

Quiet Quitting Phenomenon. Economic Determinants, Pedagogical Implications and Legal-Organizational Profiles of Work Disengagement

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Abstract

Quiet quitting represents an important and timely phenomenon in contemporary labor markets, particularly within the public education sector. The study presented in this article offers a valuable synthesis of recent international research and highlights significant gaps in the Italian context. As such, it may serve as a solid foundation for future empirical and comparative studies. Despite growing international interest, empirical research on this phenomenon within the educational sector remains limited, particularly with regard to the Italian public school system. This article examines quiet quitting among public school teachers through an interdisciplinary framework integrating economic, pedagogical, and juridical - organizational perspectives. A structured review of international scientific literature published between 2022 and 2025 was conducted using major academic databases and scholarly search engines. The analysis evaluates the empirical support for three research hypotheses concerning economic determinants, pedagogical implications, and the role of organizational and regulatory contexts. Findings reveal a clear increase in European research on quiet quitting, alongside a persistent empirical gap in the Italian context.

Keywords: quiet quitting, public school, teachers and staff of public school, public management

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of *quiet quitting* has rapidly gained traction in public debate since 2022, but only recently has it been the subject of theoretical and methodological systematization in the scientific field, emerging as an emerging construct at the intersection of occupational psychology, organizational behavior economics, and studies on the educational professions. Recent international literature converges in defining *quiet quitting* not as a form of occupational abandonment, but rather as a mode of employment characterized by the intentional reduction of routine extra-work commitment, thus by emotional withdrawal and the suspension of organizational citizenship behaviors, often in response to a perceived breakdown in the psychological contract between worker and organization (Papadopoulou & Vouzas, 2024).

The systematic review conducted by Papadopoulou and Vouzas highlights how the field of research is still in its infancy, with considerable definitional heterogeneity but also a growing convergence around the idea that *quiet quitting* represents an adaptive strategy in the face of chronic stressors, excessive workloads, lack of recognition, and perceived unfair working conditions, especially in the post-pandemic context. In short, this is a structural shift in the anthropological sense of work, as new technologies have also transformed the forms of work. Without delving into the merits of the new digital tools that have in some ways severely challenged older-generation teachers in their teaching roles, even affecting related methodologies, what is relevant to note at this juncture is the increase in a series of "distances" from the workplace.

These are departures that can be defined as silent or, at least, deliberately slow, defining a new psychopedagogical era within the teaching profession in schools, where teachers themselves, or more broadly, school staff, tend to adopt attitudes different from the normal and empirical approach in the context of dismissals in the strictest sense. Staff, therefore, teachers, are moving on a different level in terms of implementing procedures and actions aimed at distancing themselves from the sterile and futureless protagonisms of the community. The reasons, as will be seen, are varied and are the result of institutional mechanisms that certainly do not promote in-service professionals, with essential repercussions for the entire sector, namely public education. On an empirical level, one of the most relevant contributions to the stabilization of the construct is represented by the development and validation of the *Multidimensional Quiet Quitting Scale* (MQQS), published in *PLOS ONE*, which proposes a conceptualization based on two main dimensions, behavioral and emotional, and provides solid psychometric evidence based on large international samples, allowing for the first time a standardized and comparable measurement of the phenomenon (Patel et al., 2025).

In parallel, other studies have contributed to adapting and specifying the construct in specific professional contexts, including the educational one: the investigation by Alanoğlu et al. (2024) adapted the *Quiet Quitting Scale* to the context of teachers, highlighting how factors such as emotional exhaustion, insufficient incentives, the quality of the work environment, and job satisfaction constitute central dimensions of teacher work disengagement, with good factorial validity and statistical reliability. Consistently, the study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* (Ergen et al., 2025) further refined the analysis of *quiet quitting* in the school context, identifying three main dimensions: reduced job performance, indifference towards the school institution, and depersonalization, while confirming the relevance of the phenomenon among teachers through robust factorial models and a large explained variance. Alongside these quantitative contributions, the qualitative study by Memiş and Tabancalı (2024) offers an in-depth reading of the subjective experience of teachers who experience *quiet quitting*.

, highlighting how disengagement emerges as a defensive response to a variety of interconnected factors: economic precariousness, increasing administrative burdens, non-formalized expectations of extra-hours availability, loss of social prestige of the profession, and progressive impoverishment of the pedagogical meaning of teaching work. From this perspective, *quiet quitting* appears not only as an individual phenomenon, but as the outcome of structural dynamics that affect the organization of educational work and the governance of school systems. On an economic level, macro-organizational and behavioral contributions, such as Nikolova's working paper (2024), draw attention to the systemic costs of disengagement at work, highlighting how the reduction of engagement, even in the absence of formal turnover, produces significant economic effects in terms of productivity, allocative efficiency, and sustainability of public spending.

