



Editorial

Editorial Introduction to Challenges of Teaching in Today's Society: Factors Involved in Educational Quality

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Contemporary Western societies coexist with diverse factors that continually redefine and transform them in response to the myriad social demands they face. Factors such as globalization, migration, advancements in information and communication technologies, the convergence of distinct religions, and the recent global COVID-19 pandemic often instigate profound social changes, reshaping values and fostering evolving trends. The apparent lack of control over the trajectory of society raises concerns about the potential disappearance of defining values and traditions, giving rise to undesirable challenges in fostering harmonious coexistence.

Nevertheless, societies are not powerless when confronted with these changes. They possess a potent asset for nurturing values grounded in coexistence, tolerance, and the preservation of identity, all while remaining open to contributions from diverse cultures. This invaluable resource can be found in educational models and public education, enabling societies to promote social cohesion and address the fundamental question that resonates within every society: *What kind of society do we aspire to become?*

In the realm of contemporary educational models, teachers stand out as principal agents in transformative or conservative processes. Yet, they are more than just educators; they are also citizens influenced by factors that exert a profound impact on societies. Confronted with the perpetual state of flux within societies, teachers encounter a substantial challenge, requiring adaptable training and professional development tailored to the ever-changing social circumstances surrounding them.

This Special Issue in the *Social Sciences* journal, entitled "Challenges of Teaching in Today's Society: Factors Involved in Educational Quality", aims to provide relevant scientific insights into the exploration of this multifaceted issue. The selection of articles included in this Special Issue emerged from a thorough review of around thirty scientific manuscripts, with seven being ultimately accepted for publication. Among these, five articles are anchored in empirical research on the topic, while two offer reviews of the previous literature. A summary of the most relevant aspects of each contribution is presented below.

Firstly, María Luisa Sierra-Huedo, Ana C. Romea, and Marina Aguarales contribute a study that analyzes the empirical research phase of the Erasmus+ Project "Schools as Learning Organizations". This cross-European investigation spanned Bulgaria, Italy, Turkey, and Spain, identifying barriers to transforming schools into learning communities. The study explores leadership styles and the application of a systemic perspective in schools, emphasizing the significance of transformational leadership and the implementation of a systemic approach. The findings reveal persistent systematic and cultural barriers but also unveil opportunities for fostering positive changes in schools.

Secondly, Roberto Sánchez-Cabrero, Lidia Mañoso-Pacheco, and Ana Cristina León-Mejía focus on the perceptions of future secondary school teachers regarding their training, the influence of gender on their perceptions, and their social image. Through a questionnaire of 1469 participants, the study reveals gender differences in the age at which



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an individual chooses a teaching career as well as prior experiences. Although no significant gender disparities were found in their perceptions of teacher training, women report more negative memories of their secondary school teachers. This underscores the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into curriculum planning for future educators (Sánchez-Cabrero et al. 2023).

Moving on, Pablo Herranz-Hernández and María Naranjo-Crespo contribute an empirical study that explores how language shapes thinking and morality, centering on the metaphor of hot and cold. The research analyzes the moral judgements of fourth- and sixth-grade primary school children in cold and warm situations. Overall, the study found that children negatively judge unhelpful behavior more in cold situations compared to warm ones. Additionally, older children display greater sensitivity to the influence of weather on their moral judgments. The authors suggest that these differences offer value insights for teachers aiming to instill inclusive values, proposing that the climate metaphor is a simple and effective tool for addressing moral issues with children.

Shifting focus, Carsten Kronborg Bak and Simon Schulin investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education, specifically the transition to online learning. Through focus groups with university students, the study seeks to comprehend how preferences influence their educational experience. It discusses effects on students, emphasizing regulation, learning approaches, and preferences for the online teaching environment. Results indicate that students with high self-regulation adapt better to online learning, while those preferring in-person teaching may encounter difficulties. The study concludes by stressing the importance of supporting students with self-regulated learning strategies and providing flexibility in the online teaching environment for daily teaching practices.

Next, Daiva Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė and Viktorija Strazdauskienė explore the personal qualities of a managerial leader in a high-quality educational institution in Lithuania. Drawing on the experiences of leaders, teachers, and parents, the study reveals that the most important qualities of a managerial leader include the ability to inspire, mobilize, empower, be tolerant, responsible, innovative, creative, and reliable. The study underscores the significance of shared leadership and mutual trust between the leader and the school community. Additionally, the characteristics of a high-quality educational institution, such as a focus on progress, performance assessment, and feedback, as well as community trust and support, are identified. The findings offer a comprehensive insight into the personal qualities and competencies necessary for a managerial leader in a high-quality educational institution.

Following this, Vanessa Botero-Gómez, Luis Germán Ruiz-Herrera, Alejandro Valencia-Arias, Alejandra Romero Díaz, and Juan Carlos Vives Garnique contribute a review article on the bibliometric analysis of the use of virtual tools in teaching and learning processes. The authors highlight the growth of publications focused on the adoption of virtual technologies, the design of pedagogical instruments, the preparation of relevant content, and the creation of virtual learning environments. The identified trends emphasize the importance of validated psychometric models, learning management, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the adoption of virtual technology in education. The study concludes that the implementation of virtual tools in education provides flexibility, expands educational coverage, and increases student motivation. The authors stress the need to understand the factors influencing technological adoption in order for educational institutions to align with current needs.

Lastly, María Dolores Pérez-Esteban, Jose Juan Carrión-Martínez, and Luis Ortiz Jiménez present a systematic review of the educational response provided to students with disabilities in higher education institutions. The study analyzes teachers' attitudes, innovative strategies, and current obstacles to the inclusion of students with disabilities in university settings. The results underscore the need to improve teachers' attitudes, implement inclusive strategies in classrooms, and eliminate architectural and academic barriers to ensure inclusive education. The study also highlights the crucial role of teacher

training, support for students with disabilities, and the promotion of active and flexible methodologies for effective inclusion in higher education.

In conclusion, the articles featured in this Special Issue, dedicated to the challenges of teaching in today's society, demonstrate the intricate nature of the addressed issues. The active engagement of these authors and their research signifies a substantial advancement in the professionalization of teaching. These studies effectively address contemporary challenges, including the complexities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, the integration of information and communication technologies, the imperative for educational inclusion, the evolving the landscape of teacher training, and the dynamics of co-teaching in classrooms. While considerable progress has been made, much work remains, and the future is likely to introduce novel challenges for educators. Ongoing research efforts will be essential to illuminate and navigate these emerging issues effectively.

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List of Contributions:

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