

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL WELL-BEING: VIEWS OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the need to promote the professional well-being of primary school teachers. The study aims to analyse and compare the views of primary school teachers and school leaders on the professional well-being of primary school teachers. The study involved 72 ($n = 72$) primary school teachers and 20 ($n = 20$) school leaders. The study addressed two research questions: RQ1: What is the professional well-being of primary school teachers from the point of view of school leaders and teachers themselves? RQ2: Is there a difference between the views of the primary school teachers and the school leaders regarding professional well-being? For data collection, two structured questionnaires were planned and designed to gather information about the following study scales: (1) teaching duties, (2) cooperation with colleagues, (3) professional development, and (4) methodical work. The SPSS 22 was used for processing and analysing the quantitative data. The study revealed that school leaders' views on the professional well-being of primary school teachers are generally more unfavourable than teachers' views. Primary teachers and school leaders agree that teachers' methodical work is well valued and feedback provided to primary school teachers is growth-oriented. The study found a statistically significant difference in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders on teaching duties and cooperation with colleagues. For these two scales, the primary school teachers are more optimistic than the school leaders. The study concluded that despite the statistically significant differences in the views on two out of the four scales, there was generally no statistically significant difference in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders on the professional well-being of primary school teachers. The study findings are essential in promoting the professional well-being of primary school teachers.

Keywords: *Primary education, primary school teachers, professional well-being, school leaders, teachers' support.*

Introduction

Primary school teachers have many responsibilities, such as carrying out educational activities in line with subject standards and the developmental needs of each student,

being classroom managers, engaging in the organization of extra-curricular activities and cooperating with parents, colleagues and school leaders. Moreover, every primary school teacher also carries out methodical work. It is essential for primary school teachers to feel good while performing their work duties, as this affects not only their work but also the students and their learning achievements. Studies have shown that teacher stress, fatigue, and depressed mood negatively affect students' satisfaction with school (Ramberg et al., 2019) and learning motivation (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Additionally, in schools where teachers had a higher level of emotional exhaustion, the student's performance regarding their literacy and numeracy skills was lower (Granziera et al., 2023).

Researchers believe that the teaching profession lacks respect in society (Pagiriene & Ramanauskiene, 2021), requires unique challenges (Kok, 2018), is stressful, and is associated with burnout and high turnover of qualified teachers (Gearhart et al., 2022; Ghamrawi et al., 2023). In particular, the social changes over the last 20 years have significantly affected teachers' well-being, making it more difficult for teachers to adapt to working conditions (Arbia et al., 2023). However, primary school teachers and other teachers have demonstrated resilience and flexibility during the global pandemic. In Switzerland, for example, primary school teachers' professional well-being was affected by many factors, such as high workload, social distancing, lack of competence and self-efficacy (Hascher et al., 2021). In the Philippines, less support for teacher autonomy by school leadership increases teachers' stress levels and harms their well-being (Mendoza & Dizon, 2024). In Greece, the well-being of primary school teachers was at an average level, as teachers' self-efficacy to promote student engagement decreased (Reppa et al., 2023). On the other hand, in Latvia, teachers' job satisfaction during the pandemic was negatively affected by the inability to control the activities taking place at school, the lack of positive emotions in everyday life, and the confidence's decrease in the ability to implement concrete ideas in the teaching/learning process to achieve the outcome required (Stramkale, 2023). Researchers believe teachers can develop and improve their ability to adapt to changing circumstances by engaging in reflective practices (Davis et al., 2024).

Studies have found that teachers' well-being is negatively affected by excessive demands at work (De Clercq et al., 2022), limited work resources (Collett, 2013), lack of autonomy (Skinner et al., 2021), students' behaviour in classrooms (Li et al., 2022), the desire to maintain control and the tendency of doing everything perfect (Glazzard & Rose, 2020). Moreover, primary school teachers with low emotional responses have a higher level of professional well-being (Li et al., 2023). Poor well-being reduces teachers' motivation, creativity and problem-solving abilities (Ghamrawi et al., 2023).

