

Article

Teaching Performance of Slovak Primary School Teachers: Top Motivation Factors

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Abstract: Teaching is a specific type of profession with a specific mission. In this study, the motivation level of primary school teachers in Slovakia in the period from 2015 to 2020 was analyzed. A total of 1189 Slovak teachers with a stratified selection were addressed. Cronbach's Alpha, Tukey's HSD (honest significant difference), and ANOVA were used to analyze the data obtained. The research results confirm that Slovak teachers are motivated most by relationship and financial factors. Other important motivation factors are atmosphere in the workplace, a good work team, a supervisor's approach, a fair appraisal system, and a basic salary. The research also confirms that, over the duration of the study, there was a significant change in the average level of motivation factors; however, there was no change in their relative proportion and structure. In relation to gender, significant diachronic differences were confirmed. Research results prove that Slovak teachers have stable requirements in terms of motivation. This study's findings will further help school management create effective motivation programs for primary school teachers. Regarding the fact that no similar research has been conducted in Slovakia in a long time, the research results presented here are original and unique.

Keywords: teacher professional development; motivation of teachers; gender; diachronic view of motivation; primary school teachers



Citation: Javorčíková, J.; Vanderková, K.; Ližbetinová, L.; Lorincová, S.; Hitka, M. Teaching Performance of Slovak Primary School Teachers: Top Motivation Factors. *Educ. Sci.* **2021**, *11*, 313. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11070313>

Academic Editor: Katarína Stenberg

Received: 15 May 2021

Accepted: 21 June 2021

Published: 23 June 2021

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1. Introduction

Employees' personalities, expertise, talents, and skills represent an organization's human potential [1,2]. An employer expects high performance and a positive attitude from employees in the workplace [3,4]. Therefore, it is essential for each organization to recognize the factors that affect the behavior of individual employees [5,6]. As a result, focused and efficient employee motivation can secure the prosperity of an organization [7]. Motivated employees perform their work at a comparatively higher level than employees who are inappropriately motivated or not motivated at all. Employee motivation needs to be tailored to each employee and based on his or her personal characteristics. What motivates one employee may not motivate others. It is essential for supervisors to recognize those motivation factors that are significant and important to their employees, and to be aware of employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction related to individual motivation factors. In this way, potential dissatisfaction can be easily identified and prevented [8]. It has been confirmed that employees who feel uncomfortable and tired when performing their duties achieve low productivity and level of motivation. On the other hand, the expectations of high productivity and effectiveness from highly motivated employees are substantially higher than performance from poorly motivated employees [9].

An employee's performance is defined as their ability to achieve objectives and goals that result from their employment [10,11]. In this context, it is of key importance for supervisors to be aware of factors that motivate each employee. Supervisors often pay too much attention to the financial factors that affect an employee's motivation [9,12,13]. Undoubtedly, financial aspects are often significant [14–16]; however, they are not inevitably the most significant factors that affect the performance of employees [17]. There are also many other factors that can motivate employees [18–20]. As noted by Piñero Charlo et al. [20], Malchrowicz-Moško et al. [21], Fratričová and Kirchmayer [22], and Joniakova and Blstakova [23], an employee's determination to perform well also depends on the impact of cultural and social factors, as well as on social and demographic factors. Furthermore, according to Ryan and Deci [24], employees are also influenced by a variety of external conditions in the performance of their duties. Consequently, their productivity has a fundamental impact on complex corporate processes [25–30], on the overall development of their organization [31,32], on their organization's competitiveness [33–35], and, finally, on the development of all national economy sectors [36–40].

In the context of education, we understand teaching performance as a teacher's ability to adapt to a dynamic working environment, fulfilling their designated roles and passing knowledge to other generations [41,42]. In the past, a teacher's status in Slovakia was very respectable. Teachers represented moral authorities and sources of wisdom (with academic and social skills) [43]. In contemporary society, the teaching profession continues in its specific mission, aiming at the development of a harmonious personality, knowledge, wisdom, goodness, and creativity, and thus contributes to the development of education, science, culture, and health for the welfare of society as a whole [44,45]. At the same time, the teaching profession is highly challenging in terms of knowledge, personal skills, empathy, stress management, and the implementation of one's talent, as teachers not only affect students by what they say but also by their personality [46–49]. Such a profession requires constant professional growth, which also contributes to a teacher's internal satisfaction [49]. According to Stieben et al. [50], the continuous development of teachers can be diverse, including professional development and participation in common decision making. Teachers who can implement results of professional development are usually more eager to apply newly acquired teaching methods than untrained ones [51]. Other items contributing to satisfaction may include positive relationships with colleagues, opportunities for joint planning and decision making, and subsequent support of the supervisory and management staff [52,53].

Teaching motivation includes various activities, including continuous professional learning, efficiency, self-sufficiency, independence, and career goals [54]. Furthermore, teachers' motivation is significantly affected by self-sufficiency and involvement, which is reflected in higher teacher efficiency. The higher qualitative level the teacher acquires, the better prepared he or she is to handle and overcome stress and challenges in the work environment [55,56]. However, professional researchers should also take into consideration the fact that a teacher's values before, during, and after their work performance also affects a vast number of items, such as overall school culture and social values and norms of their respective school [57]. Teachers also vary in a number of individual characteristics that affect the methods they implement in their classes, as well as the timing of these methods [58,59]. According to previous research into the recognition and motivation of teachers and teacher profiles [60–63], several essential teacher profiles exist. The first teacher profile is characterized by an attitude requiring high teaching performance and high self-confidence, combined with a low performance attitude to teaching. The second teacher profile is characterized by an attitude showing low self-sufficiency combined with a high performance attitude to teaching. The third teacher profile is characteristic of several objectives and moderate self-effectiveness. It is represented by moderately motivated teachers who lack self-confidence. The fourth type is an unmotivated teacher with a lack of confidence and low pedagogical expertise. The last teacher profile is represented by those with low-level pedagogical expertise and high pedagogical value, as well as a good

attitude towards teaching and with sufficient expertise regarding the satisfaction of the learning needs of students.

