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Professional commitment and turnover intentions of elementary school teachers during educational crisis

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Objectives: This study examined professional commitment and turnover intentions among elementary school teachers in Israel during and after a period of educational disruption caused by COVID-19, investigating how demographic factors and satisfaction with life influenced these professional attitudes during systemic crisis.

Methods: Data were collected from 815 elementary school teachers at two time points: during the third COVID-19 lockdown (February 2021: T1, $n = 395$) and after returning to face-to-face teaching (June 2021: T2, $n = 420$) in Israel. Participants completed questionnaires measuring professional commitment, turnover intentions, and satisfaction with life. Analysis included independent t-tests to compare commitment and turnover intentions between time points, and hierarchical linear regression to identify predictors of professional commitment and turnover intentions.

Results: Professional commitment levels remained stable across both time points, while turnover intentions significantly increased after returning to face-to-face teaching. Seniority emerged as a significant predictor of both commitment and turnover intentions, with less experienced teachers showing higher turnover intentions. Full-time employed teachers demonstrated fewer intentions to leave compared to part-time teachers. Teachers with advanced academic degrees (M.A.) showed higher dropout intentions. Life satisfaction positively predicted professional commitment and negatively predicted turnover intentions. The regression models explained 13.8% of the variance in professional commitment and 16.8% of the variance in turnover intentions.

Conclusions and implications: This study uniquely contributes to the literature by examining teacher commitment and turnover through different phases of an educational crisis, providing novel insights into how the transition back to traditional teaching affects professional attitudes. The findings highlight the complex relationship between professional commitment and turnover intentions during systemic disruptions, particularly for vulnerable teacher subgroups with less seniority and advanced degrees. This research offers innovative guidance for developing targeted retention strategies, strengthening mentorship programs for new teachers, and creating career advancement opportunities within the education system—approaches that are crucial for maintaining workforce stability during and after educational crises.

KEYWORDS

professional commitment, elementary school teachers, turnover intentions, educational crisis, resource-rewards model

Introduction

Teaching is one of the most demanding and stressful professions (Shu, 2022; Buskila and Chen Levy, 2020; Jepson and Forrest, 2006). During the COVID-19 pandemic, an unsafe and unfamiliar reality challenged teachers both physically and mentally (Baloran and Hernan, 2020; Donitsa-Schmidt et al., 2021; Ramot and Donitsa-Schmidt, 2021). Many schools, universities, and colleges had to be closed and shift to remote teaching (Baloran and Hernan, 2020). The closing of educational institutions—which was done to curb the spread of the virus—impacted students, parents, and educational staff alike (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). Consequently, at the end of April 2020, approximately 90% of all students worldwide were studying from home. The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for educational systems worldwide, forcing rapid shifts between remote and face-to-face teaching modalities (UNESCO, 2020). While previous research has examined teachers' stress and burnout during this period (Brown, 2021; Shamir-Inbal and Blau, 2021), there remains a critical gap in understanding how professional commitment and turnover intentions fluctuated as teachers transitioned back to classroom teaching after extended periods of remote instruction. This study addresses this gap by examining whether the return to face-to-face teaching after a prolonged crisis period stabilized teachers' professional commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991) or, conversely, increased turnover intentions due to accumulated stress and changing workplace expectations (Zamarro et al., 2021). Understanding these patterns is essential for developing effective teacher retention strategies during and after educational disruptions (Donitsa-Schmidt et al., 2021; Ramot and Donitsa-Schmidt, 2021).

In Israel, the closing of educational institutions began in March (Buskila and Chen Levy, 2020), and in January–February 2021, a year after the COVID-19 outbreak in Israel, a third lockdown was imposed (Knesset, 2021) on educational institutions (Butoin and Kalosh, 2020). In fact, from the beginning of the year in September 2020 until March 2021, students of various age groups did not study in educational institutions for between 7 and 17.5 weeks of schooling. Distance learning was immediately and rapidly substituted for frontal (face-to-face) lessons during the lockdown.

Therefore, teachers were required to develop adaptability and adjust their thoughts, actions, and feelings to conduct themselves optimally and effectively (Baloran and Hernan, 2020). In this new reality, teachers faced challenges of deterioration of working conditions combined with a sudden change in teaching methods, workload which required preparing for online teaching and balancing home and work, and uncertainty imposed by disruptions in familiar work routines and daily activities, all of which are changes that increased stress (Brown, 2021; Diliberti et al., 2021).

It has been demonstrated that high levels of stress adversely affect productivity, mental health, and the desire of employees to retire (Klassen and Chiu, 2011; Moses et al., 2016). Surveys conducted worldwide among teachers during the first year of COVID-19 found that many of them felt stressed (Brown, 2021; Knesset, 2021), burned out, exhausted, anxious (Shamir-Inbal and Blau, 2021), and uncertain regarding their professional abilities (Sokal et al., 2020). In addition, many reported a desire to retire from the profession entirely (Kini, 2020; Page, 2020). However, there has been a change in the reality

related to COVID-19 over time (Aragasi and Pangandaman, 2021). In Israel, the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines and their prioritization for teachers, along with the implementation of health guidelines and a reduction in patient numbers, led to the resumption of in-person teaching and the discontinuation of capsules in most schools by April 2021 (Knesset, 2021). A curriculum for summer vacation was also published in May 2021 (Knesset, 2021). Furthermore, the pandemic provided opportunities for professional development, including online classes and support courses, thereby enabling teachers to gain confidence and competency in flexible learning (Hariri and Sumintono, 2020). The literature indicates a positive association between teachers' professional commitment and their intention to remain in their profession (Moses et al., 2016).

