

**Perceived Needs by Spanish Teachers in the Return to the Classroom in  
Times of COVID-19**

**Necesidades percibidas por los docentes españoles con la vuelta a las  
aulas en tiempos de COVID-19**

**Necessidades percebidas pelos professores de espanhol com o retorno à  
sala de aula em tempos de COVID-19**

Alberto Sanmiguel-Rodríguez  
Universidad Camilo José Cela  
Madrid, España  
[asrgz2014@gmail.com](mailto:asrgz2014@gmail.com)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5119-5141>

Raquel Leirós-Rodríguez  
Universidad de León  
León, España  
[rleir@unileon.es](mailto:rleir@unileon.es)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7502-7644>

Víctor Arufe-Giráldez  
Universidade de A Coruña  
A Coruña, España  
[v.arufe@udc.es](mailto:v.arufe@udc.es)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6440-048X>

Andrea García-Fernández  
Universidade de Vigo  
Pontevedra, España  
[andreagf@uvigo.es](mailto:andreagf@uvigo.es)

José Luis García-Soidán  
Universidade de Vigo  
Pontevedra, España  
[jlsoidan@uvigo.es](mailto:jlsoidan@uvigo.es)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8795-6731>

Rubén Navarro-Patón  
Universidade de Santiago de Compostela  
Lugo, España  
[ruben.navarro.paton@usc.es](mailto:ruben.navarro.paton@usc.es)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2555-0319>

## Abstract

**Introduction.** Government, health and educational institutions had to face, at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year, the implementation of protocols and action plans for the prevention of COVID-19. **Aim.** The aim of the study was to analyze the thinking of Spanish teachers in the academic year 2020-2021. **Method.** Participation of 965 teachers (74.3% Women;  $M_{age} = 43.5 \pm 9.9$ ). An ad hoc questionnaire with a total of 11 questions was used. **Results.** According to age and gender, differences were found in the management (P1) ( $p = 0.02$ ) and support (P2) ( $p = 0.04$ ) of the educational administration, in the perceived security (P3) ( $p = 0.01$ ), in the reduction of the working day (P5) ( $p = 0.002$ ) and in the availability of material resources (P6) ( $p = 0.004$ ) and human (P8) ( $p = 0.04$ ) sufficient. Those with greater teaching experience showed differences in the item P2 ( $p = 0.03$ ), P3 ( $p = 0.03$ ) and P8 ( $p = 0.03$ ). **Conclusions.** Less experienced teachers are more concerned. Teachers with greater teaching experience indicated a need of human resources and training to teaching.

**Keywords:** Covid-19; educational policies; teachers; professional satisfaction.

## Resumen

**Introducción.** Gobierno, instituciones sanitarias y educativas tuvieron que afrontar, al inicio del curso 2020-2021, la implantación de protocolos y planes de actuación para la prevención del COVID-19. **Objetivo.** El objetivo del estudio fue analizar el pensamiento de los docentes españoles ante el curso académico 2020-2021. **Metodología.** Participación de 965 profesores (74,3% Mujeres;  $M_{edad} = 43,5 \pm 9,9$ ). Se empleó un cuestionario *ad hoc* con un total de 11 preguntas. **Resultados.** Según la edad y el género se hallaron diferencias en la gestión (P1) ( $p = 0,02$ ) y apoyo (P2) ( $p = 0,04$ ) de la administración educativa, en la seguridad percibida (P3) ( $p = 0,01$ ), en reducción de la jornada laboral (P5) ( $p = 0,002$ ) y en la disponibilidad de recursos materiales (P6) ( $p = 0,004$ ) y humanos (P8) ( $p = 0,04$ ) suficientes. Los de mayor experiencia

docente mostraron diferencias en el ítem P2 ( $p = 0,03$ ), P3 ( $p = 0,03$ ) y P8 ( $p = 0,03$ ). **Conclusiones.** Las profesoras con menor experiencia docente muestran mayor preocupación. Los profesores con mayor experiencia indicaron mayor necesidad recursos humanos y de formación para la docencia.

