

# **Sustainability of bureaucratic pressure on the psychological component of pedagogical activity**

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**Abstract.** The relevance of the authors' appeal to the problem of the sustainability of bureaucratic pressure on the right of teachers to decent work, excluding the threat of factors that damage their mental and physical health, is associated with two aspects. In the theory of sustainable development of education, a significant social institution is considered from the point of view of its task of ensuring the stability of the development of the society of the future. However, the problems of the mechanism of protection of the psychological and physical state of health of the leading subject of education - the teacher, as a rule, remain 'behind the scenes'. At the same time, there are quite a lot of publications in foreign sources about the real problems of strengthening the attack on academic rights and freedoms precisely in the research field that is lacking in national practices.

**Materials and Methods.** Materials and methods: a review of analytical assessments presented in the Scopus, Web of Science, CyberLeninka, RSCI and others databases was used to apply the methodology of analysis, synthesis, generalization of the results of qualitative research of author's and secondary ones.

**Results.** The aim of the work is to compare the results of qualitative studies of factors that negatively affect the state of mental and physical health of teachers. The novelty of the work lies in the comparative approach to the causal relationships of the process of increasing bureaucratic pressure on the psychological stability of the academic community. Results and discussion section contains proposal to unite the efforts of the academic community at the international level to protect the right of teachers to a psychologically safe and stable working environment.

Discussion and Conclusion. The study may arouse interest among the academic community, university management organizers, and representatives of public institutions developing innovations in organizing psychological support for university employees. In conclusion, the author's approach to the essence of the used concepts of "stability of the moral and psychological context of the work of teachers" is given. This will make it possible to determine further directions of analysis, synthesis and evaluation of the presented category.

**Keywords:** academic community, bureaucratic pressure, psychological context of teachers' work.

### **Introduction**

The problem of sustainability of bureaucratic pressure on the academic community is widely debatable in the world scientific field in terms of the conflict of interests between the leading participants in the educational process. Indeed, in recent years, there have appeared various publications actively presenting not only the themes of suppression of academic rights and freedoms, but also of increasing responsibility of teachers for the results of their work (Global Forum on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy, and the Future of Democracy declaration. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/global-forum-declaration-global-forum-final-21-06-19-003-/16809523e5>; Thirteenth Session: Joint ILO–UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel, Geneva, 1–5 October 2018, Geneva: International Labour Office, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019. 44 p. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---sector/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_671540.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_671540.pdf)).

However, very few publications aim to analyze the cause-and-effect context of one of the significant problems. We are talking about the problem of destruction of stability of the moral and psychological component of work of teachers as a result of increased bureaucratic pressure. In this regard, an attempt to implement comparative approach to the results of current research can be considered as relevant. Of particular importance may be authors' attempt to comprehend the essence of the concept of "stability of the moral and psychological context of work of teachers" and its characteristics such as "stable flexibility / adaptability".

**Purpose of the study** - to verify the data of foreign studies with a list of problem points in the activities of teachers with the opinion of Russian colleagues. Limitations: the respondents insisted on guarantees of the survey anonymity, and the conclusions can only indicate a certain trend in the correlation of causal contexts in Russia and abroad.

## **Materials and methods**

Despite the fact that discussion of the problems concerning the psychological component of pedagogical activity is widely conducted among both academic experts and non-specialists, still it is somewhat one-sided. For many years already psychologists have been researching the burnout syndrome, the reasons for its manifestation in representatives of different professions and ways to overcome it (Temirov, 2011). The range of scientific developments on this narrow topic is quite diverse and has a significant time lag (Aminov, 1994; Kondrateva, 2017; Seregina, 2007, etc.). At the same time, it should be noted that there is a certain general and persistent approach of researchers: a person who has lost a state of psychological stability must diagnose his condition himself and simply start using the recommendations of scientists, for example, go in for sports (Shacz, 2017; Ivanov, 2019).

Researchers began to turn to the strata of teachers of higher education relatively recently (for example, L. I. Shcherbich together with I. I. Seregina and others).

There exist other studies (Antipina, 2017). For instance, U. D. Antipina in cooperation with her colleagues investigated the contradiction between the external requirements associated with professional status and the opportunity to get satisfaction from their work and develop. However, the scientists conclude that personal qualities of teachers to a greater extent affect the development of emotional burnout syndrome rather than organizational issues. Their work focuses on such terms and notions as “experiencing traumatic circumstances”, “inadequate emotional response”, “expanding the sphere of saving emotions”. A. S. Leonova argues that employees of higher education institutions are more often "in a state of emotional impasse" than teachers of a secondary education school. However, the causes of this phenomenon are not analyzed (Leonova, 2017). V.S. Tretyakova, in line with most studies, states the existence of a problem without analyzing its causes (Tretyakova, 2019), like many other authors (Fesun, 2019). Medical aspects of the phenomenon under consideration are interestingly described by a number of foreign authors (Rosman, 2013).

