

# The Relationship between the Challenges of Academic Work and the Well-being of University Lecturers in Light of a Qualitative Research in Hungary

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## Abstract

The changes in higher education as a result of the massification of higher education presented the society of educators with new challenges and roles. Previous research agrees that the effectiveness of higher education institutions depends to a large extent on the performance of the instructors, however, the examination of the factors that facilitate this and support well-being has received little attention in the literature so far. The aim of our research is therefore to explore the dimensions of the physical, mental, emotional and social well-being of instructors, and to reveal the factors that appear as challenges and risk factors during the work of teachers. To investigate this, we conducted a semi-structured focus group interview research, during which we interviewed 11 university instructors from Eastern Hungary. Among our most important results, it can be mentioned that the interpretation of the role as instructors at institutions of higher education, well-being at work, and the challenges associated with each role appear as significant factors in the narrative of the instructors. Our results can help educational policymakers and institutional decision-makers support the promotion of the well-being of educators with appropriate decisions, thereby indirectly promoting the achievement of educational and institutional excellence.

Keywords: well-being, academic staff, stress factors, Hungary.

## 1. Introduction

In the last decade, we could witness the transformation of higher education both internationally and in Hungary. The changes that occur in higher education are caused by factors such as globalization and the development of a knowledge-based society, and as a result, higher education institutions have become massified. Due to the massification of higher education, heterogeneous student groups appeared in the institutions when it comes to their age, occupational status, geographical and social background. Since the 1990s, universities have had to face new challenges; the task of the institutions is not only transferring theoretical knowledge and educating intellectuals in the classical sense, but also to meet much broader economic and social expectations. Thus in addition to their academic role, they also assume an economic role (Teichler, 2011).

In the previous decade, parallel to the expansion, following the reinterpretation of the role of the state, the business approach, which is rooted in the neoliberal concept of public policy and the practice of strengthening cost-efficiency, has entered higher education worldwide at a rapid pace. Here the institution is seen as a competitive market player striving to increase revenue, the instructors as workers who can be described with quantitative performance indicators, and the students as consumers or products (Amaral, 2008). Since, according to international research, the success of higher education institutions primarily relies on the instructors, it is therefore very important to know the characteristics and background of the instructors' physical, mental, social and emotional well-being, as dimensions of health, working conditions, and effectiveness (Alqarni, 2021; Hegney et al., 2020; Iyali et al., 2020). Higher education is a labour-intensive sector, where adequate quality can be ensured by relying on the skills of its employees. For this, the well-being and health of the instructors is essential, because if the instructors are unmotivated, their stress level is high, and they are feeling unwell, then the institution cannot function effectively either (Bell et al., 2012). The research area we want to investigate, i.e. the well-being of the instructors, is important both at the individual and institutional level. Several researches have already been published in the international literature that focus on the instructors; these mostly deal with the issue of instructor identity and professional development. In Hungary, relatively few studies deal with university instructors, so the novelty of this research is that we would like to fill this gap with our study.

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Our aim is to reveal the stress factors and resources perceived by the lecturers, which are related to their work in higher education. In our current research, we conducted focus group interviews with lecturers from Hungarian institutions, within the framework of which we collected information about the challenges appearing in higher education, furthermore, we also measured various factors of the lecturers' well-being. In our study, we explore the changing relationship between these two issues. After the theoretical overview, we briefly present the methodological features of our research, and then present and discuss the results.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 The changing higher education***

Higher education is rapidly expanding, diversifying and it is attracting more and more students from different backgrounds. In addition to theoretical knowledge, this change requires the transfer of practical knowledge, for which it is necessary to be familiar with the needs of the labour market. Modernizing the content of the training entails the need to develop the pedagogical and methodological culture. Institutions are required to increase the efficiency of education by developing higher education pedagogy, educational organization and knowledge transfer methods. Consequently, institutions have to take on an economic role in addition to their academic role, and developing partnerships with participants of the labour market also becomes one of their tasks (Elliott, 2017; Harrison, 2017; Teichler, 2011). The institutions' scope of responsibilities has expanded, as well as the roles and responsibilities of lecturers (Bell et al., 2012; Kinman, 2014). However, higher education institutions no longer have a monopoly on the provision of educational services, as a new competitive situation has been created by the learning society; lifelong learning has become a lifelong necessity for almost everyone. This type of necessity requires continuous flexibility and quick response from higher education institutions. In this constant change, the roles of educational providers are becoming more and more blurred, as higher education no longer reflects the full-time commitment of neither the instructors nor the students anymore. And in order for higher education to be able to accommodate students and meet the long-term needs of the learning society, a change in teaching and learning methods is necessary (Cross, 1987). Examining the efficiency and effectiveness of learning-centered teaching is closely intertwined with the educational view of instructors; these kind of researches came to the forefront of educational research in the 1990s. At the international level, there is an increasing appreciation for the teaching-learning function and the improvement of the quality of education in higher education, the key actors of which are the instructors, but in Hungary, only a few studies deal with the identity and way of thinking of the instructors (Kálmán, 2021). For this renewal, the work and involvement of the university instructors is essential, and their well-being is related to this. In recent decades, higher education has undergone changes also in the sense that while years ago university could be labelled as a workplace with adjectives such as safe, calm, and socially recognized, nowadays, due to the diversification of higher education and its reinforced role as a service provider, it is hardly possible to characterize it with the aforementioned characteristics. Instructors have to fulfill more and more tasks, roles, and expectations. The demands and requirements are serious stress factors that have a negative impact on the well-being of lecturers (Bell et al., 2012; Kinman, 2014; Malik et al., 2017).

