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The Impact of Teachers' Level of Awe, Resilience, and Self-Compassion on Their Performance During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Abstract

Emergency following the COVID-19 pandemic has forced educational institutions in over 190 countries to close, and teachers worldwide worked hard to adapt their curriculum to an online format and face multiple related challenges. The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on teachers' performance and verify whether this change may have been justified by individual resilience, self-compassion and awe levels. The respondents perceived a significant drop in performance following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic across all investigated subscales. Preliminary data obtained in this study indicate that this drop may be explained by a link between performance and Awe, Resilience and Self-Compassion.

Keywords: *awe, teachers' performance, resilience, self-compassion.*

Introduction

The coronavirus disease pandemic has impacted learning interactions across the globe, causing an unprecedented crisis across educational systems in nearly every country. Emergency following the COVID-19 pandemic has forced educational institutions in over 190 countries to close. At least 1.2 billion students moved to online learning, and teachers worldwide worked hard to adapt their curriculum to an online format (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020).

The professional development of teachers and their professional performance is an important topic because of its impact on students' academic achievements (Knight, 2009). Students' results during their education are directly related to the teaching practices their teachers offer (Chetty et al., 2011). According to Babalola (2004), outputs determined by teacher performance are the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour of those students who could accomplish their educational goals and complete an academic programme. As Wallin (2003) noticed, a teacher whose performance is high will also aim at increasing student learning by helping coordinate the education programme and navigate efficiently in the academic environment.

Teachers' perception of online teaching, satisfaction, and personal self-efficacy affect their teaching quality (Zou et al., 2021). It is therefore paramount to explore teachers' experience and performance following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Empirical research has linked higher levels of well-being with higher performance levels (Warr & Nielsen, 2018). According to scientific studies, psychometric variables like resilience, self-compassion, and awe have been linked to higher well-being. The purpose of this quantitative study is to investigate the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on teachers' performance and verify whether this change may have been justified by individual resilience, self-compassion, and awe levels.

Concepts Overview

As Ryff et al. (1998) state, resilience is a measure of one's mental adaptation and recovery capacity when facing challenges. Resilience as a construct focuses on social skills, the ability to maintain positive emotions, and individual immunity strengths (Carbonell et al., 1998). Some approaches suggest that the essence of resilience is the ability to *adapt* to challenges. Other approaches suggest that it is the ability to *remain* psychologically healthy and stable despite existing stressors (Luthar et al., 2000; Joyce et al., 2018). The 'bounce-back' feature seems to be the core of resilience regardless of the approach used (Luthar et al., 2000). Yates and Masten (2004) suggest that one can strengthen resilience by building individual strengths, learning coping strategies or working towards mitigating the effects of adverse events.

According to Neff (2003), self-compassion has six components: self-kindness, sense of humanity and mindfulness and their counterparts: self-judgment, isolation and overidentification. Empirical studies suggest a strong link between

self-compassion and well-being (Neff, 2009). Self-compassion is associated with optimism, increased feelings of happiness and safety, connectedness and curiosity. According to Kashdan and Ciarrochi (2013), not only is self-compassion "linked to less anxiety, stress, and depression" but also "another important strength provided by self-compassion is the ability to cope effectively". Self-compassionate individuals are intrinsically motivated to learn, more easily admit mistakes, and are keen to modify unproductive behaviours (Neff et al., 2005).

Awe has been defined by Keltner and Haidt (2003) as the „feeling of being in the presence of something vast and greater than the self, that exceeds current knowledge structures". Some examples of "something vast" triggering the experience of awe include beautiful nature scenes, impressive arts, childbirth, spirituality and religion, charismatic leaders (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Zhao et al., 2018). According to Keltner & Haidt (2003), "awe is a very powerful trigger of prosocial behavior". Individuals inspired by awe felt less focused on themselves and more willing to dedicate their time to others, ultimately increasing their well-being (Rudd et al., 2012).

Traditionally, the educator's performance has been perceived through their qualifications based entirely on subject matters (Carreras, 2005). The evolution of the modern educational environment brought in the importance of professional competencies as factors determining the educator's performance. Focus on professional competencies allows the educator to expand their impact beyond merely knowledge sharing. It encourages student engagement and critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision making amongst students. Such an approach has been shown to encourage student autonomy, improve integration of knowledge, and lead to better academic performance (Leary et al., 2013; Vansteenkiste et al., 2009).