**Palabras claves:** Covid-19; políticas educativas; profesorado; satisfacción profesional.

## Resumo

**Introdução.** Instituições governamentais, de saúde e de ensino tiveram de enfrentar, no início do ano letivo 2020-2021, a implementação de protocolos e planos de ação para a prevenção da COVID-19. **Objetivo.** O objetivo do estudo foi analisar o pensamento dos professores de espanhol antes do ano letivo 2020-2021. **Metodologia.** Participação de 965 professores (74,3% Mulheres; Mage =  $43,5 \pm 9,9$ ). Foi utilizado um questionário ad hoc com um total de 11 questões. **Resultados.** De acordo com a idade e sexo, foram encontradas diferenças na gestão (P1) ( $p = 0,02$ ) e apoio (P2) ( $p = 0,04$ ) da administração educacional, na segurança percebida (P3) ( $p = 0,01$ ), na redução na jornada de trabalho (P5) ( $p = 0,002$ ) e na disponibilidade de recursos materiais (P6) ( $p = 0,004$ ) e humanos (P8) ( $p = 0,04$ ) suficientes. Aqueles com mais experiência docente apresentaram diferenças no item P2 ( $p = 0,03$ ), P3 ( $p = 0,03$ ) e P8 ( $p = 0,03$ ). **Conclusão.** Os professores com menor experiência docente demonstram maior preocupação. Os professores com mais experiência indicaram uma maior necessidade de recursos humanos e de formação para a docência.

**Palavras-chave:** Covid-19; políticas educacionais; professores; satisfação profissional.

## Introduction

The spread of the new Coronavirus called SARS-Cov-2 caused educational institutions in Spain to close in March 2020 as a measure of health protection

for students, workers and families (Gupta & Jawanda, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020). After the period of maximum restrictions, in September of the same year the return to the classroom was proposed with the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year. However, this return occurred in a context of uncertainty about the new conditions imposed by the health situation (MacIntyre, et al., 2020). In fact, Kim and Asbury (2020) have described insecurity and ignorance of what will happen as stressors for teachers. All this caused, fundamentally, by the teachers' perception of the loss of control over work and the lack of support for the performance of teaching tasks (Whalen, 2020).

In the summer of 2020, in Spain it was still not known exactly what the planning of school activities for the following year would be like (Gandolfi, 2021). However, this health crisis can be interpreted as an experience from which to obtain learning that helps the educational community and, especially, in order to be prepared for a new similar situation (Sala, 2020). In other words, the situation experienced has represented a turning point for teachers at all educational levels (González-Calvo et al., 2020).

Government, health and educational institutions had to face, at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year, the implementation of protocols and action plans for the prevention of COVID-19. Protocols that, due to the autonomous administrative organization, are different in each autonomous community (AC) (Varea et al., 2022). This new context directly influences the pedagogical decision-making processes by teachers and, consequently, the learning experience of students (Biesta, 2009; Lepp et al., 2021). For this reason, this research was carried out with the objective of analyzing the attitudes and needs perceived by Spanish teachers in the 2020-2021 academic year. All this with the previous hypotheses that the attitudes could be of concern or insecurity and that they did have additional needs in relation to the human resources available in the educational centers.

## **Material and method**

## **Experimental design and sample**

For this work, we carried out a descriptive cross-sectional study in a representative sample of Spanish teachers. The National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2020) census the population of Spanish teachers in 847,713 teachers. According to these data, considering a heterogeneity of the sample of 50%, a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 99%, it would be necessary to reach a sample size of 663 individuals. For this study, a sample of 965 teachers of different educational levels from all over Spain has been obtained.

The questionnaires were completed virtually during the month of August 2020. An email with the protocol and instructions was sent to all practicing teachers in Spain through a database of emails from public, concerted and private educational centres in Spain. From this process, a sample of 965 teachers was obtained who expressed their desire to participate in the study, voluntarily. It was explained to all the participants that the study respected the principles of the International Code of Ethics in Humanities and Social Sciences of the *Center for Research Ethics & Bioethics* and the Data Protection Law 15/1999. In addition, all of them had to sign the informed consent for participation in this research. The research protocol was approved by the EDUCA Ethics Committee (Code 62020).

