What it means for higher education

*Insights from TALIS, the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey*

**What are some key lessons from TALIS regarding teacher preparation, professional development, and teaching practices?**

- Most teachers were educated at the tertiary level, through teaching programmes including a mix of content, pedagogy and practical experience. Yet, teachers’ feelings of preparedness for the profession vary a lot.
- 88% of teachers reported having taking part in at least one professional development activity over the previous year. A large majority of them report a moderate to strong positive impact of such activities on their teaching.
- Yet, teachers report unmet professional development needs, in particular in the areas of teaching students with special needs and using information and communication technologies (ICTs) for teaching.
- Using active teaching practices depends more on differences among individual teachers than on the school or country they work in. The same is true about teachers’ beliefs about teaching.

**What are some other key TALIS 2013 findings about the state of the profession?**

- TALIS shows that teachers are satisfied with their job: on average, 77% report that the advantages of the profession outweigh the drawbacks and 91% report being satisfied with their job overall.
- However, on average, less than a third of teachers believe that teaching is a valued in society, although there are substantial differences across countries.
- TALIS shows that more teachers tend to think the profession is valued in society when they work in a country that is high performing on PISA, and when their school provides staff with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions.

**What it means for higher education**

*For higher education institutions delivering teacher education*

- **Review initial teacher training programmes** to ensure adequate mix of content, pedagogy and practice and include a stronger emphasis on teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning to promote student-centred pedagogical approaches.
- **Consider a more active role in providing professional development to experienced teachers:** assess how teacher education departments and faculties can assist with ongoing teacher professional development, through partnerships with schools, support through the dissemination of pedagogical research, etc.
- **Consider the transferability of some key TALIS findings in a higher education context,** for example regarding the role of continuing professional development for faculty and the use of active pedagogies.

*For higher education policymakers and researchers*

- **Consider policy approaches to ensure stronger links** between teacher education departments/faculties in universities and the secondary school system, beyond the delivery of initial teacher education.
- **Consider opportunities to research the changing nature of teaching at the higher education level,** including in the context of a changing context and new demands placed on faculties.

*For higher education students and graduates interested in a teaching career*

- **Broaden skills to be better prepared for a changing profession:** Teachers-to-be can learn from TALIS the areas in which teachers often feel under-prepared and should thus seek out opportunities to develop relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes ahead of, and during, their teaching career.
Overview of TALIS 2013

In June 2014, the OECD released the results of the second cycle of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), a survey-based project which focuses on the working conditions of teachers at the secondary level and the learning environment in schools. TALIS provides a detailed picture of the characteristics of the teaching workforce, teachers’ reported pedagogical and professional practices, their training and professional development, as well as their job satisfaction and perceptions of how their profession is valued in society. Over 100,000 randomly selected lower secondary teachers and their school leaders from over 6,500 schools in 34 countries and economies took part in the TALIS 2013 survey.

TALIS is relevant to higher education stakeholders for various reasons, in part because HEIs deliver teacher education and training in many countries and because many higher education graduates are teachers-to-be. This Brief focuses on selected TALIS findings related to teacher education and training.

Teachers feel well-prepared for their profession, slightly less so in pedagogy

The great majority of TALIS teachers hold tertiary qualifications: 89.5% have attained the ISCED 5A level of education, and 1.4% has reached the ISCED 6 level. Moreover, 90% of teacher report having completed a teacher education or training programme. Most TALIS teachers report that their formal education included three key components: practical experience, subject-matter training and pedagogical training. Yet, significant country variations exist, both in terms of the components of teachers’ formal education and how prepared teachers feel for their profession. TALIS shows that teachers have generally received content training in all subject areas which they teach. In Iceland and Alberta (Canada), however, less than half of the teachers (42% and 44% respectively) report their formal education included content training in all the subjects they teach. This suggests that many teachers in these regions are teaching subjects for which they have not been specifically prepared for.

Variations also exist regarding pedagogy and classroom practice. While a large majority of teachers have received pedagogical and practical training in all the subjects they teach (respectively 70% and 67%, on average), these figures vary across countries. For example, more than 80% of teachers received practical experience in all the subjects they teach in Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Singapore and England (UK). By contrast, Italy stands out with only 35% of teachers reporting they had practical components for all the subjects they teach, and an additional 12% reporting they had such training for some of the subjects they teach.

