, Gabdrakhmanova & Zinnatullina, 2020; Sotnikova, 2017). Scholars consider the Israeli model of teacher education. It is based on a four-year academic program. The first year is introductory.

Conditions are the following: an early-career teacher teaches in the school, he/she receives a salary, has a mentor in school and attends weekly group workshops for aspiring teachers. During the year, the performance

of early-career teachers is assessed and those who meet the standards receive a teaching certificate at the end of the year (Schatz-Oppenheimer, Maskit & Zilbershtrom, 2011).

There are also a number of studies investigating how to provide meaningful suggestions for heads of the school and administrators hoping to support and retain their aspiring teachers (Sarah, 2012), how mentoring policies implemented by school administrators affect teacher retention or leaving in the first years of work in school (Whalen, Majocha & Nuland, 2019; Kulikova, 2018; Tongush & Roschektaeva, 2017; Espinoza et al., 2018; Mathur, Gehrke & Kim, 2013). The goal of mentoring is twofold as noted (Parker, Ndooy & Imig, 2009): «While it is vital to offer mentoring to an early-career teacher, it is equally as important to improve the quality of these experiences to help new educators become more effective and reduce beginning teacher attrition» (p.330). In our republic, there is a mentoring system, when 5-6 early-career teachers are assigned to one mentor (they may be from different schools). Mentor's work is paid. Grant support for mentoring is useful for mentors and early-career teachers.

Methodology

To solve the problem highlighted, we turned to the following scholarly studies:

- theory and practice of modern higher education,
- studies that consider an early-career teacher and head of the school as a subject,
- research examining problems in the field of social adaptation of an early-career teacher in an educational institution, problems of retention of early-career teachers in school.

We formulated a hypothesis of the research: the risks faced by heads of the schools when hiring a young specialist and the risks faced by early-career teachers when they come to school may not coincide. It is necessary to identify the risks which are common for both an early-career teacher and head of the school. This, in our opinion, will help identify gaps in the methodological support that school leaders provide to early-career teachers, when choosing forms of methodical work aimed at the development of professional skills.

To confirm the hypothesis, a system of various complementary methods was used:

- theoretical methods: theoretical analysis and synthesis of philosophical, methodological, pedagogical, psychological, sociological, scientific and methodological literature, generalization;
- empirical methods: the study of documentation, questionnaires, qualitative and quantitative analysis, statistical and mathematical research methods.

It should be noted that many scholars use the method of comparative analysis in their research (Graf, 2016; James, 2004; Theda, & Somers, 1980). In our study, we compare the survey results of early-career teachers from rural schools and those from urban schools and analyze heads of the schools' opinions. We compiled the questions, posted them on Google Drive and sent links to the mail to each participant of the survey. According to some answers to the questions, it was possible to simply determine the number (for example, gender, work experience, etc.), some answers to the questions required the use of qualitative analysis (for example, to list possible risks when hiring a young specialist, etc.)

The research is based in the Institute of Psychology and Education of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University as well as in schools in four municipal heads of schools and a school in a million-plus city. We identified two groups of early-career teachers: group (G1) - 11 early-career teachers from urban schools where there is one male teacher, and group (G2) - 6 early-career teachers from rural schools where there is one male teacher as well. The heads of the schools regularly come to the Volga Interregional Center for Advanced Studies and Professional Retraining of Educational Workers to have advanced training courses, and we identified one group as Gd for our study. This group included 131 heads of schools. There are mainly women, 20% of the group are men. Those working in the position of head of the school one year make up about 10%, two years -10%, three years -12%.

Results

We started looking for reasons which force early-career teachers to quit school, although graduates of our university when receiving a higher education degree document from the head of the institute, firmly believed that they would work as a school teacher and have a successful career. First, we needed to analyze the situation in rural schools. We picked out four rural areas, each with 15 to 27 schools, and calculated how many early-career teachers (i.e. after graduation) work there. In one of the areas, not a single early-career teacher has come to work at the school over the past three years. In another area, only one young specialist has come to work at the school over the past three years. It turned out that there were very few early-career teachers. Then we started looking for early-career teachers in the city. We calculated about the same number of teachers as in the group of teachers from rural schools. In the Gd group, 61.8% of directors run a rural school, the rest manage an urban school.