The professional well-being of primary school teachers can be influenced by factors related to the teachers themselves and school-level factors. Teachers can deal with factors that affect professional well-being if they depend on the teachers themselves. Researchers recommend school teachers to reduce workload and share responsibility (Glazzard & Rose, 2019), plan their work carefully (Falecki & Mann, 2021), be more engaged and build good relationships (Kern et al., 2014), be emotionally stable (Vorkapič & Pelozza, 2017), have self-efficacy and teaching with fun (Manasia et al., 2020).

However, there are also aspects related to the educational work that teachers cannot directly influence. For example, Karegyeza and colleagues point out that school leadership attitudes can influence teachers' well-being (Karegyeza et al., 2021), and according to Li and colleagues, the student's behaviour in the classroom can cause teachers' positive or negative emotions, which also affect teachers' well-being (Li et al., 2022). In addition, an appropriate working environment reduces teachers' burnout, exhaustion and job replacement (Ortan et al., 2021) and increases professional well-being (Nwoko et al., 2023). Researchers consider that school leaders could directly affect teachers' professional well-being (Van der Vyver et al., 2020). Several studies have highlighted that teachers' professional well-being might be enhanced if the school leaders provide sufficient support for teachers (De Clercq et al., 2022), use transformational and transactional leadership styles (Kok, 2018), create a caring, supportive and collegial work environment (Collett, 2013) and ensure teacher autonomy (Echon & Cabal, 2022). It is believed that there is a positive connection between teachers' professional well-being and the school's organisational health. (Samosa et al., 2023).

Professional well-being is also related to building relationships with colleagues. Well-being could be fostered and maintained by high-quality professional relationships with colleagues (Garbett & Thomas, 2020). Teachers should engage in meaningful collective action and decision-making (Woo et al., 2022). Moreover, healthy relationships are also essential to ensure high-quality teachers' work (Zakaria et al., 2021). If a school gives priority to teacher well-being (Tatum, 2023) and has an atmosphere that encourages conversations about teacher well-being (Allies, 2021), then teachers will show high levels of well-being (McCallum, 2021).

Researchers found that teachers need support to avoid feeling isolated and ineffective, which, in turn, can lead to a desire to leave the profession (Gibbs & Miller, 2014). A study conducted in Finland revealed that the support of school leadership and colleagues is significant for a teacher's professional well-being, and students' involvement in promoting teachers' positive well-being is also essential (Murphy et al., 2020). We should think more about fostering positive emotions in teachers because, as Dreer (2024) highlighted, emotions play a significant role in teachers' job satisfaction and ensure that teachers stay in the profession. It is essential to be able not only to recruit new teachers but also to retain existing and experienced teachers (Langford & Crawford, 2022). On the one hand, older teachers need more freedom in choosing how to arrange their work, and they need to receive acknowledgement of what they do to be satisfied with their work and to remain in the profession. On the other hand, experienced teachers should be able to have opportunities for career growth (Panagopoulos et al., 2024).

School leaders' perception of how primary school teachers feel while performing their duties is one of the ways to facilitate teachers' daily work and possibly help them feel much better. Despite there are many studies conducted on teachers' professional well-being, there is still a limited number of comparative studies on how teachers and school leaders understand the professional well-being of primary school teachers, which also defined **the aim of this study** – to analyse and compare the views of primary school teachers and school leaders on the professional well-being of primary school teachers.

Methodology

Participants

The empirical study was carried out from September 2023 to December 2023 and involved 72 ($n = 72$) primary school teachers from 17 comprehensive schools (one primary school, eight basic schools and eight secondary schools), as well as 20 ($n = 20$) school leaders from 20 schools. In total, 92 ($n = 92$) respondents participated in the study. Respondents were randomly selected. The data obtained was anonymous, which ensured that respondents could not be identified in the data.

Data Collection Instruments

The study addressed two research questions:

RQ1: What is the professional well-being of primary school teachers from the point of view of school leaders and teachers themselves?

RQ2: Is there a difference between the views of primary school teachers and school leaders regarding professional well-being?