A negative phenomenon is that the profession of teachers in Slovakia has been undervalued for a long time. Teachers are strongly dissatisfied, which has also been expressed by their strike threats in the past. These threats to strike resulted in negotiations between teacher trade unions and the government of the Slovak Republic, finally contributing to improvements in the social status of Slovak teachers. Moreover, the school system in Slovakia currently faces numerous problems. The school system cannot effectively respond to the diversity of interests and children's needs. The educational system does not eliminate risks of later potential failure over time. Teachers are not ready to implement a wide range of teaching methods, recognize the needs of individual learners, and respond to these individual needs by adjusting their teaching methods. These are just some of the issues that Slovak education faces. In addition, research results of Němec et al. [64] point out many other barriers to the effective development of Slovak schools, such as a lack of adequate funding and qualified personnel, poor equipment, an increasingly demanding educational process, insufficient educational devices, and the subsequent absence of modern and efficient methods. In spite of these negatives, teachers are interested in upgrading their teaching conditions and moving their schools and students forward towards more innovative methods. Another positive factor is that teachers themselves have many ideas about how to improve the teaching process. However, most of them do not have sufficient support for further quality education or enough funds to adapt teaching methods or purchase teaching aids, which largely reduces their motivation to improve performance. Subventions in the school system depend on the state; however, there are many other factors that have a significant impact on teachers' work performance and working conditions. Many researchers analyzed these factors [65–68] and confirmed the interconnection between teachers' work environment, their work conduct, and their motivation to work. Massry-Herzallah and Arar [65] claim it is management style—with the use joint decision making between supervisors and employees—that has an impact on raising the motivation and involvement of teachers to work. Joint decisions increase a feeling of autonomy and intensify teachers' commitment and enthusiasm for work. Similarly, teachers' performance is influenced by numerous external and internal factors. These include working motivation factors and financial, social, work, and career motivation factors [69,70]. This research proves that an appropriate work environment with the right management and motivation to work secures a high level of teacher performance [69,71,72]. With regard to the fact that no similar research has previously been conducted in Slovakia, the aim of this study is to identify factors that affect the motivation of Slovak primary school teachers from the point of view of their diachronic requirements, as well as preferences according to their gender.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Aim and Research Problems

The aim of this study was to identify factors that affect the motivation of Slovak primary school teachers from the point of view of their diachronic requirements, as well as preferences according to their gender.

Based on the previous research in gender differences in motivation [65,73,74], the following working hypotheses were formulated:

- WH1—The motivation of primary school teachers in Slovakia will not change over time;
- WH2—The motivation of primary school teachers in Slovakia will change over time and in relation to gender.

2.2. Description of the Research Sample

The motivation level of Slovak teachers was analyzed via data collected by a questionnaire. The questionnaires were electronically distributed. All parts of Slovakia were covered by the research sampling unit. A total of 1,189 Slovak teachers, with a stratified selection, were addressed in the period from 2015 to 2020. Data were processed in SPSS

(Statistical Package for The Social Sciences). The IBM® SPSS® (version 26.0, Armonk, NY, USA) software platform offers advanced statistical analysis, a vast library of machine learning algorithms, text analyses, open source extensibility, integration with big data, and seamless deployment into applications. Through statistical analysis, the level of motivation of primary school teachers from a gender perspective was defined. The sample unit description is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample unit description.

Factor		Year						Total	
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020		
Gender	Men	Count	8	68	70	25	24	29	224
		% within	3.6%	30.4%	31.3%	11.2%	10.7%	12.9%	100.0%
		% within year	9.3%	18.9%	19.7%	21.4%	16.0%	24.2%	18.8%
	Women	Count	78	292	286	92	126	91	965
		% within	8.1%	30.3%	29.6%	9.5%	13.1%	9.4%	100.0%
		% within year	90.7%	81.1%	80.3%	78.6%	84.0%	75.8%	81.2%
Total	Count	86	360	356	117	150	120	1189	
	% within	7.2%	30.3%	29.9%	9.8%	12.6%	10.1%	100.0%	
	% within year	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

In questionnaires, the respondents evaluated 30 motivation factors in terms of their satisfaction, importance, and motivation at their respective schools. Motivation factors in the structure presented in Table 2 were analyzed.

Table 2. Motivation factors analyzed.

Motivation factors relating to mutual relationships	1. Atmosphere in the workplace 2. Good work team 6. Communication in the workplace 17. Supervisor's approach
Motivation factors relating to career aspiration	8. Opportunity to apply one's own ability 14. Career advancement 15. Competences 16. Prestige 18. Individual decision making 19. Self-actualization 26. Personal growth 29. Recognition
Motivation factors relating to finance	3. Fringe benefits 21. Fair appraisal system 30. Base salary
Motivation factors relating to work conditions	4. Physical effort at work 5. Job security 9. Workload and type of work 10. Information about performance result 11. Working hours 12. Work environment 13. Job performance 22. Stress 23. Mental effort
Motivation factors relating to social needs	7. Name of the educational organization 20. Social benefits 24. Mission of the educational organization 25. Region's development 27. Relation to the environment 28. Free time

All factors were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (the least important/satisfied) to 5 (the most important/satisfied).

2.3. Research Procedure

The level of importance was evaluated by the arithmetic mean and other mathematical-statistical methods. Motivation factors were tested using Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha Cronbach Alpha takes into account the following intervals: $\alpha \geq 0.9$ (excellent); $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$ (good); $0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$ (acceptable); $0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$ (questionable); $0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$ (poor); $0.5 > \alpha$ (unacceptable). The internal reliability of individual scales of all analyzed motivation factors was measured when the Cronbach's Alpha reached $\alpha = 0.707$. Further, the correlation between the selected motivation factor (corrected item) and the rest of the motivation factors (total correlation) was tested. The results were greater than 0.3 (values range from 0.644 to 0.675) in all cases, which, according to de Vaus [75], is an indication that the items belong to the index and that the index is one-dimensional. In addition, it is possible to see from Cronbach's Alpha column whether a deleted item is a motivation factor that is removed from the index, and whether the Alpha value increases as a result. The results of Cronbach's Alpha testing for individual motivation factors are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The results of Cronbach's Alpha testing.