### ***2.2 Definition of well-being***

Well-being is a construction of certain elements (PERMA – positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment) (Seligman, 2011). Well-being at work includes job satisfaction and meaningful work (Akram, 2019; Falout & Murphey, 2018). Tommasi et al. (2023) highlighted that meaningful work refers to a positive and fulfilling experience, marked by feelings of competence, connection with others, and the perception that one's work has purpose and significance. Based on the dual nature of meaningful work, researchers and practitioners should consider both individual views and the surrounding organizational and contextual factors (Tommasi et al., 2020). According to the job demands-resources model, resources at work (motivation, commitment, enjoyment of work) are extremely important for the realisation of work goals, while factors related to job demands are characteristics such as intense cognitive, emotional, physical and/or psychological strain that require considerable effort to perform tasks. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

Occupational stress is present in the lives of teachers. Burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and a drop in performance are widespread among them. High levels of stress can lead to physiological, psychosomatic and mental illnesses. Stress factors can arise from work-related factors such as overwork, goal-oriented culture, but also from other job characteristics (role conflicts, high and inconsistent workload, long working hours, fear of evaluation) (Alqarni 2021; Hegney et al., 2020; Jepson & Forrest, 2006). Due to the diversification of higher education and its increasing function as a service provider, instructors have to fulfill more and more roles (educator, researcher, mentor, pastor) in addition to their increasing tasks. Iyali et al. (2020) distinguish between stress factors

related to workplace demands (long working hours, unmanageable amount of emails, pressure to publish) and those that limit efficiency (poor communication, fast pace of work, lack of technical support). The increased number of students, the disruption of the balance between work and private life, competition for different resources, lack of respect or harassment can also be identified as sources of stress (Alqarni, 2021; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Fetherston et al., 2021). Gender, age, cultural differences and teaching experience can be factors influencing the experience of stress. Women and teachers with little teaching experience are at greater risk (Jepson & Forrest, 2006; Sak, 2018). Academic work has become burdensome, which can have serious consequences both for the individual, i.e. the workforce, and for higher education, in terms of quality (Bell et al., 2012).

Predictors of well-being are good health, a low stress level and work resources (experiencing positive emotions, support from colleagues, psychological characteristics of the person such as self-efficacy, self-esteem) (Alqarni, 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Weiland, 2021). Teachers who have comprehensive access to these resources enjoy their work more and are more committed (Han et al., 2020).

Tommasi et al. (2022) examined the relationship between organisational conditions influencing and doctoral students' mental health. Doctoral students' meaningless work experience was shown to be predicted by the lack of PhD support and by the academic environment with neoliberal ideology affecting the levels of the sources of meaning. In turn, meaningless work resulted to be associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety and quit intention among doctoral students (Tommasi et al., 2022:309). To address this, institutions should promote the perception that doctoral students' work is socially and financially valued (Tommasi et al., 2022). Young researchers in Hungary reported low income, lack of research resources, insecurity in their careers, and barriers to careers for women and researchers with families, facilitated by rigid and hierarchical institutional characteristics and infrastructural problems. Lecturers play an important role in decision-making, institutional efficiency and innovation, so the well-being of them is crucial (Alpár et al., 2018). From the data, we can see that higher education institutions shall actively respond to issues related to the well-being of employees and students, and strive to create an efficient academic environment (Brewster et al., 2022).

Lecturers in Hungary have not been studied in depth as part of the above topic. Research related to faculty well-being, similar to our research, can help determine how faculty can achieve their own well-being and in what ways the institution supports them.