Two questionnaires were planned and designed to answer the research questions – one for primary school teachers and one for school leaders. Both questionnaires included statements with the same meaning to compare the views of primary school teachers and school leaders. Each questionnaire consisted of four study scales: (1) teaching duties, (2) cooperation with colleagues, (3) professional development, and (4) methodical work. The first study scale identified the extent to which primary school teachers enjoy performing their teaching duties. The second study scale described the cooperation with colleagues, which is also the basis of emotional well-being. On the other hand, the third study scale determined the professional development of primary school teachers, and the fourth one figured out the methodical work, which is also a key factor of professional well-being. Several statements were included in each of the study scales (see Table 1).

The respondents rated each of the statements on a six-point Likert scale as follows: fully agree (6 points), agree (5 points), rather agree (4 points), rather disagree (3 points), disagree (2 points) and completely disagree (1 point). The statement was assumed to be at a low level if its arithmetic mean (M) ranged from 1.00 to 2.66, and at a medium level if the arithmetic mean (M) ranged from 2.67 to 4.33, and at a high level if the arithmetic mean (M) was between 4.34 and 6.00.

Table 1 Description of the study scales

Study scales	Statements (N)
Teaching duties	9
Cooperation with colleagues	4
Professional development	7
Methodical work	8

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed electronically via Google Drive, and the participation was voluntary. All survey responses collected from teachers and school leaders will remain anonymous to maintain privacy. That encouraged credible and honest answers about the situation. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and that the data obtained would be analysed and used only in a summary manner. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in line with the ethical standards of the institutional and or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Data analysis

SPSS 22 and Excel was used for processing and analysing quantitative data. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient determined the reliability of each study scale (see Table 2).

Table 2 Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the study scales

Study scales	Respondents	Cronbach's alpha coefficients	Reliability
Teaching duties	Primary teachers	.880	Good
	School leaders	.811	Good
Cooperation with colleagues	Primary teachers	.798	Good
	School leaders	.760	Good
Professional development	Primary teachers	.766	Good
	School leaders	.755	Good
Methodical work	Primary teachers	.837	Good
	School leaders	.876	Good

The study used descriptive statistics to measure the arithmetic mean, the standard deviation, and the standard deviation from the arithmetic mean, the median and mode, Skewness and Kurtosis of each statement. On the other hand, the study uses the Mann-Whitney *U* test to compare the views of primary school teachers and school leaders on the professional well-being of primary school teachers for each of the study scales.

Results

The study determined that it is essential for primary school teachers to experience joy in performing their teaching duties and cooperation with colleagues. That enables primary school teachers to feel emotionally well. All statements that make primary school teachers happy were rated at a high level, except one that describes the creation of tests. On the other hand, the school leaders rated four statements that describe the creation of tests and teaching materials, as well as the evaluation of their work and students' achievements at a medium level (see Figure 1).

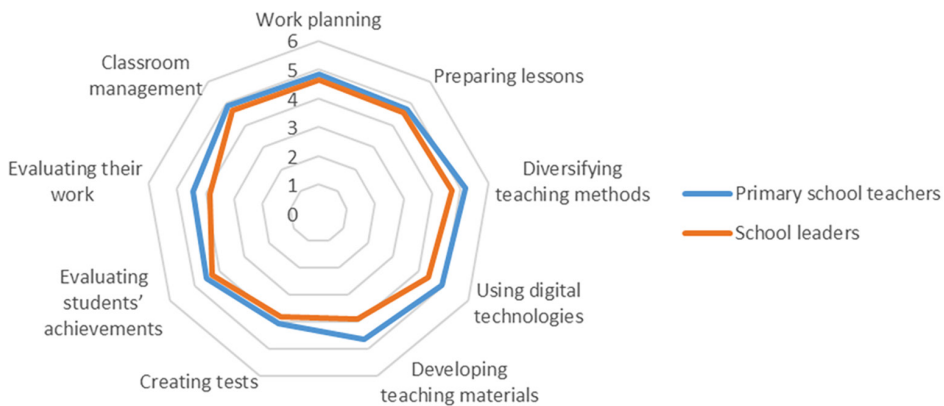


Figure 1 Teaching duties from the point of view of primary school teachers and school leaders

Primary school teachers believe that they are much happier when performing tasks such as diversifying teaching methods ($M = 5.17$, $SD = .732$), using digital technology ($M = 4.97$, $SD = .822$), classroom management ($M = 4.89$, $SD = .897$) and work planning ($M = 4.85$, $SD = .850$). School leaders also believe that primary school teachers enjoy diversifying teaching methods ($M = 4.70$, $SD = .865$), classroom management ($M = 4.70$, $SD = .923$) and work planning ($M = 4.65$, $SD = .875$).