Recent research indicates that the closing down of schools and the transition to distance learning led many teachers to report a desire to drop-out from the profession (Kini, 2020; Page, 2020). One of the factors associated with absence and intention to drop out among teachers is professional commitment (Moses et al., 2016). Professional commitment is vital to successful teaching, as it motivates the teacher to perform tasks, improves the school environment, and drives students to action (Moses et al., 2016; Day, 2008). Teachers with high professional commitment remain longer in the system and are motivated to perform challenging tasks (Shu, 2022; Thien et al., 2014).

Professional commitment is related to affective factors such as a positive perception of life (Çevik, 2017). The decision to drop out from the profession may also be related to high-stress levels and mental health (Klassen and Chiu, 2011; Jepson and Forrest, 2006; Moses et al., 2016). Since COVID-19 affected teachers' personal and professional lives, mental health, and well-being (Shamir-Inbal and Blau, 2021), the current study aims to examine the professional commitment of teachers and their intention to leave the teaching profession a year after the outbreak (2021) and when returning to the face-to-face teaching routine.

The teaching profession and teacher shortage

The teaching profession is significant for the future of society, shapes the future generations, and is at the forefront of educational endeavors (Arbiv-Elyashiv, 2015). Teachers' motivation and professionalism are necessary conditions for the success of the education system (Day, 2008). However, teaching is known as one of the most demanding and stressful professions (Shu, 2022; Buskila and Chen Levy, 2020; Jepson and Forrest, 2006). In recent decades, researchers have indicated a significant shortage of teachers as one of the major challenges in the education system in Israel. Simultaneously, committees and educators emphasized the distress that exists in the teaching profession and even in the training of teachers in the face of social, occupational, technological, and educational changes as well as the need to update the profession and adapt it to the current era (Israel Ministry of Education, 2019).

A report (Knesset, 2022; Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021) regarding the status of the teaching profession in Israel indicated a shortage of educators and teachers in various subjects. This is assumed to be a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis, which was accompanied by a considerable intensification of the difficulties faced by the education system (Knesset, 2022).

Professional commitment and teachers' intentions to drop out of the profession

Professional commitment involves a deep identification with the values of the teaching profession and a sense of loyalty, motivation, and engagement in one's work (Brown, 1996) and is perceived as a life purpose (Nir, 2002); professional commitment is crucial for teachers' professional development (Nayci, 2021). According to Bogler (2005) and Somekh and Derech-Zehavi (2005), professional commitment among teachers is a multifaceted concept that includes career and occupational commitment. Teachers with high professional commitment invest their personal resources in advancing the field, aligning with professional values, and endorsing activities that promote twenty-first-century skills, coping with students, and a sense of identity with colleagues (Nayci, 2021; Bogler and Somech, 2004). On the other hand, low professional commitment may lead to negative consequences, such as poor performance, absenteeism, and intention to drop out (Brouwers and Tomic, 2000).

The multidimensional approach has become the most prominent method for examining teachers' professional commitment, which suggests that this construct can be divided into distinct factors (Hariri and Sumintono, 2020). Meyer and Allen (1991) suggested a three-dimensional commitment of teachers, which includes affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment. Affective commitment reflects the attachment of the teacher to the organization, characterized by a strong identification with the profession's goals and values, a willingness to exert effort for the benefit of the profession, and a desire to remain in it (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993).

The resource-rewards model (Sorensen and Tuma, 1981) provides a theoretical lens for understanding how teachers evaluate their professional commitment during periods of systemic disruption. This model suggests that teachers' decisions to remain in the profession are based on rational assessments of costs versus benefits (Buskila and Chen Levy, 2020), which may be significantly altered during educational crises when workloads increase while supports may decrease (Diliberti et al., 2021). Similarly, Meyer and Allen's three-dimensional commitment framework (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993) offers a structure for examining how different aspects of professional commitment (affective, normative, and continuance) may be differentially affected by educational disruptions, potentially explaining variations in turnover intentions across different teacher subgroups (Moses et al., 2016).

Normative commitment is a factor of loyalty and responsibility, which is based on the teacher's sense of duty and mutual obligation to the profession that is developed during their early socialization as new employees. Teachers with a high level of this commitment factor feel an obligation to remain in the profession (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993). The third factor of continuance commitment arises when teachers recognize the price of leaving the profession or the benefits of remaining in it. It is based on the notion that their cumulative investments—such as time, effort, and money—may disappear if they decide to leave. Additionally, limited availability of other employment alternatives may contribute to their decision to stay. Teachers with high continuance commitment remain in the profession because they feel obligated to do so (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993).