Motivational Factor	Scale Mean If Item Deleted	Scale Variance If Item Deleted	Corrected Item Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha If Item Deleted
Atmosphere in the workplace	18.16	4.028	0.512	0.337	0.644
Good work team	18.21	3.977	0.457	0.312	0.662
Supervisor's approach	18.28	3.769	0.477	0.229	0.653
Fair appraisal system	18.28	3.808	0.457	0.226	0.662
Basic salary	18.24	3.821	0.430	0.203	0.675

Given the nature of the data obtained, differences between arithmetic means of values of importance of multiple countries' motivation factors were tested by Tukey's HSD (honest significant difference). Tukey's HSD test is a single-step, multiple comparison procedure. It is also modified for a different number of observations in each group. It envisages independence between factor levels, homogeneity of variances, and normality. It can be used on raw data or in conjunction with an ANOVA (post hoc analysis) to find means that are significantly different from each other. The test makes it possible to determine whether a zero hypothesis should be rejected or an alternative hypothesis accepted [75,76]. In general, this test is used to test experimental hypotheses where the relationship of one quantity changes in connection with further variables. The level of significance $\alpha = 5\%$ was used [76,77].

3. Results

On the basis of the results of descriptive statistics, the order of importance of motivation factors in the monitored period was identified. The results presented in Table 4 show the average values of each motivation factor, 95% confidence intervals values of each motivation factor, which represents minimum (-95%) and maximum ($+95\%$) value, and a deviation from the average value. In the next analysis, attention will be paid to the first five motivation factor (Table 5).

Table 4. The order of importance of motivation factors in Slovak teachers in the period from 2015 to 2020 ¹.

Motivational Factor	Mean	Confidence Interval –95%	Confidence Interval 95%	Standard Deviation
Atmosphere in the workplace	4.64	4.60	4.67	0.602
Good work team	4.59	4.55	4.63	0.670
Base salary	4.56	4.52	4.60	0.745
Fair appraisal system	4.51	4.47	4.55	0.722
Supervisor’s approach	4.51	4.47	4.55	0.730
Job security	4.48	4.44	4.52	0.751
Communication in the workplace	4.47	4.43	4.51	0.709
Fringe benefits	4.43	4.39	4.47	0.739
Work environment	4.34	4.30	4.38	0.757
Working hours	4.32	4.27	4.36	0.778
Recognition	4.29	4.25	4.34	0.820
Stress	4.26	4.21	4.31	0.905
Workload and type of work	4.24	4.20	4.29	0.772
Social benefits	4.24	4.19	4.29	0.843
Opportunity to apply one’s own ability	4.24	4.19	4.28	0.812
Job performance	4.24	4.19	4.28	0.792
Self-actualization	4.24	4.19	4.28	0.801
Mental effort	4.17	4.12	4.22	0.925
Personal growth	4.17	4.12	4.22	0.849
Information about performance result	4.15	4.10	4.20	0.848
Free time	4.13	4.08	4.18	0.916
Individual decision-making	4.11	4.06	4.16	0.858
Career advancement	4.07	4.02	4.12	0.870
Mission of the educational organization	3.99	3.94	4.04	0.906
Relation to the environment	3.98	3.92	4.03	0.954
Name of the educational organization	3.95	3.90	4.01	1.007
Competences	3.94	3.89	3.99	0.938
Region’s development	3.83	3.78	3.88	0.964
Prestige	3.83	3.77	3.88	0.987
Physical effort at work	3.75	3.70	3.80	0.968

¹ Note: $n = 1189$.**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics: 5 most important motivation factors.

Motivation Factor		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1. Atmosphere in the workplace	Between groups	4.435	5	0.887	2.410	0.035
	Within groups	435.419	1183	0.368		
	Total	439.854	1188			
2. Good work team	Between groups	9.492	5	1.898	4.276	0.001
	Within groups	525.263	1183	0.444		
	Total	534.755	1188			
30. Basic salary	Between groups	22.416	5	4.483	8.166	0.000
	Within groups	649.443	1183	0.549		
	Total	671.859	1188			
17. Supervisor’s approach	Between groups	13.185	5	2.637	5.048	0.000
	Within groups	617.972	1183	0.522		
	Total	631.157	1188			
21. Fair appraisal system	Between groups	8.849	5	1.770	3.332	0.005
	Within groups	628.270	1183	0.531		
	Total	637.119	1188			

Figures 1–5 show the general average level of the most important motivation factors from 2015 to 2020. During those years, there is a change in the level of average importance. The change in 2015 and 2017 in “Good work team is significant”. In “Basic salary”, a signif-

icant change in 2016 was confirmed compared to 2015, 2017, and 2018. In “Supervisor’s approach”, significant differences between 2015 and 2016 can be observed. “Fair appraisal system” displays a significant difference between 2016 and 2019. The long-term underestimation of teachers’ work in Slovakia has caused considerable dissatisfaction among primary school teachers, and it has ultimately resulted in strike emergencies. Long-term underestimation was also the main reason for the frustration of teachers, which is reflected in the decline in the level of their motivation. Subsequently, the government of the Slovak Republic adopted several changes (mainly financial ones) that improved teachers’ social status in Slovakia. Since 2017, the level of motivation has generally increased.