These analyses are particularly relevant when applied to the public education sector, where the value of teachers' work is not limited to contractual fulfillment but includes a wide range of relational and planning activities that are difficult to quantify. Finally, several studies underline the importance of considering the regulatory framework as a fundamental contextual variable: the literature on *quiet quitting* suggests that the legal regulation of work, public policies, and the formal and informal boundaries of performance significantly influence the likelihood that disengagement emerges as an adaptive strategy (Papadopoulou & Vouzas, 2024; Memiş & Tabanca, 2024). Overall, the international literature presents a complex but still fragmented picture, in which teachers' *quiet quitting* is a multidimensional phenomenon, located at the intersection of economic determinants, pedagogical implications, and legal-organizational frameworks, and for which a systematic empirical analysis is particularly lacking. In particular, following a careful literature search, the authors highlight the limited research on the phenomenon in Italy and Europe.

Although studies exist, they are limited to specific areas. It should be noted that, in choosing the research topic at hand, a significant research gap emerged, and for this reason, interesting research questions and hypotheses were formulated. Specifically, during the literature search and analysis, the country that showed the greatest interest in the topic was Turkey (in quantitative terms and always within the scope of the search queries), and very few studies in the Italian context exist, except to the extent that the results provide a partial and transversal snapshot of the situation, allowing for conclusions that are, in any case, tentative. Therefore, having established the gap in the research, the authors decided to continue their research in order to analyze the phenomenon. Although current and therefore almost considered normal (the significant amount of research found) it appears very interesting as it can be traced back to a new form of "layoff" that is looming over the school sector and therefore teachers and the entire education sector, where staff, rather than always keeping pace with new challenges, seem to be failing.

This article is organized into four main sections. Following the introduction, the first section sets out the research hypotheses and clarifies the interpretative framework adopted for the analysis of quiet quitting in the public-school sector. The second section presents the results of the literature review and systematizes the empirical evidence currently available at the international level. The third section discusses these findings from an interdisciplinary perspective, considering the economic determinants of disengagement, its pedagogical implications, and the influence of the legal-organizational context. The final section offers concluding remarks, emphasizing the relevance of the phenomenon for the educational field, the persistent lack of quantitative evidence in Italy, and the need for further research specifically focused on the national context.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a structured literature review design aimed at examining the phenomenon of quiet quitting in the educational sector, with a specific interpretative focus on public school teachers. The review considered international scientific literature published between 2022 and 2025 and was conducted through major academic databases and scholarly search engines, including ERIC, ScienceDirect, PubMed, and references retrieved through Google and ResearchGate. Targeted searches were performed using title-, abstract-, and keyword-based queries in both English and Italian, such as “quiet quitting” AND teacher, “quiet quitting” AND school, “quiet quitting” AND public school, as well as “quiet quitting insegnanti” and “quiet quitting scuola italiana”. The selection process privileged peer-reviewed or full-text publications, explicit datasets or samples, and studies providing a clear description of methods and tools. The retrieved evidence was then organized comparatively in order to assess the degree of empirical support for the three analytical dimensions examined in this article: economic determinants, pedagogical implications, and the legal-organizational context of work disengagement.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H1 Economic determinants of quiet quitting We hypothesize that a lower perception of the adequacy of economic and symbolic incentives, combined with a perceived imbalance between workload and pay, is positively associated with higher levels of *quiet quitting* among public school teachers, particularly in its behavioral dimension. This hypothesis is based on evidence linking work disengagement to economic factors and the perceived lack of reciprocity between effort expended and recognition received from the administration to which they belong.

H2 Pedagogical implications of quiet quitting We hypothesize that higher levels of *quiet quitting* are associated with a perceived reduction in the quality of extra-role pedagogical engagement, such as instructional planning, collegial collaboration, and relational availability towards students and families.

H3 Role of the legal-organizational context We hypothesize that a greater perception of regulatory ambiguity regarding the boundaries of work performance (e.g., implicit extra-hours availability, non-formalized administrative burdens) is positively associated with *quiet quitting*, mediated by the perception of a breach of the psychological contract.

RESULTS

The survey was conducted with targeted queries (title/ abstract /keyword) such as: “ *quiet quitting* ” AND teacher , “ *quiet quitting* ” AND school , *quiet quitting scale teachers* , “ *quiet quitting* ” AND public school , as well as searches in Italian (*quiet quitting insegnanti* , *quiet quitting scuola italiana* , *quiet quitting insegnanti Italia*). The results were filtered by privileging: (a) peer-reviewed or full-text articles on academic portals; (b) explicit datasets /samples ; (c) description of methods and tools.