Low professional commitment to the teaching profession is related to teachers' drop-out intentions (Bentein et al., 2005; Brown and Wynn, 2007; Hackett and Lapierre, 2001; Smith and Rowley, 2005). Dropout intentions reflect the tendency to consider leaving the profession and pursue other professional alternatives. Studies have revealed that teacher drop out can have negative consequences for schools and the profession, including recruitment and training costs, difficulty establishing community and optimal relationships among teachers, and potential harm to students' academic progress (Brown and Wynn, 2007; Smith and Rowley, 2005). Zamarro et al. (2021) contend that elevated levels of job dissatisfaction and intentions to turnover among teachers could impair their effectiveness and potentially undermine the academic progress of students. However, the literature indicates that the major problem for schools is not a shortage of teachers coming into the system but rather the fact that many of the newly graduated teachers choose not to go to teach at all or to leave after just a few years of teaching (Lindqvist et al., 2014).

To prevent teachers from turnover, researchers have examined factors that predict professional commitment (Smith and Hall, 2008; Snape and Redman, 2003). These factors can help to foster a sense of belonging and commitment among teachers, thereby leading to increased job satisfaction and lower intention to drop out.

Predicting teachers' professional commitment

Research suggests that specific factors contribute to teachers' professional commitment (Moses et al., 2016). Fresko et al.'s (1997) model proposes that teachers' professional commitment can be predicted by both job-related variables and internal emotional variables.

Job-related variables are objective factors related to a teacher's work, such as seniority, education level, school role, and job scope. A variety of studies have revealed that professional demographic variables can predict teachers' professional commitment, although there is no single conclusion on this subject; in addition, as education level increases, teacher commitment increases as well (Boa et al., 1997). However, other studies did not confirm a conclusion regarding education level (Strunk and Robinson, 2006) or even found the opposite conclusion (Arbiv-Elyashiv, 2015).

According to studies (Steiner and Woo, 2021; Toropova et al., 2021; Zamarro et al., 2021; Hariri and Sumintono, 2020) that examined how professional demographic variables influence teachers' commitment to their profession during COVID-19, younger teachers (particularly women) are more likely to consider retiring from the profession following the COVID-19 pandemic due to childcare responsibilities as compared to their peers. Moreover, teachers who hold key positions in the school other than teaching (such as managerial positions) revealed a greater commitment to their profession due to a sense of meaning they attach to their work and opportunities for professional growth.

The resource-rewards model (Sorensen and Tuma, 1981) offers a theoretical framework that can be applied to predict a demographic variable. As presented in Figure 1, the model focuses on the decision-making processes of employees and can elucidate the impact of the work environment on their willingness for occupational mobility. Specifically, the model assumes that the decision to remain in teaching is based on

rational economic considerations of cost versus benefit calculations, which are influenced by the teacher's characteristics (e.g., seniority, experience, education level, and role in the school) and the rewards of their job (e.g., salary, opportunities for promotion, and prestige). The model posits that employees expect their job remuneration to be proportional to their resources, such as their education level or seniority, which can contribute to personal and occupational security at work, professional advancement, and salary increments (Buskila and Chen Levy, 2020). Therefore, the resource–rewards model provides a useful framework for understanding the factors that influence teachers' decisions to remain committed to their profession.

The current study suggests that certain professional demographic variables—including seniority, education level, role in the school, and job scope—are likely to positively predict professional commitment among teachers. Specifically, as these variables strengthen, so does the level of professional commitment. The school sector variable, which represents different school types (public, state religious, and special education), does not appear to have a direct impact on teachers' professional commitment. Along with these demographic variables, internal emotional variables, such as satisfaction with life (SWL), can also predict teacher professional commitment (Baloran and Hernan, 2020; Fresko et al., 1997).

SWL has long been a central topic of interest due to its association with positive variables such as happiness, joy, and meaning. As a component of positive psychology, it shifts the focus from problems and deficits to positive traits in order to promote quality of life, optimal functioning, and resilience in the face of stress and life events (Jamal et al., 2014). SWL is a cognitive process that involves a person's self-determined criteria for assessing their overall quality of life. This judgment is made by comparing one's current life circumstances to self-established standards. SWL is dynamic and can fluctuate based on various life factors, such as positive daily experiences, personal meaning, achievement, positive identity, physical and financial well-being, and social support (Guess and McCane-Bowling, 2016).