It is hypothesized that negative factors damaging higher school teachers' mental and physical health are most noticeable among employees belonging to the 40-50 age group or older. As a result, a stable attitude is formed: “aging personnel is a burden for universities”. Hence, V. F. Pugach does not accidentally point to the expanding variety of options for rejuvenating the teaching staff, even with the help of "surgical" methods (Pugach, 2017). The researcher proves the lack of validity of such discriminatory measures. It should also be taken into account that the topic of discrimination in the academic environment is actively "warmed up" today under the pressure of value distortions of neo-liberalism. From the perspective of our methodology, the current discussion of the so-called "colonization" and the psychological problems arising in

connection with it of opposing "white scientists" to "black scientists" may be of interest, which began, as one might assume, with the publication of K. Hart on the decolonization of Cambridge (Hart, 2018).

In foreign studies and research, other options for conflict of interest and psychological stress problems relate to difficulties in the career advancement of young personnel due to their social origin (Blome, 2019), mass layoffs of personnel as a result of a pandemic, and are described in the framework of discussions on specialized sites (Cantrell, 2019).

According to the findings made by L. Morrish in his work «Pressure Vessels: The epidemic of poor mental health among higher education staff» [Morrish, 2019, p. 43–44, 51], regardless of age, university staff are increasingly seeking advice from specialists in psychological services organized in the UK due to the negative impact of a sharp increase in workload and administrative pressure.

The mentioned above scientist's view is supported by G. Kinman, citing growth data for 6 years to 316% (the University of Warwick) and 414% (the University of Kent) of the number of employees who sought help in connection with a sharp deterioration in mental health. The researcher's conclusions relate to the need to change the conditions for using rating indicators in assessing the effectiveness of university staff, reducing the load in the scientific and pedagogical contexts. "55% of the 6,439 British scientists surveyed reported that they had symptoms such as depression, sleep problems and cognitive impairments" (Kinman, 2019).. In general, foreign colleagues proved that the main problem is related to the need to perform "illegal and unnecessary tasks", as well as "tasks that do not make much sense", noted by 50% of respondents for each position. The authors of publications on the Times Higher Education (THE) website point out the fact that graduate students are 1.9 times more likely to develop mental problems than their graduate colleagues. Reasonable conclusions are made that the strength of the impact of stressful and health-damaging factors in universities and education in general is several times higher than in medicine and law enforcement agencies.

A review of analytical assessment presented in the Scopus, Web of Science, CyberLeninka, RSCI and others databases have been used to apply the methodology of analysis, synthesis, and generalization of the results gained by the authors and secondary qualitative research.

Targets for the implementation of the right of a higher school teacher to safe and healthy working conditions are enshrined in our country, first of all, in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Labor Code, decrees of various ministries and departments. In the international context, most foreign countries have more specific regulations and legal promises to ensure the procedure for protecting similar definitions in the academic environment. However, the essence

of the concept of "safe working conditions" for teaching staff, in practice, does not include a comprehensive list of provisions testifying of the absence of factors that damage the mental and physical health of a person in the labor process. The general cause-effect description of the situation and of the essence of psychologically and physically safe working conditions in the academic environment has not yet been formed in national practice. The authors paid attention to this aspect in their reports at scientific conferences (Filippovskaya, 2020). The standpoint presented in this article develops the conclusions articulated during the reports in scientific and practical terms.

Presented below are the data of the author's express survey in the form of an interview with 9 employees of 3 universities in Yekaterinburg, conducted in September 2020. The respondents were 4 doctors of sciences (2 men, 2 women with more than 25 years of experience in education), 2 candidates of sciences (women with experience work in education for more than 20 years), 3 senior teachers (women with more than 20 years of experience in education).

### **Results and discussion**

For comparison, we used the findings of M. Weinstein based on the results of a survey conducted among employees of Nottingham Trent University (NTU) (Weinstein, 2018). Conclusions on NTU were related to management at work (MAW) issues. Foreign colleagues pointed out the inconsistency of academic workload with its goals by introducing overtime into the norm. The only correct component of the list of the workload was called the list of the volume of classroom hours, while everything else is leading to the need to work overtime "above the norm", when planning itself becomes "a paper exercise that has nothing to do with the actual work performed" (Weinstein, 2018).

The remarks made by Russian respondents are similar: *"There are constant references to the fact that the working week of the faculty is 36 hours a week, and the classroom load and contact work is 900 hours a year. All the rest of the time is related to the load of the second half of the day, no one monitors the performance of it and if it is possible to implement, the instructions replace one another. There is no time to live, there is no time to grow creatively either"*.