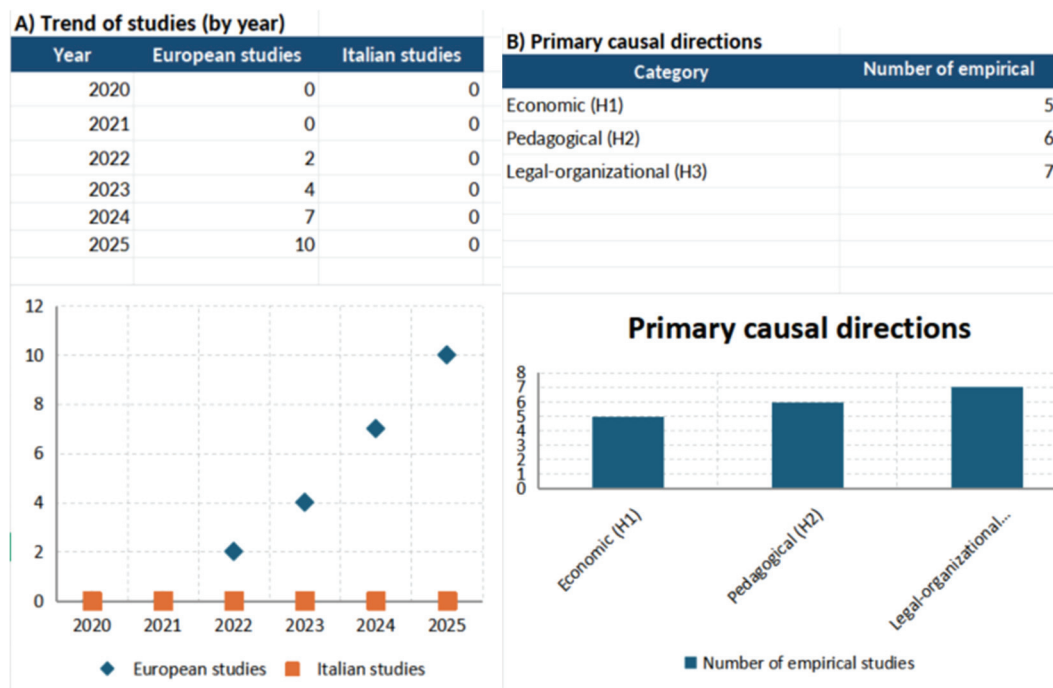
Table 1: Available empirical evidence

Study (year)	Country/area	Drawing	Tools / Key	Key findings	Hypotheses
Memiş&Tabancalı (2024)	Europe – Türkiye	Qualitative; n=13 teachers	Phenomenological interviews	Disengagement as a response to burdens, lack of recognition, organizational ambiguity	H1 (partial), H2, H3

Giliç (2025)	Europe – Türkiye	Survey ; n=384 teachers	Career Barriers Scale, Quiet Quitting Scale	Career Barriers and Incentives Associated with Quiet quitting	H1, H3
Dilekçi et al. (2025)	Europe – Türkiye	Cross-sectional ; n=366 teachers	QQS, stress, burnout , change fatigue	Stress and burnout explain ~35% of the variance in quiet quitting	H2, H3
Ergen et al. (2025)	Europe – Türkiye	SEM; n=411 teachers	Leadership styles , mobbing, QQ	Autocratic leadership ↑ QQ; mobbing mediator	H3
Lewandowska (2025)	Europe – Poland	Empirical analysis on teachers	Overload and adaptation indicators	Quiet quitting as a growing structural phenomenon	H2, H3
Italy	Italy	—	—	No quantitative empirical studies found	Empirical gap

Source: Own processing

Figure 1: (A) Line of trend of studies; (B) Prevalent causal direction of quiet quitting



Source: Own processing

Figure 1 synthesizes the main patterns emerging from the literature review on quiet quitting in the school context and provides a visual summary of the empirical evidence collected in the study. Panel A, entitled Line of trend of studies, represents the chronological development of research interest in the phenomenon. The graph shows a clear upward trajectory in the number of studies published between 2022 and 2025, thereby indicating that quiet quitting has progressively moved from a marginal topic to a more structured field of inquiry within educational and organizational research. This trend is consistent with the article's broader argument that the phenomenon is still relatively recent in the academic debate, yet increasingly recognized as relevant, especially in relation to teachers and public-school staff. At the same time, the graph also indirectly highlights the fragility of the evidence base, since the increase in

publications does not necessarily correspond to a broad geographical distribution of studies, and the Italian context remains substantially underexplored.