The study found a statistically significant difference in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders regarding the statements that teachers are happy to use digital technologies ($U = 460.00$, $z = -2.661$, $p = .008$), develop teaching materials ($U = 438.50$, $z = -2.791$, $p = .005$), evaluate their work ($U = 446.50$, $z = -2.768$, $p = .006$). The teachers are more optimistic about diversifying teaching methods than school leaders ($U = 497.00$, $z = -2.270$, $p = .023$). The study revealed that the answers of school leaders on the scale describing the teaching duties of primary school teachers are, in several cases, more pessimistic than the teachers' answers themselves.

Primary school teachers ($M = 5.31$, $SD = .597$) and school leaders ($M = 5.35$, $SD = .671$) highly value positive relationships with colleagues, which is one of the keystones of teachers' professional well-being and consider as a basis for successful cooperation and willingness to share professional experiences with colleagues, which is also have been highly rated by both teachers ($M = 5.07$, $SD = .718$; $M = 5.04$, $SD = .740$) and school leaders ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .761$; $M = 4.35$, $SD = .980$) (see Figure 2).

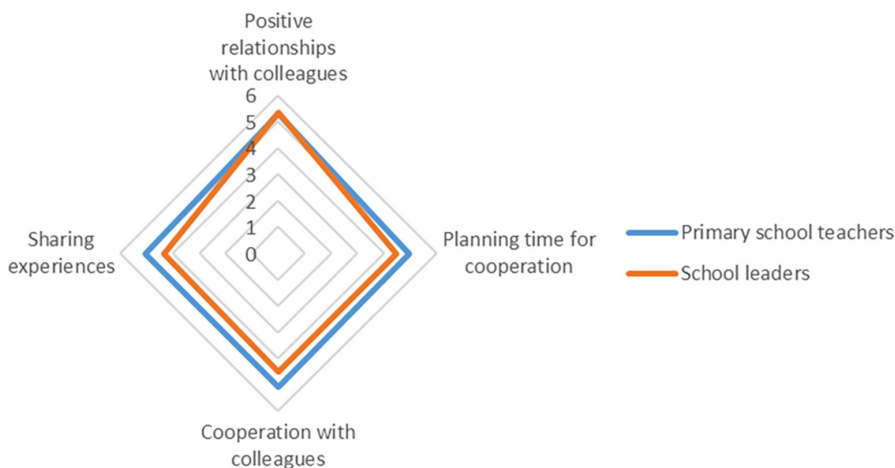


Figure 2 Cooperation with colleagues from the point of view of primary school teachers and school leaders

The study determined that there are statistically significant differences in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders regarding such aspects of cooperation as planning time for cooperation ($U = 472.50, z = -2.504, p = .012$), cooperation with colleagues ($U = 430.50, z = -2.966, p = .003$) and sharing experiences ($U = 431.00, z = -2.935, p = .003$). The data analysis shows that the responses of school leaders regarding three out of four statements describing the teachers' cooperation with colleagues are more pessimistic than the responses of teachers themselves.

Teachers should have opportunities for professional development, which includes learning from each other to feel good. The results indicate that all eight statements in this study scale have been rated high by primary school teachers and school leaders (see Figure 3).