We conducted a survey in two groups (G1 and G2) and, using comparative analysis, determined what risks an early-career teacher faces in an urban school and a rural school.

Next, we surveyed heads of the schools (Gd). The survey was aimed at identifying the risks faced by the head of the school and the teaching staff when an early-career teacher comes to work at the school. Some heads of the schools presented only their own assumptions or relied on previous experience of working with early-career teachers, since there were no early-career teachers in the school (they analyzed the answers on Google drive).

Next, we compared the views of early-career teachers and those of heads of the schools about the risks they face when an early-career teacher comes to school (qualitative analysis was used).

First, we determined the grades and the training courses early-career teachers teach. It turned out that most of them work in middle school.

Table 1. Grades where early-career teachers work

Grades	G1	G2
Grade 1-4	3 (27%)	2(33%)
Grade 1-9	1(9%)	-
Grade 5-9	5(45%)	4(66%)
Grade 5-11	2(18%)	-

Table 2. Training courses taught by an early-career teacher

G1	Training course	G2	Training course
1	Native (Tatar) language The English language	1	History Social Studies
1	Geography The English language	1	Mathematics Computer science
2	Mathematics	2	Mathematics
1	Native (Tatar) language	1	Mathematics, the Russian language and literature, Music, Art, Handicraft, The world around
1	Music		
2	The English language		
1	Elementary school		

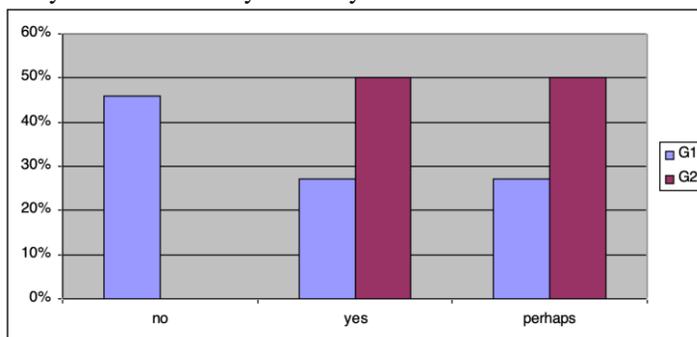
1	Native (Russian) language		
1	Second foreign language		

The workload of a teacher is one of the most difficult problems faced by early-career teachers. More experienced teachers are not eager to quit school. The head of the school realizes that if an experienced teacher leaves and an early-career teacher comes to work in the place of a departed experienced teacher, then the school performance indicators will be lower. Therefore, the administration is trying to keep an experienced teacher even providing him/her with a part-time assignment. However, an early-career teacher also cannot come to work with a small workload. The table below shows that 50% of an early-career teacher in village schools and 36% of early-career teachers in urban schools have a teaching load of fewer than 18 hours per week (Table 3). In order to have full-time employment, young teachers in rural schools have to teach several training courses (Table 2). This is very difficult even for an experienced teacher. Consequently, an early-career teacher cannot work at school for a long time earning such a salary. Most of the early-career teachers are not satisfied with their salaries and their living conditions. Of Gd group, only 9% agreed that the housing conditions of an early-career teacher are unsatisfactory, only 12% of heads of the schools say that an early-career teacher’s salary is high. The data is shown below.