## **Research instrument and analysed variables**

The instrument used was an ad hoc questionnaire to collect information on the teachers' perception of the anti-COVID-19 protocols designed by the central government and the Autonomous Communities, to return to the classroom in Spain. The questionnaire was prepared taking into account other works on the subject (Alonso, 2020; Chang & Yano, 2020) and was validated through the judgment of experts (Lynn, 1986). To do this, we requested the help of four women and three men specialists in education and health. In this way, we design a first draft of the questionnaire and send it to the group mentioned above, sending us their comments and suggestions. With this information we

re-elaborated and modified the questionnaire that was sent again, so that they could assess the suitability of the questions of the corrected instrument. Finally, these experts issued their assessment, showing a level of agreement of 85%, for which we consider that the questionnaire was valid to be applied to the 965 participants, according to the criteria of [Polit et al. \(2007\)](#). Reliability was determined by standardizing the survey administration protocol for all participants.

The questionnaire was made up of a total of 38 items aimed at knowing the perception and feelings of the teaching staff about the measures imposed by the national and regional administrations and the return to the classrooms in the 2020-2021 academic year. For this publication we have focused on the study of the following items directly associated with the teachers' perception and feelings at the beginning of the course: *Do you think that the administration is managing well the planning of the students' return to the classroom?* (P1), *Do you feel supported by this new situation by the state and regional educational administrations?* (P2), *With the beginning of the new school year, do you feel safe teaching in person at the centre?* (P3), *From your point of view, should the working day be reduced? (fewer hours at the centre, 4-day shift ...)* (P5), *Do you have enough training and / or preparation to face virtual or blended teaching?* (P6), *In case of having to face virtual classes, do you have enough resources to face this non-face-to-face teaching?* (Q7), *Do you think the human resources are sufficient to face this return to school?* (P8). All of them had three answer options: *Yes*, *No* and *Don't know / no answer*. Derived from item P3, it was specifically asked *Which of the following options worries you the most?* (P4): (a) Contaminate my students; (b) Being infected by my students; (c) I am equally concerned about infecting or being infected when interacting with my students. If they answered negatively to item P8, they were specifically asked to select the category or categories of insufficient human resources (P9): (a) Teaching staff; (b) Health personnel; (c) Maintenance and service personnel; and / or (d) Administrative staff.

Two items were also included whose response options were those of a five-point Likert scale (in which zero was the most unfavourable option and four the

most favourable option): *According to your point of view, indicate on this scale the level of security perceived upon returning to class (P10) and According to your point of view, indicate on this scale if the return to school seems correct (P11).*

Finally, the following socio-demographic variables were included: gender; age; years of dedication to teaching; the area of knowledge of their university education (art and humanities, social and legal sciences, health sciences, science or engineering and architecture); the academic level in which they carried out their teaching activity (Infant, Primary, or Secondary Education, Baccalaureate, Professional Training, University Degree or others such as Official Language Schools, Superior Conservatories of Music or Schools of Performing Arts); and the ownership of the work centre (public, concerted or private).

### **Statistic analysis**

For the analysis of the results, the sample was divided into four age groups: under 30 years (n = 128), participants between 31 and 40 years (n = 247), participants between 41 and 50 years (n = 324) and participants older than 51 years (n = 269). Similarly, the sample was divided into four groups according to their teaching experience ([Table 1](#)): participants with less than 10 years of teaching work (n = 371), with between 11 and 20 years (n = 311), with between 21 to 30 years (n = 200) and with more than 31 years of professional experience (n = 86).

Descriptive measures (frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation) were used to characterize the sample. The chi-square proportion test and Cramer's V statistic were used to verify the equality of proportions of the groups in a large database according to the different age groups, teaching experience and ownership of the centre.

T tests and Cohen's d statistic were used to determine the differences between sexes, and the ANOVA test and the eta-squared statistic were used to analyse

the questions of the questionnaire with a continuous response option (from 0 to 5), according to the defined sample groups.