### **3. Methods**

#### ***3.1 Research strategy***

This study was conducted within the framework of the project *"Investigating the role of sport and physical activity for a healthy and safe society in the individual and social sustainability of work ability and quality of work and life (multidisciplinary research umbrella program)."* The study examines the well-being of lecturers in the Northeast Hungarian region and four regions across the border (Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia, Serbia) from various aspects. Interviews were conducted with lecturers from several higher education institutions across the border, but the aim of our current study was not an international comparison. As a sub-dimension of the research, we examined the factors related to the well-being of university instructors. The present research examines the issue from the perspective of the role of the instructors and the challenges that arise during education. Previous international research has approached the topic mainly from the direction of psychology. In our current study, however, we examine the factors that hinder and support the work of lecturers from the perspective of higher education. Although the difficulties of young researchers in the workplace have been studied in Hungary in recent years (Alpár et al., 2018), the two populations studied cannot be considered identical.

#### ***3.2 Data collection***

In order to answer our research questions, we conducted semi-structured focus group interview research among Hungarian university lecturers (n=11). According to Hennink & Kaiser (2022), saturation can typically occur between nine and 17 interviews, especially with relatively homogeneous study populations and narrowly defined goals. For this reason, we did not do a greater number of interviews. The sampling of focus group interviews is non-probabilistic and non-representative and therefore allows for exploratory research (Babbie, 2001). One of the advantages of focus group studies is that they can capture real-life experiences in a social environment (Krueger, 1988). The study focused on the life situation and workplace challenges of the interviewees. Therefore, it was beneficial that the interviewees, after hearing each other's experiences, stimulated side conversations and controversial situations that drew the researcher's attention to factors that had not taken into account beforehand.

In the course of our research, we interviewed through two focus group interviews 11 university instructors who perform educational activities at a university in Eastern Hungary.

TABLE 1. Introduction of the interviewees (N=11)

| Interviewee | Focus group No. | Gender | Field of Science              | Occupation                               |
|-------------|-----------------|--------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1A          | 1.              | Male   | Art                           | Associate professor                      |
| 1B          | 1.              | Male   | Technological Science         | Professor, vice dean, head of department |
| 1C          | 1.              | Male   | Social Science/Health Science | Associate professor                      |
| 1D          | 1.              | Female | Medicine                      | Assistant professor                      |
| 1E          | 1.              | Male   | Art                           | Assistant lecturer                       |
| 1F          | 1.              | Female | Information Technology        | Assistant professor                      |
| 2A          | 2.              | Male   | Health Science                | Master lecturer                          |
| 2B          | 2.              | Male   | Natural Science               | Associate professor                      |
| 2C          | 2.              | Female | Economics                     | PhD student                              |
| 2D          | 2.              | Female | Humanities                    | Assistant lecturer                       |
| 2E          | 2.              | Male   | Teacher training              | Associate professor                      |