Panel B, entitled Prevalent causal direction of quiet quitting, represents instead the relative weight of the three interpretative dimensions around which the article is structured: economic determinants, pedagogical implications, and the legal-organizational context. The graph shows that the legal-organizational dimension is the most recurrent explanatory domain in the available literature, followed by pedagogical implications, while economic determinants appear less frequently, though still significant. This means that, according to the studies reviewed, quiet quitting among teachers tends to be interpreted primarily as a response to ambiguous work boundaries, informal overload, dysfunctional leadership patterns, mobbing, and the perceived breach of the psychological contract, rather than as a purely economic reaction to inadequate pay. Nevertheless, the pedagogical and economic dimensions remain central because disengagement also affects extra-role teaching commitment, collegial cooperation, and the broader motivational balance between effort, recognition, and professional meaning. In this sense, the graph does not simply classify causes, but visually communicates the multidimensional nature of quiet quitting and reinforces the article's conclusion that the phenomenon should be understood as systemic rather than merely individual or generational.

The comparative analysis of the empirical evidence shows that the three research hypotheses receive different degrees of support. H1 is only partially confirmed, since some studies identify insufficient incentives, lack of recognition, and career-related barriers as relevant correlates of quiet quitting, but the economic dimension appears less frequently than other explanatory domains. H2 finds broader support in the literature, as disengagement is repeatedly associated with reduced pedagogical involvement, occupational stress, burnout, and weakening extra-role commitment. H3, by contrast, emerges as the hypothesis most strongly supported by the available evidence, given the centrality of organizational ambiguity, excessive informal demands, leadership patterns, and psychological contract disruption in the reviewed studies. Taken together, these results suggest that quiet quitting among teachers should be interpreted primarily as a legal-organizational and pedagogical phenomenon, with economic factors acting as an important, yet comparatively less dominant, contributing dimension. The persistent lack of Italian quantitative studies further reinforces the need for context-specific empirical investigation.

DISCUSSION

The literature search conducted (including ERIC, Science Direct, PubMed indexes, and references available via Google/ ResearchGate) shows that the phenomenon of quiet quitting applied to the educational context is still in its infancy in the academic landscape, with few dedicated empirical publications and a predominance of conceptual or exploratory contributions. In particular, the study “Teachers ' Silent Scream: Quiet Quitting” represents one of the rare contributions that specifically address quiet quitting among teachers, addressing it through a qualitative phenomenological design with semi-structured interviews with 13 teachers and identifying behavioral and emotional indicators of disengagement linked, among other things, to perceptions of job insecurity, economic dissatisfaction, and work-life imbalance (Teachers' Silent Scream: Quiet Quitting, 2024).

In parallel, a larger empirical study, “ Evaluation of Quiet Quitting: Is the Bell Ringing?, adopts a mixed design with a qualitative phase (32 interviews) and a quantitative survey on 484 teachers in the Eskişehir region (Turkey), highlighting that economic, organizational and well-being factors explain the

phenomenon and that a large part of teachers perceive insufficient working conditions and remuneration, resulting in emotional and behavioral detachment.

Although not specifically focused on Italian public schools, this quantitative study provides robust empirical evidence on the association between working conditions and quiet quitting in the educational context. Furthermore, a recent publication, " Quiet Quitting in Career Ladders : Teacher Perspective ," empirically indicates how the lack of progression opportunities and work-life balance may contribute to the phenomenon among teachers.

Other emerging contributions explore correlations between professional burnout, occupational stress, and quiet quitting in larger teacher populations: a study published in 2025 in Science Direct indicates that professional stress, burnout , and “ change fatigue ” explain approximately 35% of the variance in levels of quiet quitting among teachers, suggesting a significant link between working conditions and disengagement.

Conceptually, there are preliminary reviews and exploratory research works that address quiet quitting in the education sector in a broad sense and analyze its causes, manifestations, and potential impacts, but not always with primary data (e.g., preprints and studies still in progress).

In terms of geographical distribution and comparison Europe vs other contexts, it is possible to observe that:

- most of the empirical studies published so far concern non-Italian or international contexts (for example Turkey in the case of quantitative surveys or more general conceptual contributions) but there are no empirical studies published on populations of Italian public school teachers available in the main databases to date;
- Other research (for example, one conducted on 229 teachers in Poland) highlights that quiet quitting is perceived as a growing structural phenomenon even in European contexts and that it is associated with harsh working conditions, high bureaucracy, and a lack of adaptability of school organization to teachers' professional and personal needs.