All statistical analyzes were performed with Stata version 12 (StataCorp., United States) and statistical significance was always established at a value of  $p < 0.05$ .

## Results

The characteristics of the sample are presented in [Table 1](#). The analysed sample consisted of 965 teachers, 74.3% female and 25.7% male. Among them, significant differences were obtained in their age ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = -0.31$ ) and in the years of teaching experience ( $p < 0.01$ ;  $d = -0.19$ ).

The differentiated analysis of the sample according to gender obtained significant differences in the area of knowledge of the participant's university career ( $X^2 = 56.812$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ;  $V = 0.24$ ), with the majority of women being students of social and legal sciences; and in the level of education in which they carried out their teaching activity ( $X^2 = 32.979$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ;  $V = 0.18$ ), with the first levels of education (Infant Education, Primary Education and Secondary Education) being the majority in women.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the sample

	Total (n = 965)	Women (n = 717)	Men (n = 248)
Age (mean $\pm$ standard deviation)	43.5 $\pm$ 9.9	42.7 $\pm$ 9.8**	45.7 $\pm$ 9.8**
Years of teaching dedication (mean $\pm$ standard deviation)	15.3 $\pm$ 10.2	14.8 $\pm$ 9.9*	16.7 $\pm$ 10.8*
Knowledge area [frequency (percentage)]:#			
Arts and humanities	222 (22.9)	185 (25.7)	37 (14.8)
Social and Legal Sciences	536 (55.4)	413 (57.4)	123 (49.6)
Health Sciences	56 (5.8)	38 (5.3)	18 (7.3)
Sciences	76 (7.8)	51 (7.1)	25 (10.1)
Engineering and architecture	78 (8.1)	33 (4.5)	45 (18.2)
Teaching level [frequency (percentage)]:#			

Early Childhood Education	182 (18.8)	161 (22.4)	21 (8.5)
Primary education	263 (27.2)	194 (26.9)	69 (27.8)
Secondary education	181 (18.7)	127 (17.6)	54 (21.7)
Baccalaureate	143 (14.8)	106 (14.7)	37 (14.9)
Professional Training	114 (11.8)	69 (9.6)	45 (18.2)
University degree	21 (2.2)	14 (2)	7 (2.8)
Others	64 (6.5)	49 (6.8)	15 (6.1)
Ownership of the centre [frequency (percentage)]:			
Public	790 (81.9)	590 (82.4)	200 (80.7)
Concerted	141 (14.6)	99 (13.8)	42 (16.9)
Private	34 (3.5)	28 (3.8)	6 (2.4)

Result of the t-test between genders \*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.001.

Result of the X<sup>2</sup> analysis between genders: #p = 0.001.

Elaboración propia

The results obtained in the questionnaire used are shown in [Table 2](#). Significant differences were identified according to gender in the questions: P2 (X<sup>2</sup> = 6.294; p = 0.04; V = 0.08), P6 (X<sup>2</sup> = 11.141; p = 0.004; V = 0.11) y P8 (X<sup>2</sup> = 6.111; p = 0.04; V = 0.08). In the three items, the proportion of affirmative responses was significantly higher in the male gender.

*Table 2.* Results obtained in the questionnaire used [data: frequency (percentage)]

	Total (n = 968)	Women (n = 720)	Men (n = 248)
P1: Do you think that the administration is managing well the planning of the students' return to the classroom?			
No	846 (87.4%)	628 (87.2)	218 (87.9)
Yes	96 (9.9)	74 (10.3)	22 (8.9)
Do not know, no answer	26 (2.7)	18 (2.5)	8 (3.2)
P2: Do you feel supported by this new situation by the state and regional educational administrations?*			
No	870 (89.9)	652 (90.5)	218 (87.9)
Yes	75 (7.7)	48 (6.7)	27 (10.9)
Do not know, no answer	23 (2.4)	20 (2.8)	3 (1.2)
P3: With the start of the new school year, do you feel safe teaching in person at the centre?			
No	669 (69.2)	505 (70.2)	164 (66.1)
Yes	257 (26.5)	186 (25.8)	71 (28.7)
Do not know, no answer	42 (4.3)	29 (4)	13 (5.2)
P5: According to your point of view, should the working day be reduced? (fewer hours in the center, 4-day shift...)			
No	305 (31.5)	222 (30.8)	83 (33.5)
Yes	588 (60.8)	437 (60.7)	151 (60.9)