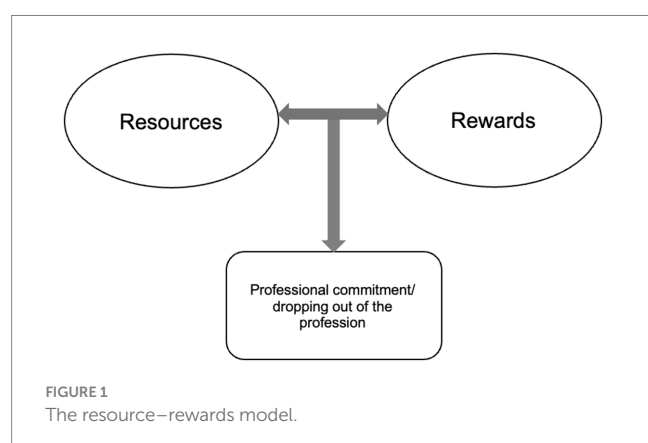
Research suggests a link between SWL and a teacher's attitude toward their work, thereby indicating that a positive perception of one's life may enhance professional commitment (Çevik, 2017; Squilini, 1999). Given the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' personal and professional lives, mental health, and well-being (Shamir-Inbal and Blau, 2021), it is worthwhile to investigate whether SWL predicts professional commitment during this period. Furthermore, previous studies have demonstrated that

both professional demographic and internal emotional variables are associated with teachers' professional commitment.

This study makes a significant contribution by examining professional commitment and turnover intentions at two critical time points—during remote teaching and after returning to face-to-face instruction—providing insight into how these professional attitudes evolve through different phases of an educational crisis. Unlike previous research that has primarily focused on teacher stress during the initial pandemic response (Shamir-Inbal and Blau, 2021; Donitsa-Schmidt et al., 2021), this study examines how the transition back to traditional teaching environments affected teachers' professional commitment and career decisions, offering valuable insights for education systems navigating recovery from systemic disruptions. Additionally, by identifying which teacher subgroups were most vulnerable to increased turnover intentions (Kini, 2020; Page, 2020), this research provides targeted guidance for retention strategies that address the specific needs of teachers based on their career stage, employment status, and educational background (Smith and Rowley, 2005; Brown and Wynn, 2007). This study addresses significant gaps in the existing literature on teacher commitment and turnover during educational disruptions. While previous research has examined teacher stress and burnout during COVID-19 (Shamir-Inbal and Blau, 2021; Brown, 2021), our work uniquely investigates how professional commitment and turnover intentions evolve as teachers transition between remote and face-to-face instruction modalities. The novel two-time-point design captures a critical transition period in the educational system's response to the pandemic, providing insights that single-timepoint studies cannot offer. Furthermore, this research makes an original contribution by applying both the resource–rewards model and Meyer and Allen's three-dimensional commitment framework specifically to elementary school teachers during an educational crisis—a population and context combination that has received limited attention in previous studies. By examining how different teacher subgroups respond to these disruptions, this study offers unprecedented insights into vulnerability factors that can inform targeted retention strategies. Additionally, while most existing research focuses on teacher well-being during crises (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021), our study uniquely examines the interplay between professional commitment, turnover intentions, and satisfaction with life as teachers navigate systemic disruptions, providing a more comprehensive understanding of teacher retention challenges.

The current study

Professional commitment is a key factor in motivating teachers to successfully teach, perform educational tasks, and improve the school environment (Moses et al., 2016; Day, 2008). Teachers who demonstrate higher levels of commitment tend to remain in the education system for longer periods of time and are more motivated to tackle challenging tasks (Shu, 2022; Thien et al., 2014). This commitment is influenced by both emotional factors and the teachers' perception of their lives as well as professional-demographic resources such as seniority, experience, education level, and role in the school (Çevik, 2017). However, to the best of our knowledge, the interplay among these resources has not been studied extensively in the context of the COVID-19 crisis in Israel, particularly among elementary school teachers who faced unique challenges during the pandemic (Donitsa-Schmidt et al., 2021; Kneset, 2021; Ramot and Donitsa-Schmidt, 2021).



This study offers several novel contributions to the existing literature on teacher commitment and turnover intentions. First, while previous research has extensively examined teacher commitment under normal conditions (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993; Moses et al., 2016), this study provides a unique perspective by investigating professional commitment during a specific educational crisis, offering insights into how systemic disruptions impact teacher attitudes and career decisions. Second, the two-time-point design (during lockdown and after return to face-to-face teaching) allows for a nuanced understanding of how commitment and turnover intentions evolve across different phases of an educational crisis. Third, this research uniquely combines the resource-rewards model with Meyer and Allen's three-dimensional commitment framework to provide a comprehensive theoretical approach to understanding teacher retention during educational disruptions. Fourth, our study focuses specifically on elementary school teachers in Israel, offering contextual insights that complement existing international literature predominantly focused on secondary and higher education settings. Finally, by examining how different teacher subgroups (based on seniority, education level, and employment status) respond to educational crises, this study provides targeted insights that can inform differentiated retention strategies—an approach that has been underrepresented in previous literature on teacher commitment during crisis periods.

Based on the reviewed literature, the present study postulates the following hypotheses:

H1: Elementary teachers' professional commitment (total score and its subscales) was higher upon returning to the face-to-face teaching routine in June 2021 (T2) than in February 2021 (T1).

H2: The intention to drop out of the profession was lower upon returning to face-to-face teaching in June 2021 and higher during February 2021.