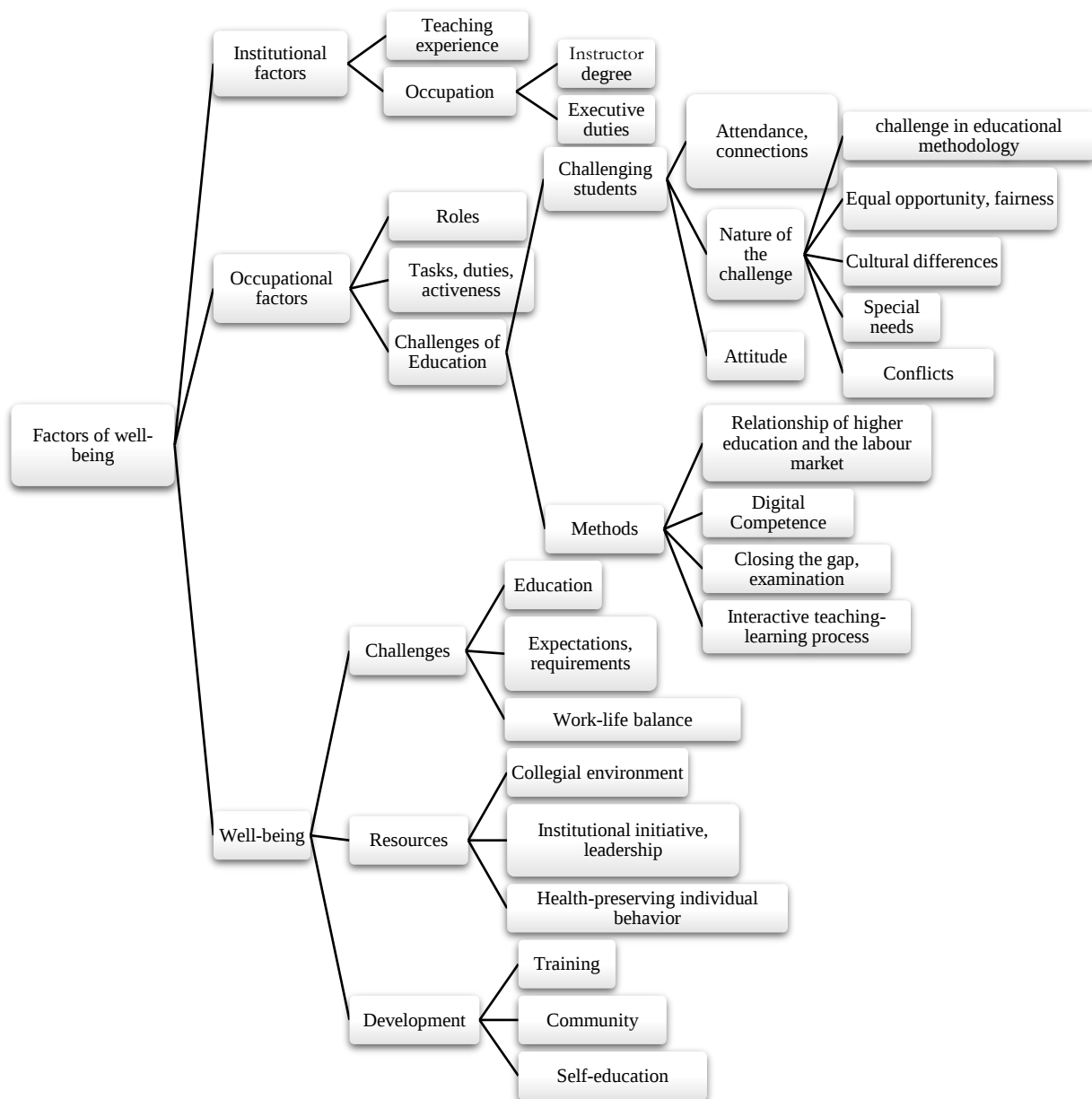
This university plays an active role in the development of the economic and social life of the region, acts as a service provider and offers a wide range of educational opportunities. Our aim was to obtain as much information as possible about the challenges in higher education and the well-being of the lecturers. To this end, it was essential to interview both young lecturers at the beginning of their careers and experienced, even older lecturers. We formed heterogeneous focus groups according to field of study, age, number of years spent in the profession, and position, in order to gain as broad an insight as possible into the experiences of instructors related to the question examined.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Based on Creswell (2012), our aim was to get close to the data. We therefore opted for manual coding, which allowed us to get to know the interviews as a whole. The length of the text was manageable. During the interview analysis, we carried out deductive and inductive coding related to the JD-R theoretical model, since we analyzed the challenges and resources related to the workplace and job, which appeared as deductive codes, and treated other hindering and supporting factors as inductive codes. In order to analyze the received data, we first performed manual coding, during which we followed a mixed coding paradigm. Deductive coding was done a priori with the help of the code network created on the basis of the interview outline and the literature, followed by the data-driven creation of additional codes due to the semi-structured nature of the interview by dividing the text segments into further sub-units (Creswell, 2012). Figure 1 illustrates the simplified branch diagram of the main content nodes created on the basis of the interview outline.

In order to ensure the reliability of the coding, we implemented the principles of personal triangulation and performed intercoding, during which two people participated in the coding of the interviews. In order to ascertain the relationship between the reliability of coding and personal triangulation, we calculated the reliability index ( $k=0.87$ ). The value of the reliability indicator ranges from 0 to 1. If the codes are the same, the coding reliability index is 1. A value of the reliability index above 0.6 is appropriate, since the coding then leads to acceptably high values and code structures similar to the values of Cohen's kappa and the structuring of Greve & Wentura (1997) and Landis & Koch (1997). On this basis, the coding proved to be reliable.

FIGURE 1. The main content codes



## 4. Results

### 4.1 Roles of lecturers

In the first part of the analysis, we have examined the issue of the lecturers' perspective, as well as the roles associated with their work in higher education. Regarding the perspective, it can be said that the instructor of art mediation mostly emphasized the perspective of the master-disciple relationship, that they linked to two other roles, that of the secondary school teacher and the parent. They believed that the diversity of the roles fulfilled allows for the development of a relationship between the master and student, which often turns into a collegial relationship. Meanwhile, the master lecturer considers the classical "universitas" approach to be important, which is not only limited to the teaching of the curriculum, but also offers the opportunity to transfer value, development, the formulation of constructive criticism, and establishment a more direct student-teacher relationship.

During the examination of the roles of the work of the instructor, we separated the answers when the interviewees named specific roles, and when they listed tasks that can be connected to their everyday work. As a first step in the analysis, we created deductive (theory-driven) categories for the role, which were: instructor,

researcher, mentor and administrator. The role of instructor was named by five respondents, two instructors from the field of medicine and health sciences, two instructors from art mediation and one instructor from the humanities. The role of researcher was also named by the previously mentioned instructors, but two lecturers from the technical and natural sciences fields reported the increasing importance of the role as a researcher. The administrative role was mentioned only by the instructor from the field of natural sciences, and according to his view, this role includes both the fulfillment tasks required by the institute (timetable, Neptun-system<sup>3</sup>, etc.), but also the responsibility for education and specialization. In addition, they also emphasized the importance of the role of the mentor, but the strengthening of this role was also highlighted by the young instructor from the field of sports science.