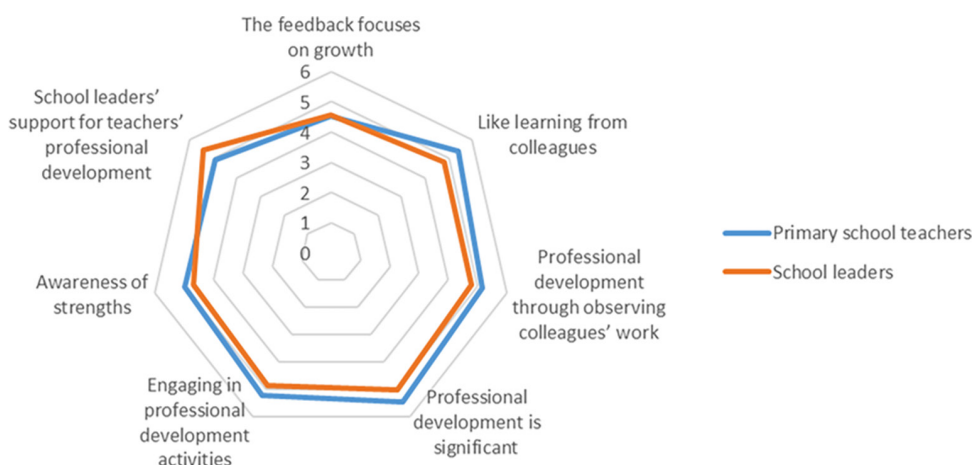


Figure 3 Professional development from the point of view of primary school teachers and school leaders

Primary school teachers ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.047$; Mean Rank = 46.63) and school leaders ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.099$; Mean Rank = 46.05) agree that the feedback provided to the primary school teacher focused on growth. Primary school teachers believe professional development is significant for them ($M = 5.49$, $SD = .074$), and school leaders agree with this ($M = 5.05$, $SD = .198$). However, a statistically significant difference was determined in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders on this issue ($U = 522.00$, $z = -2.082$, $p = .037$). Primary school teachers have valued the need for professional development more than school leaders. The study also found a statistically significant difference between primary school teachers' and school leaders' views on school leaders' support for the professional development of primary school teachers ($U = 507.00$, $z = -2.137$, $p = .033$). On this issue, the views of school leaders ($M = 5.45$, $SD = .759$) are more optimistic than primary school teachers ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.044$).

Primary school teachers are keen to engage in professional development activities ($M = 5.24$, $SD = .096$) and enjoy learning from colleagues ($M = 5.42$, $SD = .071$) by observing their colleagues' work ($M = 5.17$, $SD = .105$). However, school leaders moderately agree that primary school teachers like to engage in professional development activities ($M = 4.85$, $SD = .209$), and they want to learn from each other ($M = 4.80$, $SD = .156$) by observing their colleagues' work ($M = 4.80$, $SD = .186$). The study revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders that primary school teachers like to learn from their colleagues ($U = 389.00$, $z = -3.452$, $p = .001$) by observing their colleagues' work ($U = 516.00$, $z = -2.077$, $p = .038$). Primary school teachers believe they like learning from their colleagues by observing their work more than the school leaders can imagine and evaluate.

Methodical work is one of the most significant parts of every primary school teacher's daily work. It is impossible to ensure a high-quality teaching/learning process without methodical work, but it also creates the most problems for teachers because it is necessary to balance the load of methodical work and to receive the appropriate reward for the work done. Both primary school teachers and school leaders have rated the statements that describe the workload of methodical work ($M = 3.57$, $SD = .152$; $M = 3.45$, $SD = .223$) and the reward for methodical work ($M = 3.21$, $SD = .162$; $M = 3.55$, $SD = .320$) at a medium level.

The study results showed that primary school teachers ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.094$; Mean Rank = 46.35) and also school leaders ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.308$; Mean Rank = 47.05) agree that the methodical work of primary school teachers is well valued (see Figure 4).