H3: In line with the resource rewards model, teachers' demographic and professional demographic variables (such as seniority, level of education, position in school, and scope of the job) and satisfaction with life had a positive relationship with elementary teachers' professional commitment upon returning to face-to-face teaching in June 2021 (T2) and is predictive of their commitment.

H4: Teacher's demographic and professional variables and satisfaction with life predicts teachers' intentions to drop out.

Methods

Participants

This study surveyed 815 elementary teachers from public schools, religious schools, and special education schools across Israel, using an online panel in Israel (Panel4All).

The questionnaire was sent as a link to teachers. Of these, 469 teachers responded to the questionnaire at time 1 (T1) during the third COVID-19 lockdown in February 2021, with 395 being elementary school teachers who completed the full questionnaire. An

additional 551 teachers responded to the time 2 (T2) questionnaire in June 2021, after returning to face-to-face teaching. Of these respondents, 420 elementary school teachers completed the questionnaire. Further, 89–90% of the participants were female teachers (see Table 1) and had a mean age of approximately 40 years.

The sample of teachers in T1 were characterized by a higher rate of public-school teachers (79%) than those in the T2 sample (58%), and less religious schoolteachers (14%) as compared to those in the T2 sample (26%). In addition, a lower proportion of special education teachers was found among T1 teachers (7%) than among T2 teachers (15%; $\chi^2 = 40.41, p < 0.001$). Compared to the T2 sample (36%), T1 teachers were more likely to teach part-time (46%). ($\chi^2 = 6.67, p \leq 0.006$) than T2 teachers (36%). In addition, 93% of the teachers in T1 and 92% of the teachers in T2 were native Hebrew-speaking teachers and others were Russian or spoke other languages ($\chi^2 = 1.00, p = 0.32$). No difference was found in the age of both samples ($\chi^2 = 0.20, p = 0.96$) or their level of education ($\chi^2 = 1.27, p = 0.57$).

Tools

Demographic questionnaire

The variables included in the questionnaire were gender, age, seniority, level of education, school sector, and job scope.

Teacher commitment scale

To evaluate the level of commitment toward the profession, the 18-item scale developed by Meyer et al. (1993) was utilized. The statements of the questionnaire were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'never true about me' to 'always true about me'. Higher scores indicated a higher commitment to the teaching profession. The items within the instrument demonstrated internal consistency with a reliability of 0.89. The commitment profession scale represents three factors of commitment: (1) Affective commitment, which includes six items—for example, 'The teaching profession is important to my self-esteem'; the reliability of this subscale was 0.83. (2) Normative commitment, which includes six items—for example, 'People who were trained to teach have a responsibility to stay in the profession'; the reliability of this subscale was 0.86. (3) Continuous commitment, which includes six items—for example, 'It is not worth leaving the teaching profession now that I invested so much in it'; the reliability of the subscale was 0.76.

Intention to leave the profession

The intention to leave the teaching profession was assessed by a questionnaire given by Welsh et al. (1985) comprising three items, including thoughts of leaving the teaching profession—for example, 'I considered leaving my place of work'. A high score represented a high intention to drop out of teaching; the reliability of this scale was 0.80.

Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)

The SWLS (Diener et al., 1985, translated by Shrira and Shmotkin, 2008) is a widely used five-item index designed to measure global cognitive judgments regarding life satisfaction (well-being), which is associated with positive life outcomes (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The scale includes items such as 'So far I have achieved the important

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics of the characteristics of elementary school teachers in February 2021 during the third lockdown (T1) and June 2021 (T2).

Variable	Category	T1		T2		χ^2
Gender	Male	40	10%	45	11%	0.10
	Female	355	90%	371	89%	
Job scope	Full time	215	54%	268	64%	6.67**
	Part time	180	46%	154	36%	
Sector of school	Public	311	79%	246	58%	40.41***
	State religious	57	14%	111	26%	
	Special education	27	7%	65	15%	
Level of Education	Above high school	30	8%	36	9%	1.27
	B.A.	242	61%	237	58%	
	M.A.	123	31%	138	34%	
Age	<=35	166	42%	182	43%	0.20
	36–45	103	26%	111	26%	
	46+	126	32%	129	31%	
Mean (SD)		39.8 (11.3)		40.1 (11.1)		
Seniority	<=5	141	36%	148	35%	1.40
	6–10	87	22%	81	19%	
	11+	166	42%	193	46%	
Mean (SD)		12.2 (10.2)		12.4 (10.2)		

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

things I want in life'. Participants indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the five items using a seven-point scale that ranges from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The reliability of the translated questionnaire in the present study was alpha 0.88.

Procedure

Online questionnaires were sent to all teachers registered in the panels (6,052). The questionnaires were preceded with informed consent forms that explained the purpose of the study, assured confidentiality, and explained the possibility of leaving the study at any time. As a criterion for participation (inclusion criteria), the questionnaire also required native Hebrew speakers and elementary school teachers. Participants who failed to meet these criteria were excluded from the sample's initial response stage.

The study was approved by both the Ethics Committee of Haifa University's Faculty of Education and the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Education in Israel.