After this, we created inductive (data-driven) categories, and just as in the case of attitudes, work the creation of relationships was significant in the case of roles related to higher education as well. The instructors of technological, medical and health sciences, as well as art mediation, reported the appearance of the role of the secondary school teacher, which was often manifested in the methods used and the relationship with the students. According to the instructor in the field of art mediation, this role is often accompanied by the parental role, that is strengthened even more by the closer relationship established with the students. At the same time, one instructor of teacher training viewed the emergence of the parental role in the fact that the task of passing on values and models often falls on the instructors. The instructors of medical and health sciences and art mediation also highlighted the role of the professional, in which case the dominant task is conveying practical knowledge and the expectations of the labour market. In some cases, the interviewees did not name specific roles, but activities. Only the teachers of the technological and natural sciences highlighted contact with secondary schools and labour market players as a typical task. The interviewee working in the technological field also named talent management and upward convergence as an important activity, but the task of reducing attrition also appeared in the field of arts. Conveying basic values and setting an example, as mentioned earlier, was associated with the parental role in one case, but the dominance of these tasks was also mentioned by the master instructor of health education and the young instructor in the field of sports science. In addition to the following activities, some more specific tasks were also mentioned, but these are either specific to the training (performing arts as a task) or can be classified under other roles (organization of conferences, launching international educational programs).

In parallel to the teaching responsibilities and approach, we also investigated what activities the interviewees carry out, with which they can enrich their own professional competence and methodological culture, and how they can keep up with the challenges in higher education. Some of the instructors mentioned further training, but the majority of them (7 people) reported self-training, which meant the reading of recent domestic and international literature and the analysis of TEDx videos, but these types of self-training are sometimes closely related to communities of practice. Communities of practice were mostly mentioned by educators in the fields of art mediation, healthcare and IT.

*"It is precisely for this reason that I tried to contact colleagues or textbook authors who deal with this topic, and in the context of private lessons or private consultations, if I run into a technical problem, I can contact the competent colleague who I think can help me, and then we exchange ideas." (1E)*

Regarding the goal of development, we found that the majority of interviewees strive for development in order to be able to use the acquired new knowledge in their classes, thereby promoting the effectiveness of education and the development of students. One instructor in medical and health sciences and two lecturers in art mediation mentioned that their development is important because of their prestige, not only because of education, and the latter two interviewees also mentioned the lack of appreciation as a challenge, so in their case, their continuing education clearly has a personal aspect as well.

By viewing the methods used during education, we see that the effort to create a practice-oriented, active learning environment appears mainly in those fields of training that are already more intertwined with the labour market (information technology, natural sciences) or that prepare students for a specific profession (medical and health science, teacher education), but it was also mentioned by the teachers of art mediation. Regarding the use of digital tools, the majority of interviewees consider it important to keep up with digital advancement and usually use them in their classes. Those working in the art field believe that finding the golden mean is still important, they don't necessarily use them in their classes, but otherwise they feel its necessity and usefulness.

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<sup>3</sup> Neptun is an unified online study platform that is applied by most of the Hungarian universities. In Neptun, various study affairs are managed by both the instructors and the students.

## 4.2 Well-being at the Workplace

The roles and tasks named by the interviewees range over a relatively broad spectrum, as some educators emphasized: *"perhaps more things are included in this sphere than should be."* (2D).

*"On the other hand, I am constantly unsatisfied with myself and my work. Because this activity drains a person's strength so much that there is no time left for activities such as research. And if there is no research, there will be no publications in the future. So, on the one hand, we are saving the branch we're sitting on, at least this is what I feel in such situations, and this is not... so it creates such an unpleasant tension within me. So I'm dealing with this a lot these days, how to get over this burden in some way."* (1C)

As a result, we considered it necessary to investigate what challenges the interviewees perceive during their work as instructors, and how this is related to their well-being. We pre-defined four categories: challenges related to education, with students, requirements, and work-life balance. Among the challenges related to education, the instructors mentioned obstacles such as unexpected tasks, disproportionate class distribution, and further overload due to the success of the instructor.