González and López (2010) suggest that the following competencies determine the educator's performance: design of the teaching guides for the course, teacher planning, practical activities, didactic resources, progress monitoring and evaluation systems, ability to hold students accountable, and teacher's attitude. According to Akram and Zepeda (2015), teacher performance is evaluated based on their competence in subject matter, teaching skills, the ability to comply with the accountability standards, empathy and care for students and their success and sharing their professional knowledge with colleagues to strengthen the faculty or industry. Akram and Zepeda (2015) also propose the following five areas across which the educator's performance can be determined: subject matter knowledge, instructional planning and strategies, assessment, learning environment, and effective communication.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the study were 210 teachers. The authors used a non-probability convenience sampling technique to find volunteers to participate in the study. The authors shared the survey within their international professional network on Facebook and LinkedIn, informing of the aim of the study and asking for volunteers to fill out the survey. Non-probability convenience sampling has been suggested to be a verified and reliable method of creating participant groups (Christensen, 1994).

Procedure

Teacher performance was measured in June-July 2021. Respondents were asked to retrospectively rate their performance before the pandemic compared to June-July 2021. Resilience, self-compassion, and awe were measured in June-July 2021. No comparison was made with the time before the pandemic. There is no reason to suspect that answers shared by respondents were biased in any way. The quantitative method has been used in this study (survey method) to collect data. Obtained results have then been analysed using quantitative measures.

Research Tools

Data has been collected using the following questionnaires: Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008), Self-Compassion (Short Form), Awe questionnaire, and Teacher Performance Questionnaire. Teacher Performance has been measured based on the Self-Assessment Instrument for Teacher Evaluation (Akram & Zepeda, 2016), which is a valid and efficient tool for measuring components of teacher self-assessment. The evaluation follows five dimensions: Subject matter knowledge, Instructional strategies, Student assessment, Learning environment, Teacher Communication Skills. Self-Compassion has been measured using Self Compassion Short Form. It is a 12-question survey measuring self-compassion across six dimensions: self-kindness, self-judgment, humanity, isolation, mindfulness and over-identification. A self-reported survey – Awe subscale of the Dispositional Positive Emotion Scales – has been used to measure participants' level of awe. It is a commonly used psychological tool (Shiota, Keltner, & John, 2006).

Findings

A total of 210 individuals responded to the survey. Their demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

		Frequency	Percent
Age	25-34	73	34.8
	35-44	87	41.4
	45-54	35	16.7
	55 and above	15	7.1
Gender	Female	119	56.7
	Male	91	43.3

A paired *t*-test was conducted to: (1) determine the significance of the change in self-assessed performance from before the pandemic to the current year and (2) evaluate the areas of the least and the most deterioration. The result, shown in Table 2, indicates that the respondents perceived a significant drop in performance ($t\,(209) = -19.97, p < .001$).

Table 2. Comparison of self-assessed pre-pandemic to current year performance

	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Pre-Pandemic Performance	20.48	2.80	-19.97	209	< .001
Current Performance	18.57	2.35			
Paired Differences	-1.91	1.39			

The results, shown in Table 3, indicate that Teacher Communication Skill has deteriorated the most, followed by Subject Matter Knowledge, Instructional Strategies and Learning Environment. The ability to perform Student Assessment deteriorated the least.

Table 3. Paired t-tests comparing performance before the pandemic to current performance

Performance Measures	Pre-pandemic		Current		Paired Differences				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Teacher Communication Skill	4.11	1.27	3.63	1.08	-0.48	0.60	-11.57	209	< .001
Subject Matter Knowledge	4.33	1.09	3.94	0.86	-0.39	0.67	-8.44	209	< .001

Performance Measures	Pre-pandemic		Current		Paired Differences				
	Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Instructional Strategies	4.34	1.10	3.96	0.80	-0.39	0.63	-8.83	209	< .001
Learning Environment	3.90	1.21	3.53	1.08	-0.37	0.64	-8.25	209	< .001
Student Assessment	3.80	1.35	3.50	1.15	-0.29	0.69	-6.11	209	< .001

Note: performance measures are ordered in the table from most to least deteriorated

Table 4 presents Pearson correlations conducted to determine relationships between the study measures and pre-pandemic and current performance and the degree of change in performance. Two significant relationships have been found: Awe was positively correlated with pre-pandemic performance, and Self-kindness (Self-compassion subscale) was negatively correlated with change in performance.