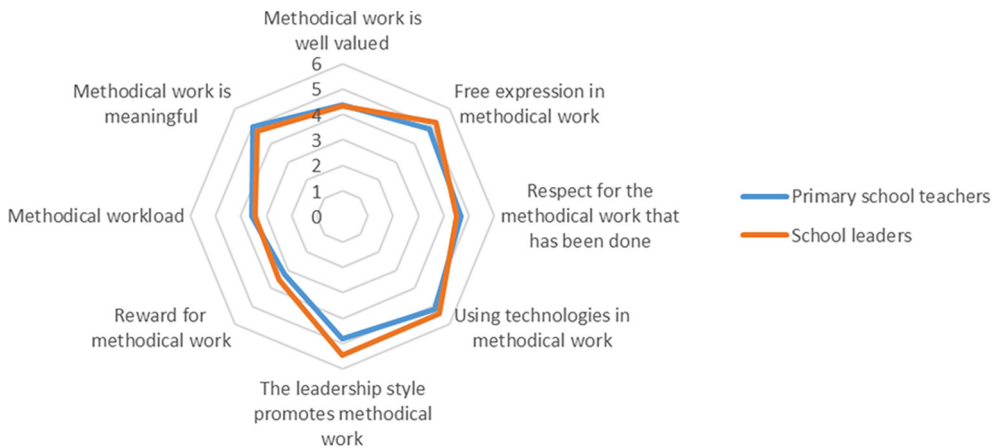


Figure 4 Methodical work from the point of view of primary school teachers and school leaders

School leaders rated their leadership style higher than teachers in terms of promoting the methodical work of primary school teachers ($M = 5.45$, $SD = .170$; $M = 4.79$, $SD = .125$), free expression in methodical work ($M = 5.20$, $SD = .186$; $M = 4.82$, $SD = .107$) and the use of technologies in methodical work ($M = 5.40$, $SD = .210$; $M = 5.14$, $SD = .103$). However, despite the different views of primary school teachers and school leaders, the study found a statistically significant difference only in the views on the leadership style that promotes methodical work ($U = 933.00$, $z = 2.137$, $p = .033$). School leaders believe that they support the methodical work of primary school teachers more than the teachers feel.

The study revealed that primary school teachers ($M = 4.70$, $SD = .649$) are more optimistic about performing their teaching duties with pleasure than school leaders ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .546$) think about this issue (see Figure 5).

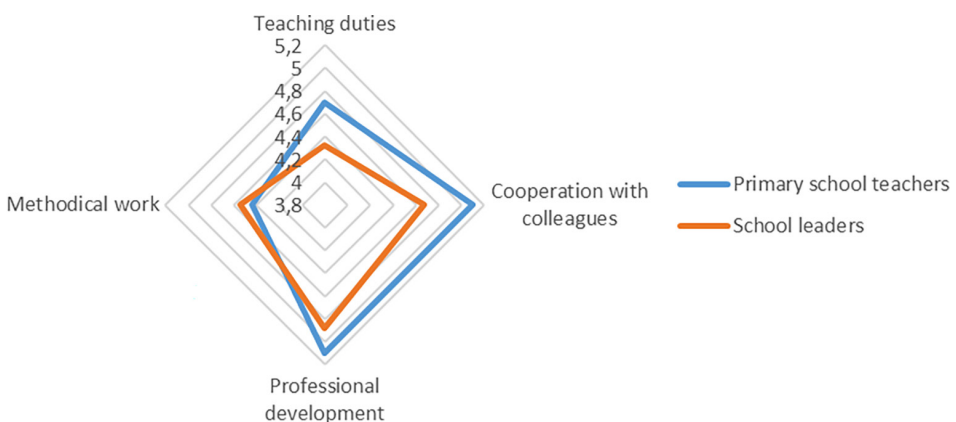


Figure 5 Study scales of primary school teachers' professional well-being

Primary school teachers also value their cooperation with colleagues and professional development more than ($M = 5.10, SD = .573$; $M = 5.10, SD = .533$) school leaders think ($M = 4.67, SD = .612$; $M = 4.88, SD = .551$). Only the fourth study scale, which describes the methodical work of primary school teachers, is rated slightly higher by school leaders ($M = 4.54, SD = .760$) than by teachers themselves ($M = 4.44, SD = .723$).