*"...and really, the feedback or the praise for this is usually that, well, that I should teach more classes, since I have also solved this task so ably and well. It is not difficult to come to the conclusion that after a while it will be at the cost to the quality of education..."* (2A)

*"...vacation is not vacation, it is spent on a different work activity."* (2D)

Instructors in the fields of natural sciences, medicine, health sciences and art mediation mentioned the challenges associated with foreign language training, while in the technical field, the issue of the "marketability" of the training also plagues the instructors. Meanwhile, two instructors reported on the passivity of colleagues (2B) and the pressure of the expectations of colleagues who advocate constant access and communication (1E). This constant readiness is burdensome for several interviewees, who commented on the breakdown of the balance between work and private life. This initially emerged during Covid-19, but did not disappear even after the end of online education (medical and health sciences, art mediation, humanities).

*"...It is often a problem to find the balance, that the working hours are over and from now on I will do something else, which is my personal life and I relax, which is, well, might be a little easier in a different profession, where one can close the shop door and go home, and from then can be less concerned with what is happening. So for me, for example, this is what causes difficulty."* (1D)

The expansion of the instructor's role and tasks, the expectations placed on the instructors, and the need for them to constantly keep their professional knowledge up to date creates tensions within the instructors. Half of the interviewees feel that working with people and constant communication is extremely stressful, as one of them put it:

*"Ours is one of the most stressful professions because you constantly have to communicate with other people. And that's why I think that all kinds of work, this applies to all teaching work as well, but all customer service, everywhere where you have to adapt to other people's expectations, values, and opinions, and you constantly have to find a common compromise solution somehow, I specifically find stressful, and consider our profession as such."* (2A).

According to the instructors, due to having to constantly meet of expectations and the increasing workload, they "don't have time to live", and they constantly feel dissatisfied with themselves.

In addition to summarizing the challenges, we also made an attempt to collect the available resources. The instructors of almost all training areas mentioned the opportunities offered by the institution, such as sports events and mental health services, but the interviewees rarely use them. The respondents reported more about how they try to deal with stress and challenges, most often they mentioned sports, excursions, and other social activities (art mediation, IT, sports science, teacher training, medical and health sciences). The master lecturer in sports science and health science emphasized the support of the colleagues and management. The majority of instructors perceive it as a resource when their colleagues recognize their successes, and what's more, it has a positive effect on them if the successes of individual instructors are published more widely, be it the success of a student or participation

in an international conference. Furthermore, they consider it a support factor if they also receive positive feedback from the students. In addition to the students, the support of the family is of course also a lifeline for the lecturers, but some interviewees drew attention to the fact that the freedom, the flexibility of the lecturer's job and the trust in the lecturers serve as a resource that sometimes functions as a serious protective factor.

*"And the kind of freedom of how I can organize, when, for example, I really couldn't teach my class due to illness, but the basic assumption is that I will make up for it, I will solve it. I think this kind of trust can take away a lot of stress. (...) And I think this is a very important stress-relieving tool or I don't know. So this kind of trust." (2A)*

#### **4.3 Challenges related to students**

In the case of challenges related to education, work and private life balance, we did not experience sharp differences between the individual fields of study, however, the challenges related to students were mostly reported by instructors of hard fields of study, while the instructors of soft fields of study only occasionally mentioned obstacles related to students. Based on the answers, we were able to distinguish three types of challenges related to students. First of all, the respondents mentioned the preparedness and incoming knowledge of the students. The interpretation of this phenomenon as a negative challenge appeared specifically in the case of educators in the STEM fields and teacher training, and this was the problematic area mentioned by most respondents. The second type includes meeting the needs of student excellence, students with a higher level of knowledge, experience or abilities, which, however, according to the teachers' interpretation, appears as a positive challenge during work of a teacher. Typically, the instructor working in the IT field mentioned this positive challenge (in addition to convergence), according to which *"as an instructor, it is a challenge to meet the expectations of students with really good abilities"* (1F), and the respondent who is an instructor in the field of social sciences highlighted the challenges in the education of adult students. In this regard, he highlighted the importance of the fact that these students must be provided with new information regarding their own profession, which they perform on a daily basis. As the third type of challenge, in addition to the change in the quality of the students, there was a change in the quantity of the students, among which the instructor of the social sciences and medical training highlighted the decreasing number of students, as well as internationalization. Several instructors also reported other expectations that are related to the labour market (technological) on the one hand, performance evaluation on the other, and the difficulty of defining evaluation criteria.