Perceptions of preparedness also vary a lot. On average, 93% of teachers feel well or very well-prepared in terms of content. Yet, this is the case for only 72% of teachers in Finland, and 76% in Japan and Mexico. Teachers overall feel slightly less prepared in terms of pedagogy: 89% of them feel well or very well-prepared. This is true for only 61% of teachers in France, 64% in Finland and 70% in Japan as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Teachers’ feelings of preparedness for teaching in terms of pedagogy

Teachers report a positive impact from professional development, but also some unmet needs

TALIS data indicate that many teachers participate in professional development activities, which can be provided at the beginning or throughout one’s career, organised within the school or through external providers, and be more or less formal. While participation varies across countries, 88% of the teachers surveyed indicated they had participated in at least one professional development activity in the past year.

Moreover, most teachers report such activities as having a positive impact on their teaching. While professional development activities cover a wide range of areas, teachers feel that those having the most positive impact (with teachers reporting a moderate or large impact) focus on their knowledge and understanding of the subject fields and on their pedagogical competencies for teaching their subject fields (for 91% and 87% of teachers respectively). Lower proportions of teachers report positive impacts for activities related to school management (76%), teaching students with special needs (77%) and teaching in a multicultural or multilingual settings (77%).

TALIS data also show the limitations of professional development programmes. First, teachers face barriers in engaging in professional development. Many of them report their work schedules and the absence of incentives as obstacles to their further participation in these activities.

Second, teachers also report unmet needs. As shown in figure 2 and consistent with findings from TALIS 2008, the main area in which teachers report unmet needs relates to teaching students with special needs. This finding needs to be considered together with the fact that only 32% of teachers on average report having taken part in this type of professional development, and that among the 14 areas of professional development examined in TALIS and for which teachers were asked to evaluate impact, it was one of the areas least likely to be identified as having a positive impact on teaching practices.

This may suggest available opportunities in this area are too scarce and, when they exist, may need improvement. ICT skills for teaching and more generally in the workplace are also identified as a key area where teachers need professional development.

Differences in teachers’ choices of pedagogical practices depend on teachers themselves, more than their school or country

Literature on teaching practices shows that active approaches, broadly defined as those actively engaging students in the learning process, can support student achievement. These include, for example, work in small groups, long projects or the use of ICTs. To understand how the use of such approaches can be fostered, TALIS sought to identify the factors that influence their adoption.

A key finding from these analyses is that most of the total variance seen in teachers’ reports of these practices comes from differences between individual teachers, and variance attributable to the school and country level is minimal. For example, 87% of the difference in the reported frequent use of work in small groups is accounted by individual teacher differences, versus 10% by country-level factors and 4% by school-level factors. For the use of ICTs, both country- and school-level factors play a larger role (respectively 13% and 7%), which can be explained by the resource-intensive nature of this practice.
Similarly, TALIS sought to identify which factors influence teachers’ beliefs about teaching, since those beliefs have an important role in shaping teachers’ practices. With respect to constructivist beliefs, in which teachers view themselves as facilitators of students’ own learning and thinking processes, the variance in those beliefs is mostly explained by individual differences among teachers (87%). Country- and school-level factors play a smaller role (12% and 2% respectively). These findings have important implications: actions targeting teachers directly may be most effective at changing practices. Thus a significant role may exist for initial and continuing teacher training in both introducing active pedagogies but also in influencing teachers’ own views about the teaching and learning process.

Further reading


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The Programme’s activities have a global reach and include monitoring and analysing policy making; gathering data; and exchanging new ideas, as well as reflecting on past experience. These activities assist members to contribute to the development of higher education internationally, nationally and locally.

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1 Note: This paper is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

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3 In this Brief, “teachers” refer to lower secondary school teachers. For further information about the TALIS sample, see Annex A of the TALIS report.

4 ISCED 5A programmes are largely theory-based programmes designed to provide sufficient qualifications for entry to advanced research programmes and professions with high skill requirement. Duration is at least 3 years full-time, though usually 4 or more years. These programmes also include second-degree programmes, such as the American master’s degree. ISCED 6 programmes lead to the award of a doctoral degree.


6 For a full definition and methodology, see p.165 (ibid).