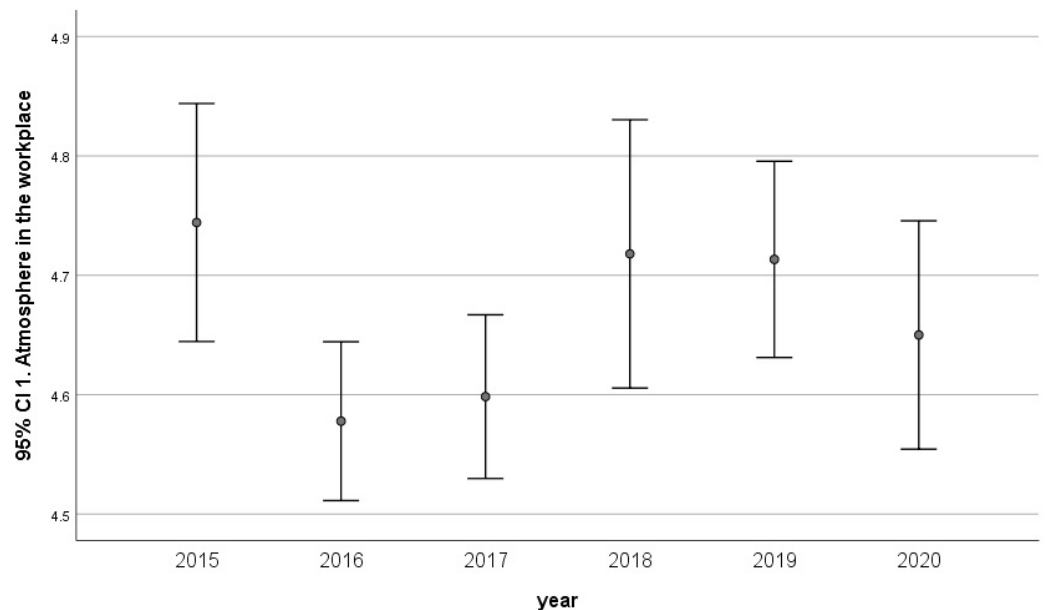


Figure 1. Average level of motivation factor: Atmosphere in the workplace.

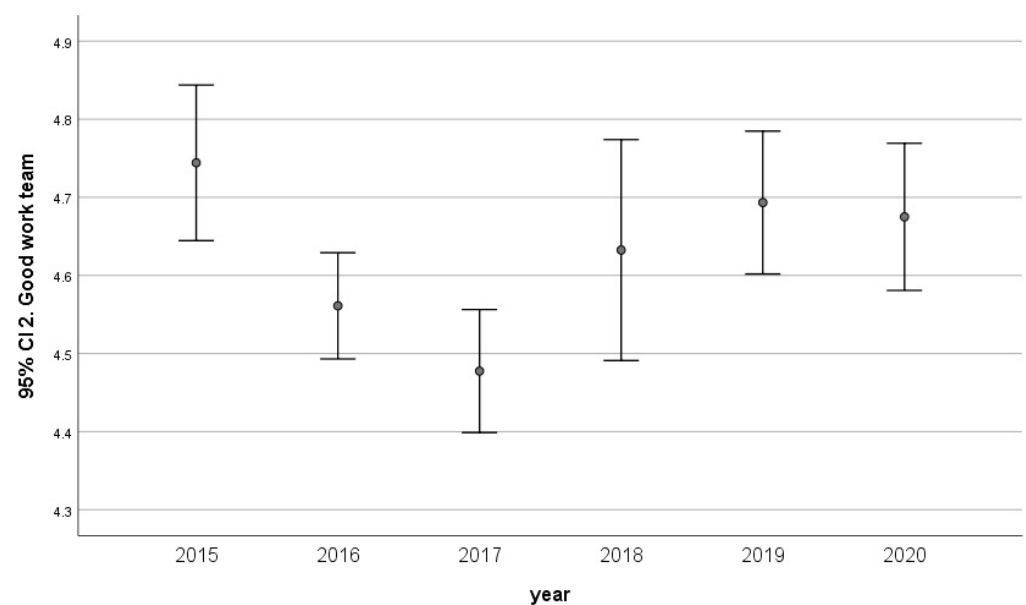


Figure 2. Average level of motivation factor: Good work team.

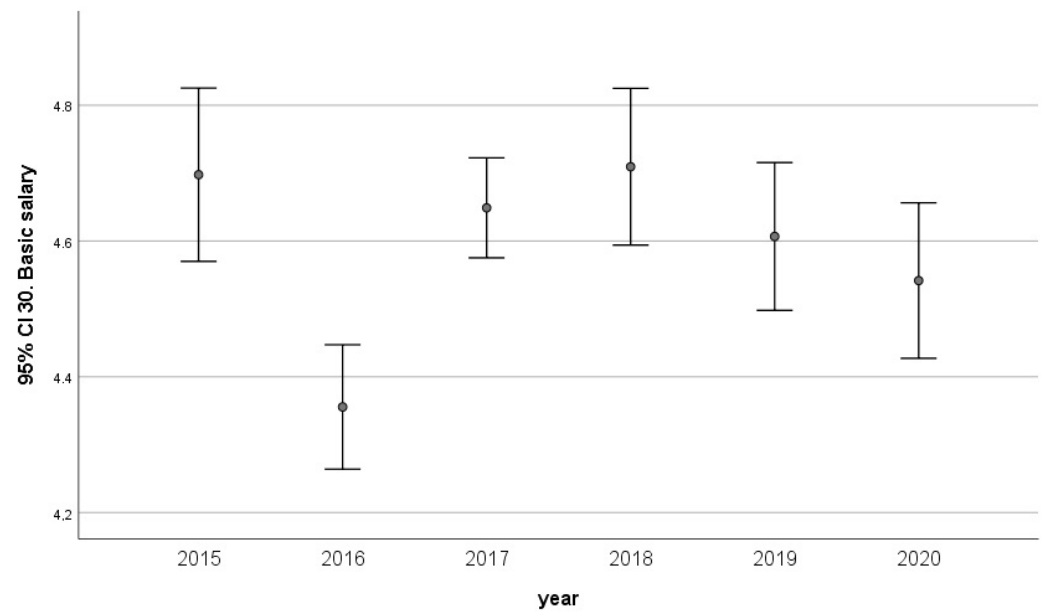


Figure 3. Average level of motivation factor: Basic salary.