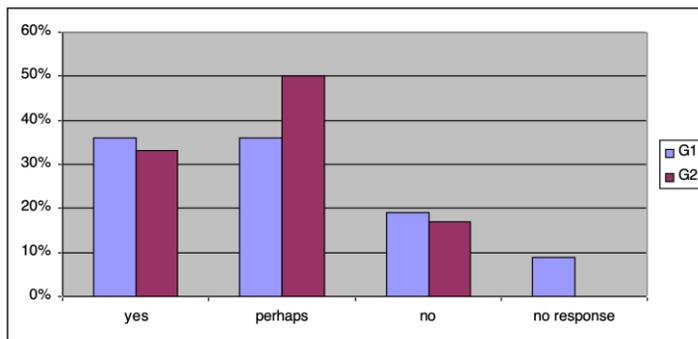
Table 3. Training load per week

Teaching load	G1	G2
up to 27 h.	5(45%)	3(50%)
less than 18 h.	4(36%)	3(50%)
more than 27 h.	2(18%)	

Are you satisfied with your salary?



Are you satisfied with your housing conditions?



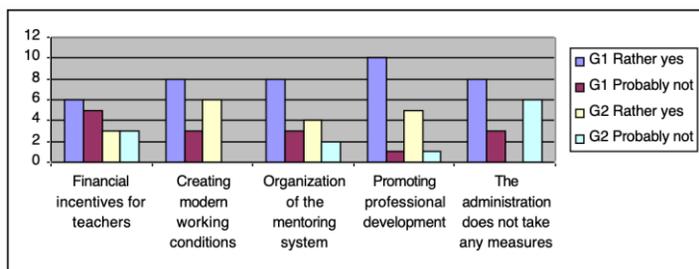
The teacher's salary was always small, the work and life of the teacher were difficult. Even so, young people chose this profession. Most of the young teachers from the village school chose this profession as they considered the teacher's activity interesting. Most of early-career teachers from the urban school chose the teaching profession because they belonged to the pedagogical dynasty or they had an interest in teaching. 59.5% of heads of the schools entered the profession because of their interest in teaching.

Table 4. Reasons for choosing the teaching profession

	G1	G2
Pedagogical dynasty (parents or many relatives work as teachers)	4(36%)	1(17%)
Interest in teaching	4(36%)	1(17%)
Spontaneous choice	1(9%)	1(17%)
Convenient working hours	1(9%)	
Interesting job	1(9%)	3(49%)

In G1 group, 50% intend to work in school, while the rest intend to quit the school or are thinking of quitting. It is the same in group G2. Early-career teachers from urban schools assess negatively efforts of the school administration, and teachers from rural schools assess it positively (to stimulate the teacher's work). In Gd group (heads of the schools), respondents assess their work in this area positively, only 1-1.5% assess it negatively.

The conditionality of the choice of the teaching profession.



To improve professional skills, the school administration chooses certain forms of methodological support that contributes to teachers' development (Table 5). The most effective, in the opinion of the heads of the schools, are advanced training courses, attending master classes of experienced teachers, assigning a mentor to an early-career teacher. The opinion of young teachers from group G1 on this matter is the following: sharing experience at methodological seminars, supporting an early-career teacher's initiatives, internship (Table 5). Teachers from G2 group are not so optimistic about the sharing experience at conferences and methodological seminars, supporting young specialist's initiatives and advanced training courses (Table 5). The opinion of the heads of the schools has little coincidence (advanced training courses) with the opinion of early-career teachers from rural schools, and does not coincide with the opinion of teachers of urban schools at all. Early-career teachers from rural and urban schools do not attach much importance to assigning a mentor to them, they do not see the benefit of attending master classes of experienced teachers.

Table 5. Distribution of forms of professional skills development in descending order of effectiveness

	G1							G2						
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Assigning a mentor	2	3	3	1			2	1	2	1	1	1		
Sharing experience at conferences	3	1	4	1	1	1			4	2				
Sharing experience at methodological seminars	4	2	2	1	1	1		1	3	1	1			
Supporting young teacher's initiatives	4	3	1	1	1		1	1	3		1			1
Attending experienced teacher's masterclasses	3	2	3		1	1	1	1	1	1	1			2
Advanced training courses	3	2	3	1	2	1			3		1		1	1
Internship	4	2	1	1	2	1		2	1	2				1