Table 4. Pearson correlations between performance and other study measures

	Pre-Pandemic Performance		Current Performance		Performance Change (pre minus current)	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*	*r*	*p*
Resilience	-0.001	0.992	-0.015	0.830	0.024	0.732
SC self-kindness	-0.133	0.054	-0.004	0.960	-0.263	< .001
SC self-judgment	-0.010	0.882	-0.064	0.356	0.087	0.207
SC humanity	0.039	0.573	-0.016	0.812	0.107	0.122
SC isolation	-0.050	0.472	-0.064	0.359	0.007	0.923
SC mindfulness	0.075	0.278	0.085	0.219	0.008	0.911
SC over-identification	-0.045	0.513	-0.001	0.990	-0.090	0.192
SC total	0.022	0.756	0.074	0.287	-0.081	0.241
Awe	0.144	0.037	0.107	0.123	0.111	0.108

Table 5 presents Pearson correlations conducted to determine relationships between subscales of the study measures. Mindfulness (Self-compassion subscale) was found positively correlated with Resilience and Awe.

Table 5. Pearson correlations between subscales of the study measures

Self-compassion		Resilience	Awe
Self-kindness	*r*	-0.002	-0.017
	p	0.972	0.805
Self-judgment	*r*	0.062	0.035
	p	0.374	0.617
Humanity	*r*	0.001	0.119
	p	0.993	0.086
Isolation	*r*	-0.133	-0.014
	p	0.054	0.841
Mindfulness	*r*	0.137	0.163
	p	0.048	0.018
Over-identification	*r*	0.095	-0.034
	p	0.168	0.628
Total	*r*	0.019	0.088
	p	0.790	0.202
Resilience	*r*		0.034
	p		0.627
Awe	*r*		
	p		

Discussion

The findings obtained in this study show that teacher performance has significantly dropped during the pandemic. Out of all the factors that account for performance, data indicated that communication skills, as perceived by teachers, have deteriorated the most. Data also implies that subject matter knowledge, being able to use instructional strategies to teach, and overall learning environment deteriorated. Out of all the factors affecting teachers' performance, the ability to perform student assessments online deteriorated the least. These findings align with – still preliminary and scarce – recent studies on teachers' performance and their professional experience during the pandemic (Zou et al., 2021).

According to Young and Duncan (2014), online lessons have been evaluated as worse than face-to-face lectures. During the pandemic, all teachers across all countries had to move to an online teaching model, which also posed train-

ing-related and instructional challenges. As Thomas and Graham (2019) indicate, online teaching requires sufficient training and support to be considered efficient. Teachers' performance deteriorates otherwise. On top of that, online and face-to-face teaching require different competencies (Thomas & Graham, 2019). Online teaching requires technological skills, which automatically adds more responsibilities to teachers and affects their performance if not trained properly.

However, findings obtained in this study suggest that there may be another pathway affecting teacher performance during the pandemic. Data has shown indication that awe experienced by participants may be positively related to pre-pandemic performance. Kindness towards oneself that teachers were experiencing (as a measure of self-compassion) was negatively related to change that teachers observed in their performance. It indicates that the more kindness one was able to show towards oneself, the lower the drop in performance caused by the pandemic. Another measure of self-compassion – mindfulness – has shown a positive relationship with resilience and awe. It may be a weak indication that resilience, awe, and self-compassion may have mitigated the drop in performance experienced by teachers during the pandemic.

A great body of research connects awe to well-being (Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Rudd et al., 2012; Van Cappellen et al., 2016). Three major components of awe and mindfulness – nature setting, inspiration and spirituality – have shown to enhance subjective well-being (Howell et al., 2013; Thrash et al., 2010). Resilience has also been linked to higher well-being (Sood et al., 2011) or even included in its definition as one of its components (Huppert & So, 2009; Leach et al., 2011; Luthar et al., 2000). As evidence-based research has highlighted the link between well-being and performance (Warr & Nielsen, 2018), it may be through a well-being pathway that awe, resilience, and self-compassion may impact performance. Moreover, Yates and Masten (2004) emphasise the direct role resilience plays in reaching individual goals and individual performance. It may indicate why teachers with high resilience can achieve professional outcomes regardless of the negative challenges they face (an example of which could be the pandemic and moving to online teaching).

Conclusions

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on teachers' performance and verify whether this change may have been justified by individual resilience, self-compassion and

awe levels. The findings show that teacher performance has significantly dropped during the pandemic. Communication skills have deteriorated the most out of all the factors that account for performance. Data also implies that subject matter knowledge, being able to use instructional strategies to teach, and the overall learning environment deteriorated. The ability to perform student assessments online deteriorated the least.

The obtained results show a weak indication that resilience, awe and self-compassion may have mitigated the drop in performance experienced by teachers during the pandemic. Further studies are required to deepen the understanding of this pathway and thoroughly investigate the link between resilience, awe, self-compassion, and performance, especially during the pandemic. Presented research has limitations. The results are preliminary, and further research is required to verify the obtained relationships. A larger sample may have highlighted more relationships between all variables and their subscales or may have indicated different relationships than those observed.

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