Therefore, the number of specific empirical studies on teacher quiet quitting is currently limited but growing, with significant evidence supporting the links between economic conditions, workload, professional stress, and disengagement behaviors in education. However, the literature lacks consolidated quantitative studies on a sample of Italian public school teachers, highlighting the need for specific empirical investigations in the national context.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper aims to situate the phenomenon of *quiet quitting* among Italian public school teachers within a multidimensional interpretative framework, based on an analysis of international literature and an empirical review of available evidence. What emerges certainly lends itself to an important consideration. Public school teachers experience a series of challenges that span multiple fields of inquiry, yet they are nonetheless subjected to pressures of various kinds, the result of a seemingly healthy system that, in essence, is anything but. This is demonstrated by the trends identified in this research, so much so that the results clearly demonstrate that *quiet quitting* cannot be reduced to a mere generational tendency or an individual choice to reduce commitment, but must be interpreted as the outcome of

structural dynamics affecting the organization of educational work. The mechanisms of economic and symbolic recognition, as well as the legal and organizational boundaries of the teaching profession, appear to be subject to systematic anomalies. Specifically, the comparative analysis of the empirical contributions found highlights a significant growth in scientific interest in the phenomenon at the European level since 2022, despite a persistent and structural research gap in Italy, which makes the national public school system a largely unexplored area from a quantitative perspective.

The distribution of empirical evidence with respect to the hypotheses formulated indicates that the legal-organizational dimension, understood as ambiguous work boundaries, informal workloads, leadership styles, and psychological contract breakdown, represents the causal domain most frequently cited by existing studies, followed by the pedagogical implications of disengagement and, to an apparently lesser extent, the economic determinants linked to the perceived imbalance between effort and reward. The satisfaction of being a teacher, and therefore of carrying out one's pedagogical mission, must certainly be rewarded both financially and morally, especially if teachers volunteer for extracurricular activities, although it is well known that some national collective bargaining agreements stipulate that certain functions are performed implicitly.

The problem that emerges, in fact, lies not only in financial recognition but also in symbolic recognition, that is, in a sort of emotional reward that in certain situations is particularly beneficial, for example, to younger teachers or those who live away from their home or regional teaching location. In short, it is a complex mechanism of action and reaction on the part of teachers who find themselves facing issues related to both the organizational health of the school system and those pertaining to their moral, symbolic, and personal spheres. Administrations, including schools as autonomous entities within the scope of their functions, and the Ministry of Education (and recently “of Merit”, in Italy) have the ethical and moral duty to support the entire school system, which includes not only students but also teachers, administrators, and school staff. It is therefore an entire educational community where every professional profile deserves to be valued, both symbolically and financially. From this perspective, school legislation—decrees, regulations, and laws—must also be optimally drafted to enhance staff and stem the phenomenon that, although still emerging at this stage in history, could become the problem of the century in the coming years.

Quiet quitting in the school sector thus *emerges* as a systemic phenomenon, in which silent disengagement emerges as an adaptive defense strategy against working conditions perceived as invasive, poorly regulated, and poorly rewarding. In light of these findings, and of what has been learned in the fields of psychopedagogy and economics, particularly regarding the average salaries of teachers and staff, what emerges is the need to develop empirical studies specifically geared to the Italian context, capable of integrating internationally validated measurement tools with a critical analysis of the regulatory, organizational, and cultural peculiarities of public schools. Looking ahead, greater scientific attention to teacher *quiet quitting* appears not only theoretically relevant, but also strategically important for educational policies, as latent disengagement among teaching staff risks having significant impacts on the quality of teaching, the efficiency of public investment in education, and, ultimately, the effective guarantee of the right to education.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Although the present article is necessarily affected by a number of limitations, primarily due to the still limited and fragmented body of literature specifically addressing quiet quitting in the educational sector, its contribution remains significant. Rather than weakening the relevance of the study, the scarcity of available empirical research, especially in relation to Italian public schools, highlights the timeliness and necessity of this work. In this sense, the article should be understood as an important starting point for the development of a future research agenda on the phenomenon. By systematizing the existing evidence, identifying the main interpretative dimensions of quiet quitting, and bringing attention to the persistent empirical gap in the Italian context, this study provides an initial analytical framework upon which more structured investigations can be built. Its value therefore lies not only in the findings discussed, but also in its capacity to open a new line of inquiry that may guide future empirical, comparative, and policy-oriented research, particularly with regard to the Italian public school system.

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