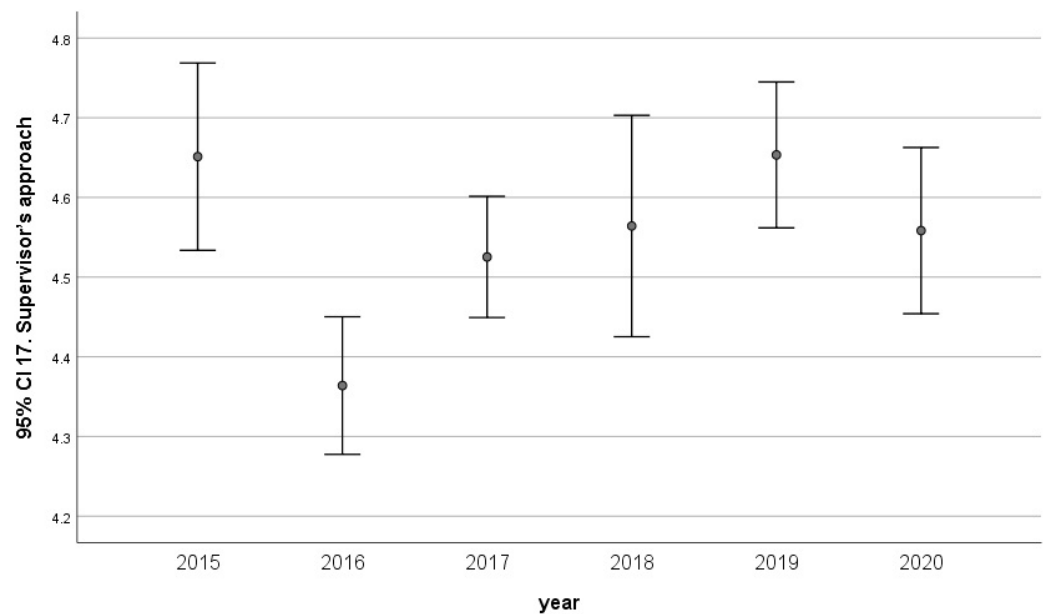


Figure 4. Average level of motivation factor: Supervisor's approach.

Furthermore, on the basis of the analyzed data, it can be concluded that, among teachers, a significant change in motivational requirements occur over time, although the structure of motivation factors has not been changed. Based on this, we decline working hypothesis WH1.

The following part of the research focused on gender-related motivation factors. In terms of gender, it is a fact that the Slovak school system employs significantly more women than men [74]. The share of a male population in the total sample is 18.84%, which corresponds to the gender structure of Slovak teachers.

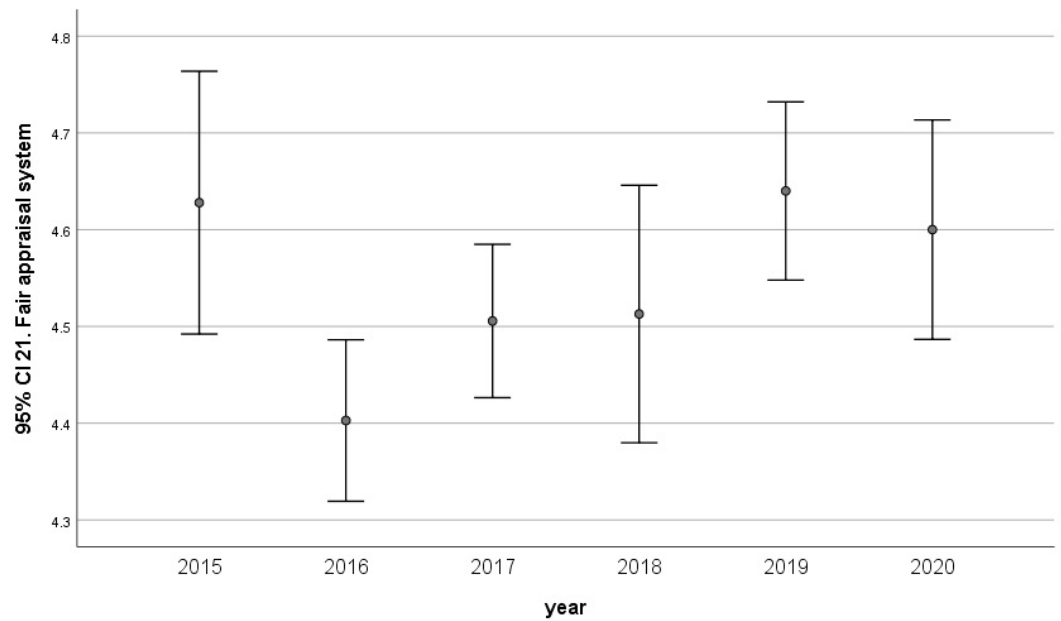


Figure 5. Average level of motivation factor: Fair appraisal system.

As for “Atmosphere in the workplace”, significant differences among men in 2020 were identified compared to women in all monitored years, except in 2016 (Figure 6). Statistical differences between genders were not confirmed (Figure 7) in “Good work team” (Figure 7). “Basic salary” displayed significant differences among men in 2017 and among women in 2016, as well as among women in 2018 and men in 2016 (Figure 8). “Supervisor’s approach” showed significant differences between men in 2016 and women in 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 (Figure 9). Finally, a “Fair appraisal system” proved significantly different between women in 2015 and men in 2015 and 2016 (Figure 10). By the aforementioned findings, the WH2 working hypothesis was confirmed.