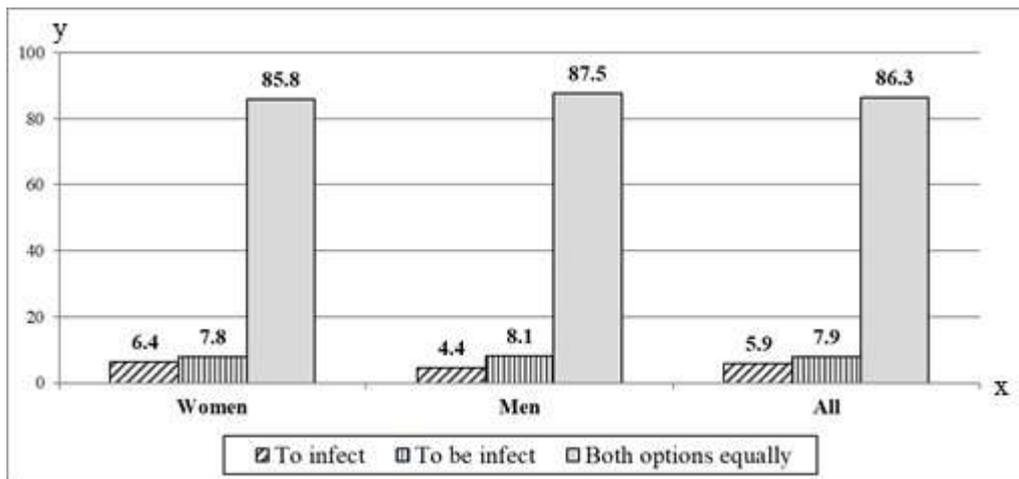
Do not know, no answer	75 (7.7)	61 (8.5)	14 (5.6)
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P6: Do you have enough training and / or preparation to face virtual or blended teaching?*			
No	400 (41.3)	313 (43.5)	87 (35.1)
Yes	505 (52.2)	354 (49.2)	151 (60.9)
Do not know, no answer	63 (6.5)	53 (7.3)	10 (4)
<hr/>			
P7: In case of having to face virtual classes, do you have enough resources to face this non-face-to-face teaching?			
No	318 (32.9)	232 (32.2)	86 (34.7)
Yes	575 (59.4)	425 (59)	150 (60.5)
Do not know, no answer	75 (7.7)	63 (8.8)	12 (4.8)
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P8: Do you think the human resources are sufficient to face this return to school?*			
No	843 (87.1)	633 (87.9)	210 (84.7)
Yes	98 (10.1)	64 (8.9)	34 (13.7)
Do not know, no answer	27 (2.8)	23 (3.2)	4 (1.6)

\* Result of the  $X^2$  between sexes: \* $p = 0.01$ .

Elaboración propia

The responses obtained in item P4 are represented in [Figure 1](#), without having identified differences between both sexes in it. The differentiated analysis according to age groups identified significant differences in the P1 items ( $X^2 = 15.08$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ;  $V = 0.09$ ), P2 ( $X^2 = 14.748$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ;  $V = 0.1$ ), P3 ( $X^2 = 15.818$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ;  $V = 0.1$ ) y P5 ( $X^2 = 21.481$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ;  $V = 0.11$ ). In all of them, the proportion of affirmative responses was significantly higher in the older age groups and the proportion of negative responses in the younger age groups. In item P4 the results showed that among the youngest teachers the fear of contagion was significantly higher and among the older age groups, being infected: infecting their students was the fundamental concern in 10.9% of the teachers under 30 years and 2.6% of teachers older than 51 years. On the contrary, being infected was the main concern of 9.4% of teachers under 30 years of age and 28.2% of teachers over 51 years of age.