Foreign colleagues from NTU also pointed out the difficulties in trying to combine personal professional growth in the role of an educator and a researcher: *"The only way to develop and maintain a scientific career is to do it by sacrificing personal and family time and effectively doing research for free", when email "becomes one of the types of tyranny" from both the students and the administration. The ever-changing "crazy management initiatives" are*

*associated with the fact that “there is too much change, happening too quickly, without any thought about how to manage this change and how much work and stress it creates” increases the level of anxiety, forces people to be in constant expectation of “what else I may be asked to do in a short time and without the necessary preparation time”.*

Another common point for comparing factors that negatively affect the stability of the psychological state is the attitude of managers to the problems of NTU teachers: *“We are underfunded, undervalued, overwhelmed”, “I am mentally tired and exhausted”, “I have serious fears about suicide”, “we are not considered people, but rather cash cows that they need to use to recoup their money”, “I am offended by the contempt and disrespect with which we are treated”.*

Not surprisingly, the answers of their Russian colleagues are practically identical. Moreover, there are facts about the humiliation of expanding the list of procedures that require bureaucratic registration: *“I don’t know who came up with the idea of requiring at every step to draw up acts on the absence of state secrets - in every report, in every article, in any public material. It is absurd to demand such work from employees of universities, which do not even have military departments, not to mention some kind of “secret” laboratories. Nobody argues - the state secret must be kept. But then why not take from everyone a nondisclosure agreement of this state secret, even by those who do not own it, but use open sources for their research? Shortly speaking, they simply do not know what else to occupy the teachers, who, from the point of view of bureaucrats, have nothing to do, as well as to give work to managers - each paper is signed by 3 managers and endorsed by the vice-rector with certification of this signature with the official seal. With all the procedures that follow from this process, it takes a lot of time, but must be done, since without this act, publication activity will not be counted in the internal rating”.*

## **Conclusion**

At the same time, one cannot but say about attempts at the level of management of the educational systems of countries to change something. For example, in the UK, the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, together with the Department of Education, in the first ten days of September 2020, proposed a Program Document on the Mechanism for Reducing the Bureaucratic Burden in Research, Innovation and Higher Education (Policy paper, 2020). The document declares the task of reducing the bureaucratic burden, since *“too often administrative activities distract from the main goal of research and educational activities”*; it is stated that the government understands *“its share of responsibility for the growth of bureaucracy”*; identified are the *“sources of unnecessary bureaucracy”*; and it is intended to

implement a package of necessary measures in the near future. Another issue is that in the entire document not a word is said about creating conditions for reducing the risk of psychological discomfort in the main “providers” of educational services.

In Russian practice, there has also been a certain turn, for example, from the confusion of the analysis of the effectiveness of the work performed by the teaching staff (PPS) and scientific and pedagogical workers (NPR), which until now caused deep indignation in the academic environment. The authors cited data in their publications indicating that the identification of teaching staff (PPS) and scientific and pedagogical workers (NPR) not only indicates a violation of the law in the target settings of management, but also causes employees to falsify data on real research projects (Filippovskaya, 2019).

Following the introduction of the new state standard by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, there appeared new instructions for teachers. However, in the monitoring materials (<http://indicators.miccedu.ru/monitoring/?m=vpo>) of the Department of State Policy in Higher Education and Youth Policy, the effectiveness of the publication activity of university employees is still assessed by the NPR (without specifying the share NPR in the total number of employees and in relation to the teaching staff), and the PPS appears only in tables describing age and certification parameters. It turns out that teachers (PPS) have nothing to do with publications recorded in international and national citation databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, RSCI based on the results of university monitoring. This is the activity of the scientific and pedagogical workers (NPR), while the share of income from educational activity itself in the total income of a university can reach 90% or more, and from research - a little more than 3%. However, an insignificant number of scientific and pedagogical workers (NPR), which in some universities is less than 2% of the total number of teaching staff, which gives an insignificant economic contribution to university revenues, turns out to “give out” colossal indicators in publications.

This imbalance cannot but affect the state of psychological stability, since it can be assumed that the real contribution of the scientific and pedagogical staff (NPR) to the positioning of the university in the scientific field is mystified, and the tasks of “squeezing the juices” from each teaching staff (PPS) to achieve the target indicators of NPR negatively affect the physical condition of people. For example, teachers from Yekaterinburg noted: *“In your articles examples of Stefan Grimm's suicide were given (Stefan Grimm, Chair in Toxicology at Imperial College London). This research professor committed suicide after the request of a bureaucrat under threat of dismissal to urgently find a huge grant. There was also an example with the suicide of an ordinary teacher, who could not bear the load of checking a huge number of students' works. We have no data on suicides among teachers. Apparently, we turn out to be more resistant to*

*negativity. The choice here is simple: either quit, or die in or near the workplace, or grit your teeth and endure. After all, the growth in the number of cancer diseases and diseases of the cardiovascular system in higher education is practically unknown, although it would have to be analyzed. I know the department where 3 people died from oncology in 2 years, and recently we attended the funeral of an employee who died after a double stroke in the workplace caused by pressure from bureaucrats”.*

The study may arouse interest among the academic community, university management organizers, and representatives of public institutions developing innovations in organizing psychological support for university employees. In conclusion, the author's approach to the essence of the used concepts of "stability of the moral and psychological context of the work of teachers" is given. This will make it possible to determine further directions of analysis, synthesis and evaluation of the presented category.

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