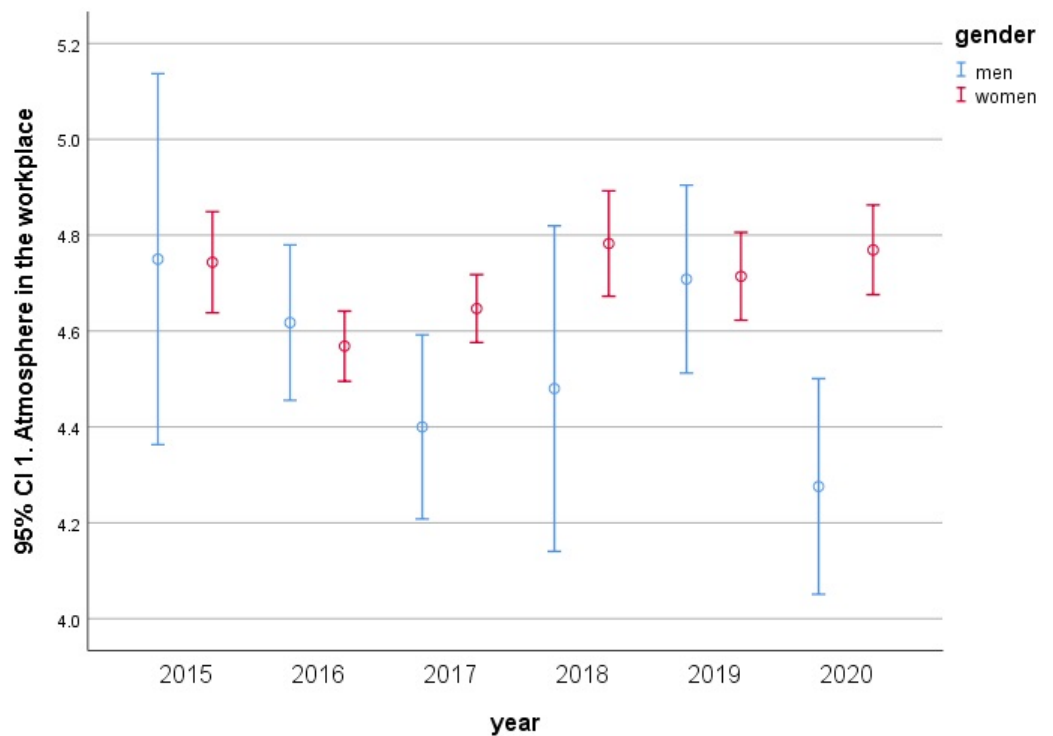


Figure 6. Gender-based differences of motivation factor: Atmosphere in the workplace.

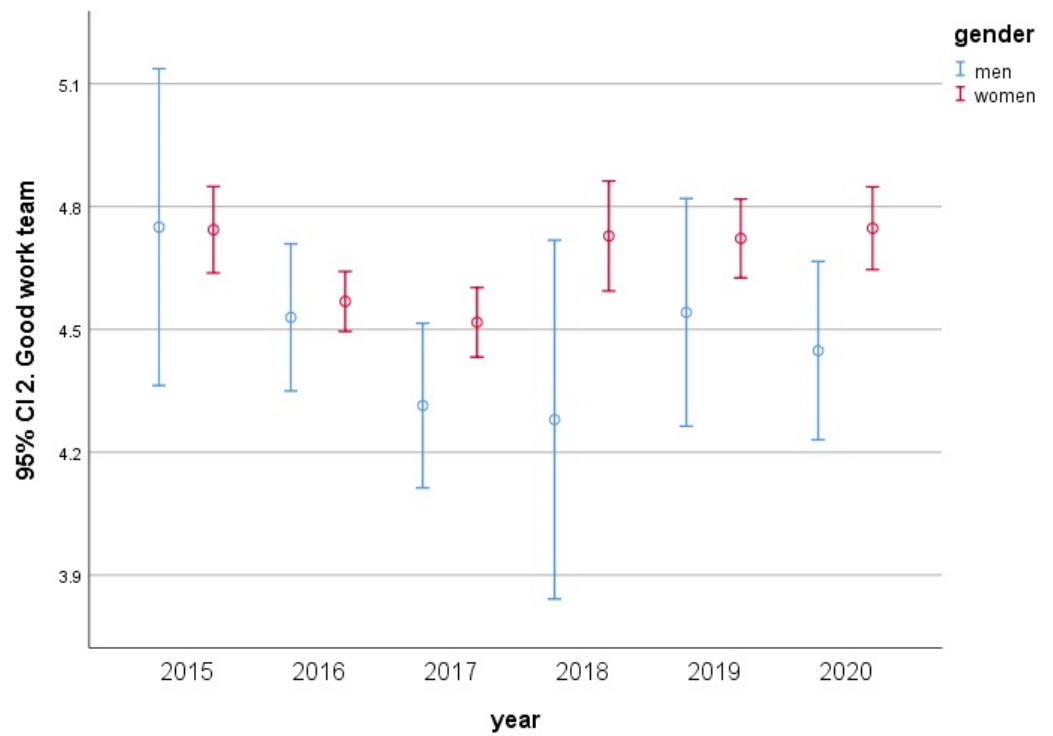


Figure 7. Gender-based differences of motivation factor: Good work team.

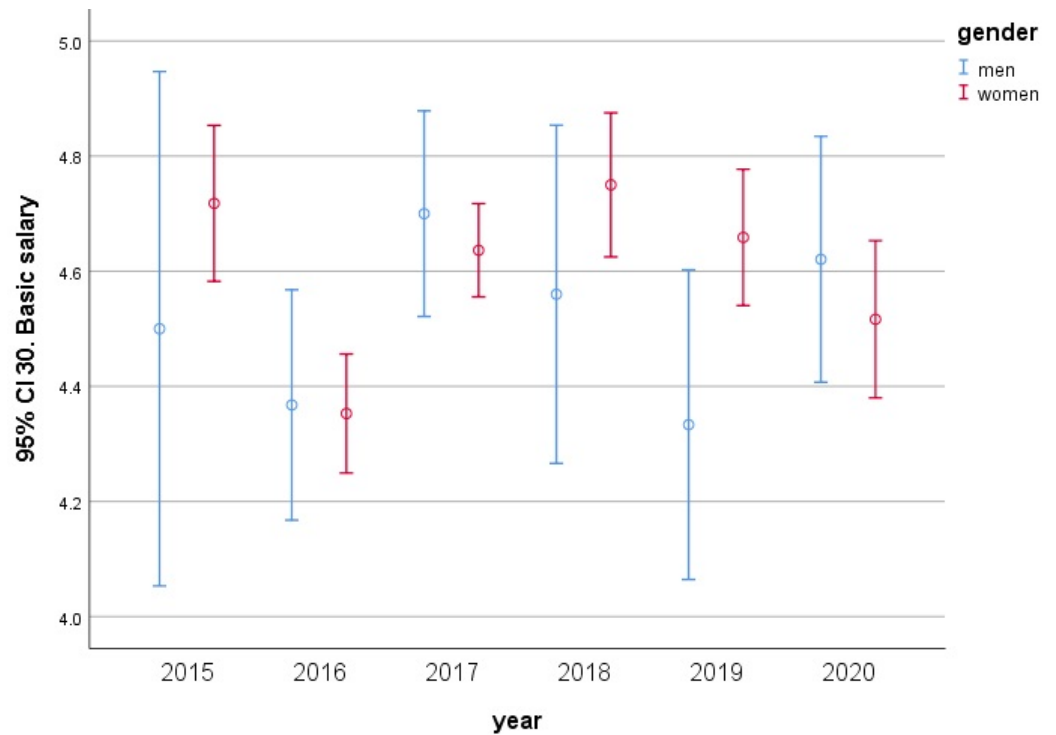


Figure 8. Gender-based differences of motivation factor: Basic salary.