Statistical analysis

To address potential common method bias concerns, we examined the correlation matrices at both time points (T1 and T2) following procedures recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). This approach follows recommendations to assess whether extremely high correlations (>0.90) exist among study variables, which would suggest common method variance issues (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Our analysis revealed that correlations among variables ranged from 0.01 to 0.45 at

T1 and from 0.02 to 0.48 at T2, with most correlations well below 0.30 at both time points. The highest correlations at both time points were between satisfaction with life and emotional commitment (0.45 at T1; 0.48 at T2). The absence of extremely high correlations and the differential patterns of relationships across variables suggest that common method bias is not a substantial concern in our data, supporting the discriminant validity of our constructs.

The first hypothesis, which examined the differences among elementary teachers in commitment to the profession (total score and subscale), was tested by a t-test for independent samples. To examine the second hypothesis, Pearson's correlation was performed among the teachers' demographic variables, professional variables, SWL, and teachers' commitment (total score and four subscales).

To examine the prediction of teachers' commitment to the profession, a hierarchical linear regression was conducted, with background and professional characteristics and SWL as predictors. Demographic variables (gender) and professional demographic variables (job scope, level of education, sector of the school) were coded as dummy variables, with the omission of the largest category.

Results

It was hypothesized that elementary teachers' professional commitment and its related subscales were higher in T2 when returning to the face-to-face teaching routine in June 2021 than that during the third lockdown in February 2021. As evident in Table 2, teachers' commitment did not change between T1 and T2. Furthermore, it was hypothesized (hypothesis 2) that the intention to drop out was lower in T2 than T1 during the third lockdown in February 2021. Contrary to our hypothesis, the teachers reported

TABLE 2 Means, standard deviations, and t-test results to compare the factor of teachers' professional commitment between two measurements.

Variable	T1: Feb 21, during the third lockdown (n = 396)		T2: Jun 21, after returning to face-to-face teaching routine (n = 419)		T (Cohen's D)
Total commitment	3.28	0.55	3.27	0.62	0.10 (0.01)
Emotional commitment	3.51	0.58	3.54	0.62	0.67 (0.05)
Normative commitment	3.16	0.70	3.13	0.77	0.58 (0.04)
Continuous commitment	3.15	0.77	3.14	0.81	0.20 (0.01)
Intentions to dropout	2.46	1.07	2.68	1.21	2.82** (0.20)

** $p < 0.01$.

higher intentions to drop out of the profession in T2 compared to their intentions to drop out in T1.

Next, we examined the hypothesis regarding the relationships among teachers' demographic and professional demographic variables and SWL to teachers' commitment at T2. Pearson's correlation was performed between teachers' background and professional characteristics and SWL to teachers' self-reported commitment (total score and subscales). As evident from Table 3, teachers' self-reported higher SWL was related to teachers' self-reported higher commitment (total score and subscales) and lower intentions to drop out. In addition, higher teacher seniority was found to be related to higher commitment and less intention to drop out of the profession. Teachers' age was found to correlate in a similar manner, but with lower correlations than seniority, to self-reported commitment and self-reported intentions to leave. In addition, teachers' full-time job was found to relate significantly but with weak correlations with more teachers' commitment to the profession and lower score of self-reported intentions to drop out of the profession.

In order to examine the third and fourth hypotheses, the significantly correlated variables were included in a regression model to predict teachers' self-reported commitment (total score) and intentions to drop out (subscale) at T2, after returning to face-to-face teaching. Teachers' age was excluded from the model due to high correlation with teachers' seniority.

Prediction of commitment to the teaching profession

The third hypothesis posed that the teachers' background and professional characteristics and SWL predict teachers' professional commitment in T2, after returning to face-to-face teaching. The regression results (Table 4) revealed that in T2, the teacher's academic education (i.e., B.A or M.A) was found to predict less commitment to the teaching profession, with 3.7% of explained variance. In addition, higher SWL predicted higher commitment to the profession, with the addition of 10% of explained variance. The total explained variance of commitment to the teachers' profession was 13.8%.

Prediction of intentions to drop out of the teaching profession

Next, we examined what will predict teachers' intention to drop out at T2 (hypothesis 4). The regression at T2 revealed that full-time

working teachers expressed fewer intentions to drop out of their profession than teachers with M.A. education. These variables explained 10% of the explained variance of intentions to drop out of the profession. Satisfaction with life remained a significant predictor of fewer intentions to drop out of the profession at this time as well, with the addition of 6.9% of explained variance. The total explained variance of this model was 16.8%.

Discussion

This study examined professional commitment and turnover intentions among elementary school teachers during and after a period of educational disruption caused by COVID-19. The educational system was affected dramatically from the crisis related to the pandemic. This impact manifested as augmented stress levels amongst educators and a heightened propensity toward exiting the profession (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Kini, 2020; Page, 2020). The buffer against this attrition has been noted to be the teachers' commitment to their profession, thereby providing resilience (Thien et al., 2014; Bogler and Somech, 2004). The period following the return to teaching after the COVID-19 crisis represents a case study of the educational system's resilience and its ability to recover after a significant disruption.