*"Who is the more effective teacher, whose student wins an international competition, or who helps a student of much more modest abilities pass an exam and gets the most out of them. Or as a third possibility, a colleague of mine just received a photo. He was teaching in high school, and the child wrote on the photo, what was about the high school graduation: "Thank You, Sir, for believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself anymore." (1A)*

The interviewees mentioned several difficulties in relation to internationalization as a challenge in itself. The majority of respondents (instructors in technological, IT, medical and health sciences, and natural sciences) report that they meet a large number of foreign students during their work. However, the instructors of social sciences, humanities, and arts training areas report that few foreign students study at their faculty, and that their programs are at the beginning of the process of internationalization. A portion of the respondents initially comment positively on the teaching these students, however, the negative answers appear prominently in the case of these respondents as well. Among the challenges, the following are highlighted: when it comes to language use, the answers include teaching classes in English, the extra work and time devoted to preparation, as well as the lack of language skills on the part of the students in the case of certain national groups. However, they highlight the differences in habits and attitudes. In this area, the instructor of the technological training area points out the willingness of the students to cheat as the biggest challenge:

*"We have a lot of bad experiences with cheating, so e.g. due to specific cases, we have to insist that it is necessary to check that the student sitting there and writing the test is the same whose name is written on the sheet. Unfortunately, this has gone in a very wrong direction in the last year." (1B)*

In some egregious cases, student attitudes and reactions can directly threaten the well-being and sense of security of the instructors. An example of this is the experience of an instructor in medical training, where one of the students made threatening comments to the instructor because of a failed exam. The problem of cultural differences in the answers of the instructor in medical training shows that in addition to the differences between domestic and foreign culture and customs, the cultural differences between students in internationally

heterogeneous groups can also be a challenge for the lecturers. Based on his experience, there are ethnic groups whose members find it impossible to cooperate with each other, which can pose difficulties in terms of class organization.

*"What we have also experienced is that there are students from some countries who, for example, are not willing to work together in a pair or group exercise, because the antagonisms between the two ethnic groups are so deeply rooted that they cannot overcome it here." (1D)*

The instructors of the soft disciplines (teacher training, art communication) mentioned rather that the students need to be taught several fundamental values, and that the students expect quick feedback from the instructors and fast, online access to the course materials.

Regarding the education of non-traditional students, we also asked about the experiences of education of students with disabilities. In this respect, the instructors of the technological, IT and social sciences training areas report a greater number of experiences, while the instructors of the medical, art, and teacher training areas do not, or only report on previous experiences going back several years. However, there is no indication in their answers whether the education of these students was a challenge or difficulty for the instructors. The answers focus on helping these students. On the one hand, adaptation to the students' needs in teaching and assessment appears, and on the other hand, institutional level efforts to ensure equal opportunities. The most accurate description of this is given by the instructor of the social sciences training area, outlining the institutional potentials for supporting students with disabilities. A critical view is presented by the instructors of the medical and health sciences training, who describe the lack of barrier-free access in their buildings as a kind of ironic situation.

## 5. Discussion

In our research, we examined the relationship between the challenges experienced in higher education and the well-being of teachers through focus group interviews with teachers. Due to the expansion, the composition of higher education students has changed, from a social, as well as from an economic and cultural point of view, but among the roles played by higher education, the consumer-oriented function that adequately satisfies the needs of the labour market has become increasingly prominent. These transformations have also brought changes in the work of instructors, the requirements placed on instructors cover certain activities to a growing extent, from teaching, research, mentoring tasks, to organizing and marketing tasks, from communication with diverse student groups to obtaining proficiency in digital education. The requirements experienced in teaching and academic work have become a serious source of stress, have put pressure on the teaching staff, and have changed the circumstances of the teaching profession, which was previously considered to be predictable and calm (Kinman, 2014). Based on these, we assumed that there is a strong connection between the special challenges in higher education and the well-being of the instructors.

Examining the role of instructors, we found that in the majority of cases the mechanisms found in the literature apply, so the interviewees most often named the roles of instructor, researcher, mentor, and administrator (Bell et al., 2012; Kinman, 2014). However, three further roles emerged during the interview. The parental role mentioned by teachers in the field of teacher training and art mediation, and this role is probably related to other characteristics of the soft science fields. Compared to the other fields, the number of students in these two training areas is relatively lower, so a familial atmosphere is created in the institutes, instructors and students can communicate with each other more easily and quickly, and the instructors are more likely to know the students personally. As we can see, this type of network within the institutions is more typical of soft scientific fields rather than of the hard scientific fields, where there is a larger number of students. The role of a practical professional is also faculty-specific, it has been mentioned in two areas of training where practice and professional awareness are of great importance, so this role has also become an integral part of teaching work in the fields of art mediation and medical and health sciences. Interestingly, the role of the secondary school teacher has returned to higher education, and it was mentioned by instructors in three different fields. The teacher in the field of art mediation connected the role of a secondary school teacher to the parental role, emphasizing the existence of a personal relationship in both cases, while in the technological and health fields this teacher's role is related to the methodology, because the instructors feel that the basic subjects have to be taught almost as if they were in high school.