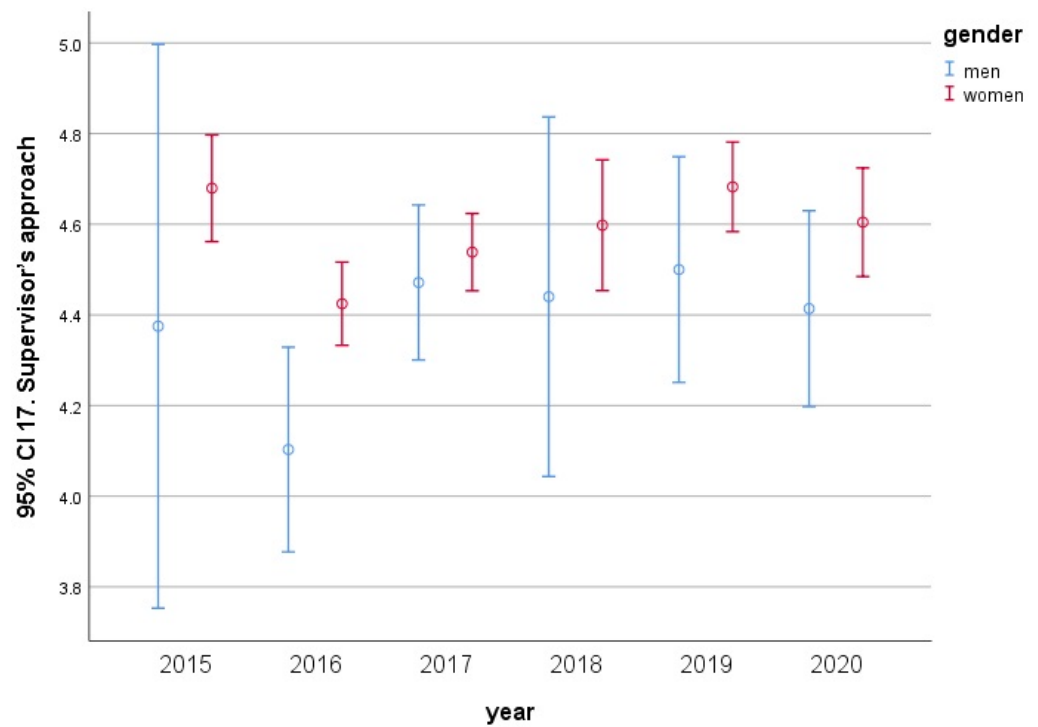


Figure 9. Gender-based differences of motivation factor: Supervisor’s approach.

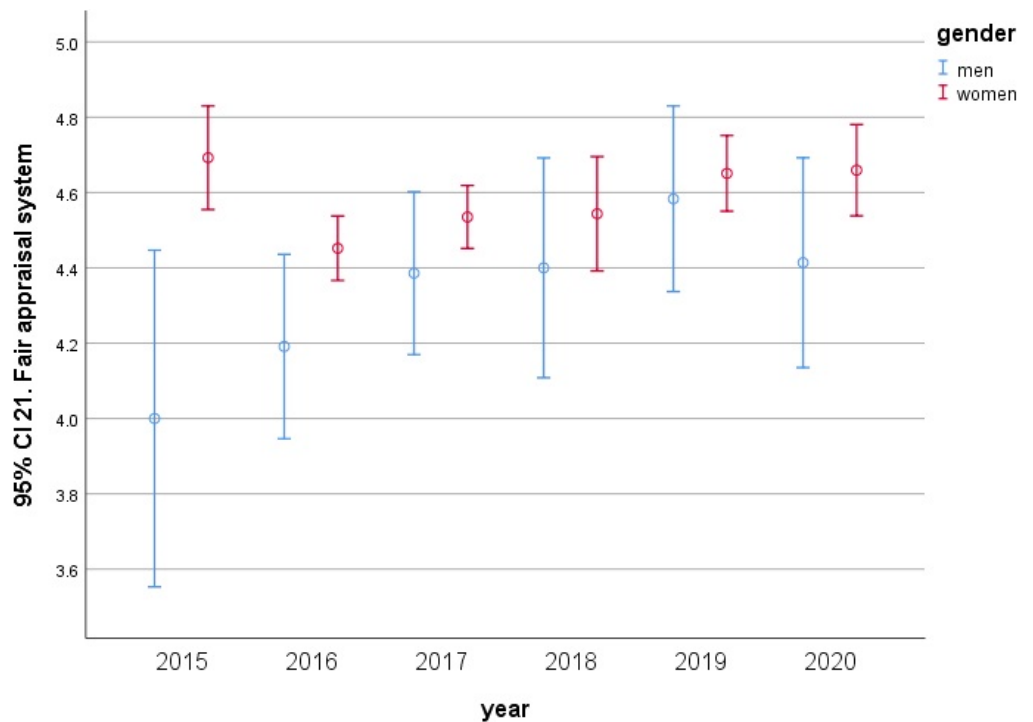


Figure 10. Gender-based differences of motivation factor: Fair appraisal system.

4. Discussion

The starting assumption was that the motivation of teachers in Slovakia would be unchanged over time. The results of the research, implemented from 2015 to 2020, show that Slovak primary school teachers consider atmosphere in the workplace, a good work team, a basic salary, a superior’s approach, and fair employee assessment to be the most important motivation factors in relation to their work. The research results confirmed that there was a significant change in motivation requirements among teachers, although

the structure of motivation factors remained unchanged. Financial motivation (basic salary) as the leading motivating factor over a long-term period is also confirmed by prior research [14–16,78–81]. The same results were confirmed by Al-Madi [70], who verified two of the most important factors: financial and relationship factors.