Changes in professional commitment between lockdown and return to face-to-face teaching

Contrary to our first hypothesis, we found no significant change in teachers' self-reported professional commitment (total score and subscales) between February 2021 (T1) during lockdown and June 2021 (T2) after returning to face-to-face teaching. This stability in commitment levels contradicts what might be expected after returning to familiar teaching environments. Our findings align with Meyer and Allen (1991) conceptualization of professional commitment as a relatively stable psychological state that may not fluctuate dramatically across short-term contextual changes. Similar stability in teacher commitment during COVID-19 was observed by Akartuna and Serin (2022), who noted that while specific aspects of commitment might shift, overall professional identification remained relatively constant for many teacher groups.

The stability of professional commitment despite dramatic changes in teaching modality suggests that elementary teachers' core professional values and identification with teaching remained intact

TABLE 3 Pearson's correlation coefficients between teachers' background and professional characteristics to teachers' self-reported total commitment and four commitment subscales for the T2 sample.

T2 variables	Total commitment	Emotional commitment	Normative commitment	Continuous commitment	Intentions to leave
Gender	0.02	−0.01	0.07	−0.01	0.07
Full-time	0.07	0.10*	0.03	0.05	−0.14**
State school	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.01	−0.02
Special education	−0.03	0.00	−0.09*	0.03	0.07
BA degree	−0.04	0.00	−0.05	−0.04	−0.02
MA degree	−0.03	−0.04	−0.02	−0.03	0.04
Age	0.10*	0.10*	0.04	0.11**	−0.21***
Seniority	0.13**	0.12**	0.07	0.15***	−0.25***
SWL	0.35***	0.48***	0.25***	0.20***	−0.28***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; $n = 408$ – 419 .

TABLE 4 Hierarchical linear regression results to predict teachers' self-reported professional commitment (total score) and teachers' intentions to drop out at T2 by teachers' background and professional characteristics and teachers' SWL.

Predicted	Teachers' commitment to the profession (T2)				Teachers' intentions to drop out (T2)			
	First step		Second step		First step		Second step	
	Beta	p	Beta	p	Beta	p	Beta	p
Male teachers	0	0.96	0.02	0.66	0.08	0.10	0.07	0.17
Full time teachers	0.05	0.31	0.02	0.67	−0.13	0.006	−0.11	0.02
State school	0	0.99	0.04	0.45	0.04	0.43	0.01	0.87
Special education school	−0.01	0.80	−0.01	0.91	0.06	0.25	0.06	0.28
BA	−0.22	0.01	−0.2	0.02	0.09	0.31	0.06	0.44
MA	−0.26	0.005	−0.23	0.008	0.21	0.02	0.19	0.03
Seniority	0.13	0.01	0.11	0.02	−0.25	<0.001	−0.24	<0.001
SWL			0.32	<0.001			−0.27	<0.001
Summary of the model	$F(7,397) = 2.18, p = 0.035, R^2 = 0.04$		$F(8,396) = 7.89, p < 0.001, R^2$ (cumulative) = 0.14		$F(7,397) = 6.25, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.10$		$F(8,396) = 10.02, p < 0.001, R^2$ (cumulative) = 0.17	

throughout the pandemic disruption. This resilience in professional commitment mirrors Froehlich et al.'s (2022) findings about newly qualified teachers maintaining professional identity during COVID-19 despite increased workplace challenges.

Changes in turnover intentions (research question 2)

In contrast to the stability in commitment, and contrary to our second hypothesis, teachers' intentions to drop out of the profession significantly increased from T1 to T2. This finding is particularly noteworthy as it occurred despite the return to presumably more familiar and comfortable face-to-face teaching conditions. Similar patterns were observed by Sokal et al. (2020), who found that Canadian teachers' burnout and intentions to leave increased even as schools moved toward reopening.

This increase in turnover intentions aligns with Zamorro et al.'s (2021) observation that the cumulative stress of pandemic teaching can

have delayed effects on career decisions. The return to classrooms brought new stressors—implementing recovery learning, addressing accumulated academic gaps, supporting students with pandemic-related trauma—all while teachers themselves were still processing their own pandemic experiences (Gutentag and Asterhan, 2022). As noted by Diliberti et al. (2021), the transition back to face-to-face teaching during ongoing health concerns created additional pressures that may have tipped the balance for teachers who were already experiencing strain.

Predictors of professional commitment

Our third research question examined how demographic factors, professional variables, and satisfaction with life predicted teachers' commitment after returning to face-to-face teaching. Our regression analysis revealed that teachers' academic education level and seniority significantly predicted commitment levels, with less experienced teachers and those with academic degrees showing lower

commitment. These findings are consistent with [Arbiv-Elyashiv \(2015\)](#) observation that early-career teachers may perceive their careers as more fluid, with teaching representing just one of several possible career paths.

The positive relationship between satisfaction with life and professional commitment supports [Çevik \(2017\)](#) research demonstrating that positive life perceptions enhance professional commitment. This finding gains particular significance in the pandemic context, as teachers' personal well-being was directly threatened by COVID-19. Our results extend prior research by showing that life satisfaction remained a significant predictor of commitment even during the transition back to face-to-face teaching, explaining 10% of the variance in commitment levels.