	Gd						
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Assigning a mentor	27	8	19	19	21	12	26
Sharing experience at conferences	9	12	17	30	29	20	15
Sharing experience at methodological seminars	16	13	21	26	18	23	15
Supporting young teacher's initiatives	23	16	20	18	23	11	21
Attending experienced teacher's masterclasses	31	12	16	13	20	20	22
Advanced training courses	38	12	7	15	22	14	24
Internship	17	7	16	20	27	27	21

In some ways, the views of the two sides coincide, but somewhere they diverge. We conducted a qualitative analysis of the records of study participants from the groups (G1, G2, Gd). According to the results of the study, we revealed that there are few early-career teachers in rural schools. An early-career teacher has a small salary, as there is no teaching load for them. Most of them have unsatisfactory housing conditions. Early-career teachers feel overworked because they have to prepare for lessons every day, and this takes a lot of time and effort. There is a large amount of paperwork that has to be done. In a rural school, in order to have full-time employment, early-career teachers have to teach up to 5-6 training courses. The tense atmosphere in school, the state of psychological discomfort oppresses early-career teachers.

They are especially sensitive to the indifference to their needs on the part of the public and the school administration. They need the support of their initiatives from the administration. Early-career teachers are mostly females who want to get married, and in village areas, it is difficult to find a suitable party, so teachers leave for the city. The heads of the school note that early-career teachers have no work experience, so the school performance is declining. A weak level of methodological training is mentioned, they do not know how to build pedagogically expedient relationships with students, parents, colleagues. The heads of the schools argue that modern early-career teachers can violate labor discipline, they are reluctant to accept methodological support, some are not ready to work or simply do not want to work, they may have a new

type of thinking: “I work the way I am paid”.

Discussions

We have taken the first steps to study the risks faced by early-career teachers in rural schools. Early-career teachers have far fewer risks than the heads of the schools do. During the survey in G1, G2 and Gd, we noticed different points of view on one situation. In our study, we found that early-career teachers do not like the forms of developing their professional skills provided by the administration. We assume that at the very beginning of a career it is necessary to offer the forms of developing professional skills that early-career teachers are glad to accept, and later to use the forms which are more effective. However, this is an assumption that can be challenged. It is necessary to study the problems of early-career teachers in more detail, to show these problems to school leaders. Sometimes people talk about the same thing but see the problem from different perspectives. In the course of the study, we encountered some limitations that can be eliminated in future studies. Firstly, early-career teachers from rural schools are very modest, and most of them do not want to participate in research. Secondly, in the course of the study, many risks were identified that an early-career teacher faces and it is impossible to study them all and provide research results on them in one article. Therefore, it is necessary to continue further investigation of the problem we have identified.

Conclusion

Some of the risks listed by early-career teachers and the heads of the schools coincide: low wages, problems with housing, dismissal at any time, being unable to cope with the workload, and an increasing amount of paperwork. We identified the risks where the views of the two sides are different: the state of psychological discomfort, the tense atmosphere in the school, lack of attention and support from the school administration and the parents of students; the risks named by the heads of the schools are misunderstanding the mission of the school, the role of the teacher’s personality in the upbringing of rising generations, etc.

The positions of school principals and early-career teachers on the forms of methodological support for the development of professional skills turned out to be different. This article shows that the analysis of the collected text data with the opinion of early-career teachers and the heads of the schools on the organization of methodological support for an early-career teacher aimed at developing professional skills provided useful information for making managerial decisions. The work shows that the heads of the schools do not take into account the opinion of early-career teachers, choosing forms of methodological support aimed at developing the professional skills of an early-career teacher. When organizing methodological support, it is necessary to take into account the opinion of early-career teachers, since they pointed out a lack of attention from the

school administration as one of the risks. In the future, we hope to conduct more extensive empirical research to find ways to reduce the risks faced by an early-career teacher at school during the first three years of work. This data can be used to develop special modules, training courses or elective courses for curricula in teacher training programs.

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