The study determined that there is a statistically significant difference in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders regarding the fact that primary school teachers perform their teaching duties with pleasure ($U = 457.50, z = -2.490, p = .013$) and on the teachers' cooperation with colleagues ($U = 431.00, z = -2.761, p = .006$). Overall, primary school teachers' views on these study scales are more optimistic than school leaders' beliefs. However, there is no statistically significant difference between teachers' and school leaders' views related to the study scales that characterized the professional development of primary school teachers ($U = 547.00, z = -1.644, p = .100$) and the methodical work ($U = 605.50, z = -1.087, p = .277$). The study results revealed that despite statistically significant differences in the views about two out of the four study scales, there is no statistically significant difference in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders ($U = 524.50, z = -1.851, p = .064$) regarding the professional well-being of primary school teachers.

Discussion

The study found that, in several cases, there are statistically significant differences between primary school teachers' and school leaders' views on the professional well-being of primary school teachers. In addition, the opinions of school leaders on the professional well-being of primary school teachers were often more pessimistic than the teachers themselves believed. These findings are consistent with a study conducted by Doran, which showed statistically significant differences in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders about well-being. The well-being of school leaders is higher than primary school teachers (Doran, 2021). Perhaps that is why, when assessing the professional well-being of primary school teachers, school leaders look at it through the prism of their professional well-being.

The study revealed that primary school teachers highly value relationships, cooperation and experience sharing with colleagues, as well as professional growth and engagement in professional development activities. The findings from the study are consistent with research conducted by Liang and colleagues, which found that a professional learning community has a positive relationship with teacher well-being (Liang et al., 2020). Moreover, Maseko has also highlighted that meaningful and positive relationships contribute to teachers' well-being and educational success (Maseko, 2023). On the other hand, Sohail and his colleagues, by summarizing the results of various previous studies, have concluded that the well-being of teachers is promoted by respect, inclusion and an atmosphere of mutual support among teachers, as negative emotions with the feeling

of being rejected or intimidated by colleagues are factors that cause teacher burnout. (Sohail et al., 2023).

The study identified the views of primary school teachers and school leaders about using digital technologies in performing their teaching duties and in methodical work. The study determined that primary school teachers are comfortable and happy to use digital technologies in their teaching duties and methodical work as they rated that at a high level, but on the contrary, the school leaders believe that primary school teachers still need support in using digital technologies. Passey's research also found that teachers' well-being is related to the use of digital technology (Passey, 2021). Therefore, it would be significant for primary school teachers and school leaders to have the same kind of understanding about this issue.

Conclusion

The study determined that primary school teachers highly value such components of professional well-being as diversification of teaching methods and use of technology in their methodical work, positive relationships and cooperation with colleagues, and engaging in professional development and learning from colleagues. On the other hand, school leaders believe that the key factors affecting primary school teachers' professional well-being are positive relationships with colleagues, the support for teachers' professional development, and a leadership style that promotes methodical work and using digital technologies. Furthermore, both primary school teachers and school leaders have rated the statements that describe the methodical workload of primary school teachers and the reward for methodical work at a low level.

The study found that both primary school teachers and school leaders agree that methodical work is well-valued and that the feedback provided to primary school teachers is aimed at their development and growth. However, in several cases, school leaders think that the professional well-being of primary school teachers is worse than the teachers themselves believe. The study results demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders regarding the use of digital technologies, the development of teaching materials, the evaluation of teachers' work, the diversification of teaching methods, planning time for cooperation with colleagues, sharing experience with colleagues, the importance of professional development. The data analysis revealed that only two statements are statistically significantly higher rated by school leaders compared to primary school teachers: the school leaders' support for primary school teachers' professional development and a leadership style that promotes primary school teachers' methodical work.

In addition, the study found a statistically significant difference in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders about two study scales: teaching duties and cooperation with colleagues. Primary school teachers are more optimistic than school leaders regarding these two scales. However, it is possible to conclude that despite statistically significant differences in the views about two out of the four study scales, there was

no statistically significant difference in the views of primary school teachers and school leaders regarding the professional well-being of primary school teachers. Further research is needed to investigate, in-depth, the specifics of primary school teachers' methodical work and their satisfaction with the planning, process and result of the methodical work.

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