The finding that teachers with bachelor's or master's degrees showed lower commitment than those with non-academic education contradicts some pre-pandemic research ([Boa et al., 1997](#)) but aligns with findings from [Akartuna and Serin \(2022\)](#), who observed that teachers with only bachelor's degrees showed greater reduction in commitment during COVID-19 than those with graduate degrees. This may reflect the increased expectations placed on academically trained teachers during the pandemic without corresponding increases in resources or recognition.

Predictors of turnover intentions

Our final research question examined predictors of teachers' intentions to drop out of the profession. The regression results revealed that employment status, academic degree, seniority, and life satisfaction significantly predicted turnover intentions. Full-time employed teachers expressed fewer intentions to leave compared to partially employed teachers, possibly reflecting the greater job security and investment that comes with full-time positions—a particularly valuable factor during periods of crisis and uncertainty.

The finding that teachers with advanced academic degrees (M.A.) showed higher dropout intentions adds nuance to previous research. As suggested by the resource-rewards model ([Sorensen and Tuma, 1981](#); [Buskila and Chen Levy, 2020](#)), highly educated teachers may have higher expectations for professional recognition and autonomy that were compromised during the pandemic. Additionally, their advanced qualifications may provide greater access to alternative career opportunities, as noted by [Arbiv-Elyashiv \(2015\)](#).

Seniority emerged as a particularly strong predictor of turnover intentions, with less experienced teachers showing significantly higher intentions to leave. This finding is consistent with research by [Sokal et al. \(2020\)](#), who found that early-career teachers were more vulnerable to burnout during COVID-19. The protective effect of experience aligns with [Meyer and Allen's \(1991\)](#) concept of continuance commitment, as senior teachers have accumulated investments in their careers that would be costly to abandon.

Life satisfaction negatively predicted turnover intentions, explaining an additional 6.9% of variance. This relationship suggests that teachers' personal well-being serves as a buffer against professional challenges, supporting [White and MacLeod's \(2020\)](#)

findings on the protective role of well-being against career attrition during stressful periods.

Conclusion and implications

This study demonstrated that teachers' intention to drop out increased from T1 to T2. Because certain professional demographics relate to the professional commitment of elementary teachers, it is recommended to examine the job conditions of teachers in accordance with the resource-rewards model ([Arbiv-Elyashiv, 2015](#)). Perhaps a match between a teacher's job, skills, and expectations improves their employment terms and prevents them from dropping out of the profession. Hence, managers should initiate cross-sectional conversations with their teachers and examine their motivation levels. Dialogue like this may also enable new creative educational opportunities, such as the leadership of educational projects in the school and beyond, which will likely increase teachers' autonomy, their professional development, and a sense of feeling that they are trusted, and—consequently—their professional commitment. If possible, it is also recommended to consider establishing a committee to discuss how to strengthen the teachers' working conditions and improve them ([Buskila and Chen Levy, 2020](#)).

At the school level, we recommend optimising the absorption of new teachers by providing them with a senior mentor and receiving feedback from the principal once every few months. We also recommend that the connection between the school and local community be strengthened to increase the teachers' prestige since the teachers' status is previously linked to their professional commitment, the decision to select and remain in the profession, and their satisfaction with life ([Buskila and Chen Levy, 2020](#); [Bogler, 2005](#)). Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a case study for teachers coping in times of crisis. Hence, the results of the current study can be applied to learning about teaching during a crisis or as possible solutions in periods of emergency.

Limitations and future studies

This study utilized a cross-sectional design rather than a longitudinal one. The teachers who responded at Time 1 (February 2021, during the third COVID-19 lockdown) were not the same individuals as those who responded at Time 2 (June 2021, after returning to face-to-face teaching). This methodological approach provides a snapshot comparison between two different samples of teachers at distinct time points during the educational crisis rather than tracking changes within the same group of teachers over time. Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs that follow the same cohort of teachers across different phases of educational disruptions to more precisely capture individual-level changes in professional attitudes and career intentions.

The current study relied on self-reported questionnaires, thereby implying a potential bias if participants were reluctant to disclose challenges, despite assured anonymity. Future research could incorporate students' reports and their academic performance to assess any shifts in teachers' professional commitment. For example,

do students of those teachers who intend to leave their jobs underperforming in school?

Moreover, this study was delimited to elementary school teachers, whose experiences may vary from those of middle- or high school teachers. Younger children, for example, may require more assistance to transition to online learning during lockdowns, possibly impacting teachers' professional commitment. Furthermore, as the research was conducted a year after the initial COVID-19 outbreak in Israel, it offers a broader and more extended perspective on the pandemic's impact on teachers. This perspective might reveal trends that are distinct from those documented immediately after the outbreak, which induced significant distress within those in the teaching community.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because the data are still under research by M.A. students. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to olipka@edu.haifa.ac.il.

Author contributions

MA: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. OL: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. MS: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft.

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