A comparable research of motivation needs conducted by Hartinah et al. [69] agrees with our findings; among the most important motivation factors affecting a teacher's performance are the motivation to be engaged in tasks, a supervisor's approach, and work environment. This proves that a suitable working environment, the right leadership, and the right motivation to work all lead to high teacher performance. Ozturk Akar [82] considers the most important motivation factors among teachers' internal career value to be basic salary, social influences, social contribution and work with children or adolescents, effective job opportunities, flexible working time, and time off during holidays and weekends. Our findings are also supported by the research of Massry-Herzallah and Arar [65], who show that an increase in the motivation and involvement of teachers is a result of management style and supervisor's approach, both of which use joint decision making between supervisors and employees.

Related research carried out in South Indonesia [67] also addresses the preference of motivation factors and employee management factors, and identifies the relationship between a supervisor's approach and motivational activities that affects a teacher's performance. Under the influence of transformational leadership that encourages teachers and increases motivation in order to increase performance, higher performance of a teacher is achieved more effectively. A leader works with teams to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration and executing the change in tandem with committed members of a group. It is an integral part of the full-range leadership model [83]. Another study conducted in Italy [68] points out differences in level of motivation between Slovak and Italian teachers. A fundamental difference lies in the fact that Italian teachers find motivation in their own efficiency, which is felt mainly when a teacher is given enough independence, as well as when teachers believe in themselves and in their ability to handle difficult situations and challenges. This research provides extra emphasis on the independence and autonomy of Italian teachers.

Our assumption was that, in terms of gender, the level of motivation of primary school teachers would be different in time. Our results confirmed this and corresponded with the research of Chebli et al. [84], Knapková et al. [85], Salem and Yunt [86], and Fernández-Muñoz and Topa [87]. There is still a significant difference in motivation levels in terms of gender during the selected years and in selected motivation factors; thus, we can conclude that there is some similarity in gender-based motivation requirements. This research finding will help supervisors to create similar motivational programs for their employees.

Further research conducted outside of Slovakia [76] points out that the level of motivation is affected by, and closely related to, believing in one's own efficiency and skills. Examining US teacher motivation, and considering subsequent research results obtained by Palermo and Thomson [51], points to the internal motivation of teachers. Additionally, a great impact on motivation is whether or not it has any social and pedagogical usefulness. Finally, it can be concluded that teachers' motivation is rooted in their own nature in relation to their professional growth, and in helping students to achieve their goals; these are values Slovak teachers do not consider important. Both foreign and Slovak teachers consider their supervisor's approach to be an important motivating factor. A teacher's performance depends on their supervisor's approach, as a teacher's performance is monitored, critiqued, praised, and criticized by their superiors. A director's approach also affects a good work team, the overall atmosphere in the workplace, and the working environment, which are all factors that influence employee satisfaction. Ashraf [88] also confirmed these conclusions in their research.

However, our research findings proved that, in addition to financial and relationship factors, Slovak teachers also display the need for a more respected social status and a better

public image of their profession. This need is directly related to their motivation and is based on personal self-realization. Financial stimuli alone will not suffice for its fulfilment. In the past, the teaching profession was highly respected and teachers were perceived as “mentors” [42]. According to Hroncová [42], their job was not only to transmit information but also to educate and lead their students. Looking at today’s view of the teaching profession in society, it is evident that the public image of a teacher has deteriorated, which is confirmed by research of Flores [89]. The original mission of their profession—a teacher as a role-model—is changing or diminishing.

5. Conclusions

This research examined what motivates teachers in primary schools and educational organizations, and focused on teachers’ preferences, with confirmed results that can help educational organizations and their directors and supervisors move forward in effective teaching management, thus leading to higher teacher satisfaction. As part of our research, the most important motivation factors of Slovak primary school teachers from 2015 to 2020 were defined.

The most important motivation factors of Slovak primary school teachers from 2015 to 2020 were relationship and financial motivation factors. It is a fact that many teachers perform in their occupation with enthusiasm and love. They devote personal and leisure time to their profession. At the same time, they are often intensively motivated by relationships in their work environment, as well as by working with students. Interestingly, the financial motivation is important, but it is not the most important factor. Therefore, the most frequent mistake is to focus on the financial aspect as the key one for increasing teacher motivation. Our research proved that other motivation factors also motivate Slovak teachers. A link between company academic findings and their application to the school system can be seen between defining the importance of relationship and financial factors that are superior to social, work, and career factors. School employees appreciate a good work team and financial evaluation the most, and are less interested in their career growth. Moreover, they are often willing to accept less satisfactory work conditions, a phenomenon typical for many Slovak schools. By maintaining and improving the highest motivation factors identified by Slovak primary school teachers, it will be possible for them to maintain enthusiasm for their demanding work as educators.

Further direction of the research can be seen in the research of teacher motivation from the point of age distribution, as well as from the perspective of teachers’ work categories. Moreover, it will be interesting, in the future, to monitor the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the level and motivational requirements of primary school teachers.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; methodology, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; software, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; validation, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; formal analysis, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; investigation, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; resources, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; data curation, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; writing—original draft preparation, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; writing—review and editing, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; visualization, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; supervision, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; project administration, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H.; funding acquisition, J.J., K.V., L.L., S.L. and M.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by KEGA, grant number 005TU Z-4/2020.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Acknowledgments: This research was supported by projects VEGA 1/0161/21 “Dependence of the type of corporate culture on the industries of Slovak enterprises and selected socio-demographic factors”, VEGA 1/0118/20 “Dyslexia as a cognitive-linguistic disorder and its symptoms in develop-

ing literacy skills in the mother tongue (Slovak) and a foreign language (English)”, KEGA 005TU Z-4/2020 “Economics, Management and Enterprising in Wood Industry Companies—university textbook with visualization support in virtual space”, and APVV-20-0004 “The Effect of an Increase in the Anthropometric Measurement of the Slovak Population on the Functional Properties of Furniture and the Business Processes”.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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