The aforementioned results also support the fact that instructors have to perform in many roles, they have to communicate with more people in various roles, and as a result, the extent of their tasks increases, as was explained earlier. However, from the perspective of our research, an important question is what kind of challenges the instructors face and what kind of reaction these provoke from them. During the analysis, we separated the

challenges related to education, students, and work-life balance. The main challenges in hard scientific fields are the convergence of students lagging behind, the lack of competence, courses in foreign languages and related work, and communication with foreign students. These challenges come with the expansion of roles and tasks.

In the case of soft science fields, instructors most often noted that students lack adequate basic values. They sometimes perceive urgency and pressure from their colleagues and students related to the speed of work, the transfer of information, and the ability to reach instructors. Furthermore, teachers of art mediation are most aware of the latest challenges arising from performance evaluation. During the interview, the instructors related some of the challenges to the expectations to the performance evaluation recently introduced at the institution. The instructors almost unanimously perceived the issue of objectifying performance as a new challenge, namely that it is difficult to determine based on metrics who is a good instructor and who does quality work. The instructors perceive a process of isolation among themselves, and they no longer see each other as colleagues, but as enemies. The instructors have repeatedly emphasized that they are frustrated by the performance evaluation.

As we mentioned before, instructors' well-being is extremely important not only at the individual level, but also at the organizational level, because higher education institutions rely on their employees' skills, work, and attitude, as this is how they ensure quality. Instructor commitment can decrease if the instructors' well-being and health is unfavourable, if high expectations lead to separation and isolation among employees, which adversely affects the institution's operation and reputation. Taking a step back and looking at the relationship between classical intellectual training and education function and educators' well-being, the research area is also significant. The purpose of higher education is not just to transfer knowledge, but also to develop character and impart values, but how can an instructor who is stressed, fatigued, and exhausted provide guidance?

Based on our results, it can be said that one of the most important ways to manage challenges and preserve well-being is if instructors have as many opportunities as possible to access workplace resources. The positive feedback received from colleagues, the leadership, and students, the recognition, the feeling of esteem and the mutual trust of the colleagues was also proven to be an essential resource.

We hypothesized that the education of non-traditional student groups presents a challenge to instructors compared to the education of traditional students. However, contrary to our expectations, the education of the student majority often presents teachers with such challenges that other issues get out of their sight. For example, in their answer to the question about the roles of instructors, the instructor for technical and IT training stressed students' ability problems, while the teacher training respondent discussed the low level of student competencies instead of adequately responding to the question. He did the same for the teacher performance question as well. These answers did not distract the other respondents from the topic of the questions, so it can be assumed they are less concerned about this issue in their everyday lives.

In the case of education-related challenges of international students, the answers are free of prejudices. In the case of problems, they don't mention ethnic or national groups, but specific cases, to which, based on the responses, they try to respond at the institutional level, improving education and monitoring, and the fact that the term "challenge" appears mostly positively in the answers.

Based on the answers, they approach students with disabilities by focusing on help. The existence and lack of experience show a partial consistency with statistical data, according to which these students are overrepresented in technological, IT, and social science education, but are underrepresented in medical and health sciences and teacher training. (Hrabéczy & Pusztai, 2020). Moreover, nowadays in Hungarian higher education, students with disabilities can be found in all years and in all fields, even in areas where respondents reported little or outdated experience. This draws attention to the problem that students with disabilities often do not inform their instructors about their individual needs and disabilities. In line with the literature, lecturers, based on their own admission, have a positive attitude towards students with disabilities, and they strive to find out what their responsibilities are regarding their education and support of them. (Salzberg et al., 2002; Debrand & Salzberg, 2005; Murray et al., 2008).

## **6. Limitations and Conclusion**

The focus of our research was the consequences of the changes taking place in higher education, which have transformed the society of lecturers. Lecturers' performance and work play a significant role in the success of higher education institutions, which is why it is crucial to examine their working conditions, effectiveness, and mental and physical characteristics. Our study argues that there are many challenging factors and risk factors associated with the interpretation of the instructors' role, which are strongly intertwined with well-being. By following up on these dangerous components and expanding resources, the instructors' well-being is supported, which indirectly promotes the efficiency of institutions.

The results of our research shall be interpreted by taking certain limitations into account. We must emphasize

that our current research is exploratory in nature. In addition to the exploratory nature of the study, one of the limitations of the analysis is that it represents only partial results of a complex, comprehensive research, and the aspects we have addressed appear to be sub-dimensions of this topic. Due to the low number of interviewee, we cannot draw clear and broad conclusions. There may be significant differences between the various fields of study, so it would be advisable to conduct research that examines the perceptions of instructors of a specific educational field more broadly. The disadvantages of focus group interviews should be considered in future studies, so in-depth interviews could reveal deeper relationships and other mechanisms. Our results provide a good basis for conducting future research, and support the achievement of both teachers' well-being and institutional excellence from a decision-making perspective.

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### Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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