Figure 1. Teachers' contagion concerns



Elaboración propia

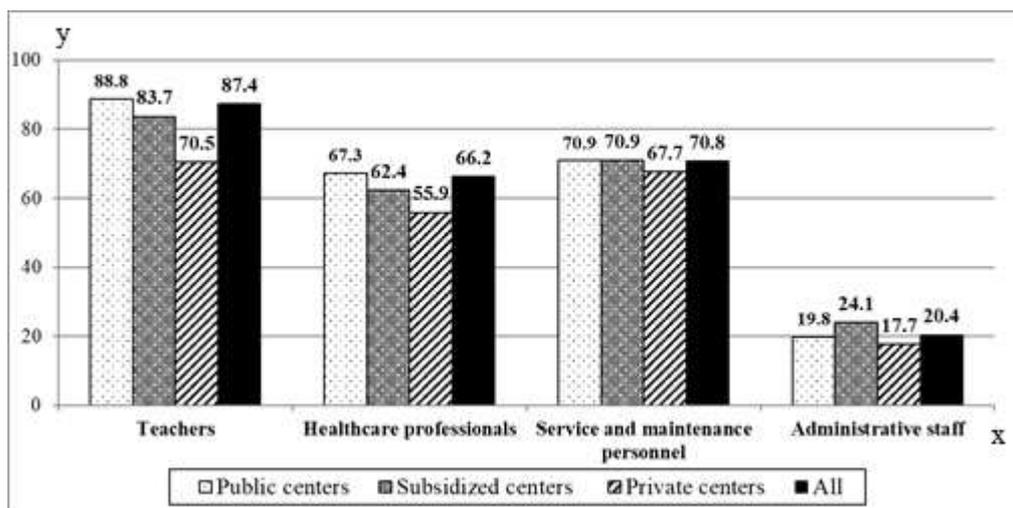
However, the differentiated analysis of the participants according to their experience as a teacher identified significant differences in items P2 ( $X^2 = 14.41$ ;  $p = 0.03$ ;  $V = 0.09$ ), P3 ( $X^2 = 13.238$ ;  $p = 0.03$ ;  $V = 0.08$ ), P8 ( $X^2 = 14.225$ ;  $p = 0.03$ ;  $V = 0.09$ ) y P9 ( $X^2 = 14.129$ ;  $p = 0.03$ ;  $V = 0.09$ ). In all of them, an increase in affirmative responses was observed as the teaching experience of the participants progressed (and the consequent reduction in negative responses).

The contrast analysis between subgroups by ownership of the centre showed statistically significant results in items P3 ( $X^2 = 9.968$ ;  $p = 0.04$ ;  $V = 0.01$ ) y P4 ( $X^2 = 25.569$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $V = 0.11$ ). In item P3, the proportion of affirmative answers was significantly higher in teachers who carried out their work in private centres (45.5% of affirmative answers in this group in contrast to 24.7% of teachers in public centres). In item P4, it was observed that the concern of being infected was significantly higher in public education teachers (87.3% of this subgroup of participants selected this response option). On the contrary, in private school teachers, the majority answer option in this item was that the concern was the same about infecting and being infected (67.6%) compared to 23.6% who were more concerned about infecting their students and 8.8% who stated that they were more concerned about being infected.

The human resource needs expressed by the respondents identified that more

than 66% of the participants recognize the need for more teaching, health and service and maintenance personnel (Figure 2). These needs were significantly different among workers in educational centres of different ownership in relation to the need for more teachers ( $X^2 = 11.853$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ;  $V = 0.11$ ).

Figure 2. Teachers' concerns based on the type of centre



Elaboración propia

In relation to the responses obtained in items P10 and P11, the perceived level of security was, on average,  $1.5 \pm 1.1$  points and the return to the classroom in September was perceived as correct, on average, with a score of  $1.9 \pm 1.3$  points. In neither of the two items were significant differences identified in the responses obtained according to gender ( $p > 0.05$ ) but there were in relation to the ownership of the centre in Q10: in which it was found that the perceived level of security was significantly lower in public centres compared to concerted schools ( $p = 0.001$ ) and private ones ( $p = 0.03$ ), but it was not different between the latter two. The correlation analysis identified significant relationships with the age of the participants in item P10 ( $r = 0.8$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ) and P11 ( $r = 0.7$ ;  $p = 0.04$ ). On the contrary, years of experience as a teacher were not correlated with any of these items ( $p > 0.05$ ).

## Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the attitudes and needs perceived by Spanish teachers regarding the 2020-2021 academic year. Given the results presented here, it could be affirmed that the attitude of concern and insecurity in the face of the possibility of contagion by COVID-19 was generalized and that there were additional needs in relation to the human resources available in the different educational centres.

Specifically, it has been identified that, in general terms, Spanish teachers have not felt supported by the different educational administrations. In addition, this phenomenon was intensified by the differentiated analysis of women with less teaching experience. This finding may be related to the greater predisposition of women and young people to the predominance of external locus of control (Cakir, 2017; Tas & İskender, 2018). In turn, this could justify that these sample subgroups perceive, in general, less self-efficacy in their teaching tasks (Akca et al., 2018).

However, the identification of the need for more human resources and training to face virtual or blended teaching was significantly higher in male teachers. Although this difference between both genders may be influenced by the difference in age between both genders. In this way, men, being older, could identify greater barriers to the integration of new virtual education. In fact, previous studies have identified that as age advances, the ability to adapt to new scenarios decreases due to physical and mental exhaustion that appears more prematurely compared to the first decades of teaching dedication (Hlad'o et al., 2020; Vedovato & Monteiro, 2014).

In parallel, the differences identified according to the teaching experience of the participants could also be justified by the implicit age difference between the sample subgroups described. However, the differences identified based on this variable did not always coincide with the differences according to age group. Therefore, these discrepancies could also be due to differences in academic training between them, given that the academic organization and the weight of the different recognized competencies and skills in university study plans has

changed profoundly in recent decades. In this way, the sum of generational differences intrinsic to age differences and belonging to profoundly different educational systems could explain the findings of this research ([González-Calvo & Fernández-Balboa, 2018](#); [Watson, 2006](#)). In this specific case, the experience has acted as a positive mediator in the teachers' perception of their abilities to carry out the designed protocols.

The perceived level of security was very low, especially in public centres. Institutions where, in addition, there was a greater need for teachers and greater concern about being infected by COVID-19 (especially among older teachers). Teachers from private schools could have identified that their students, coming from more favourable socio-family backgrounds ([Goren & Yemini, 2017](#); [Manstead, 2018](#)), are less likely to be carriers of the virus. And, at the same time, older teachers would be more afraid of being infected by the greater severity of COVID-19 symptoms as the age of the patients advanced ([Kamal et al., 2021](#); [Unim et al., 2021](#)).

Finally, more than 66% of the participants recognized the need for more teaching, health and service and maintenance personnel. All of this could be related to the previously recognized need to reduce the ratio of students per classroom in schools in Spain.

This study has methodological limitations that must be recognized: the collection of information through a questionnaire with limited and closed response options may bias the participants' opinions. But this also responds to the impossibility of having other validated instruments, to be able to triangulate the results and thus check the validity of the opinions expressed, through the different questions.

However, this research presents strengths such as the timeliness of the moment in which it was carried out, the representativeness of the sample size reached and the novelty and current interest of the data presented of great relevance for the academic organization of the next academic year 2021-2022 and facing to the design of Action Plans in the face of similar situations in the future.

## Conclusions

The teachers participating in this research show a general concern about the contagion of COVID-19 by not feeling supported by the different educational administrations. Differentiated by gender and teaching experience, the teachers with less teaching experience. On the other hand, teachers with more teaching experience were those who indicated a greater need for more human resources and training to face virtual or blended teaching. Likewise, those teachers who had more teaching experience said they had greater capacities to implement the designed protocols. Finally, we must conclude that the older teachers and the public schools were the ones that presented the greatest insecurity when they returned to the classroom.

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