TEACHING in Focus

2015/10 (March)

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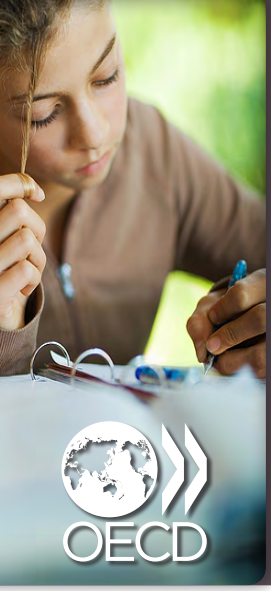


Embedding professional development in schools for teacher success

- **Teachers report participating in more non-school than school embedded professional development (i.e. professional development that is grounded in teachers daily professional practices).**
- **Participation in non-school and school embedded professional development varies greatly between countries.**
- **Teachers report more positive impacts on their classroom teaching from school than non-school embedded professional development.**

What is TALIS?

The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) is the first international survey examining teaching and learning environments in schools. It asks teachers and school principals about their work, their schools and their classrooms. This cross-country analysis helps countries identify others facing similar challenges and learn about their policies.

TALIS 2013 focused on lower secondary education teachers and their principals. It sampled 200 schools in more than 30 countries and 20 teachers in each school.

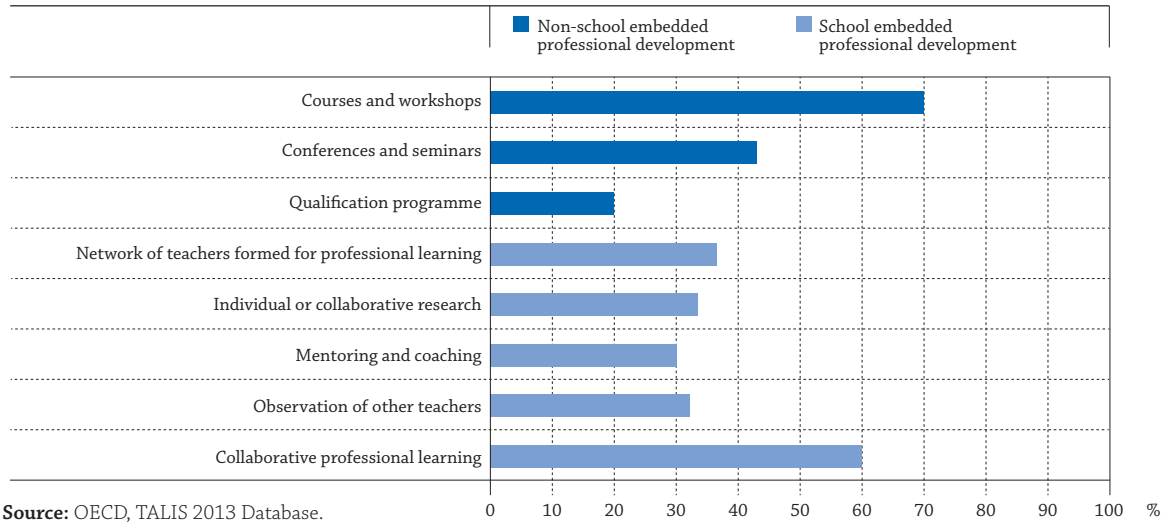
More information available at *www.oecd.org/talis*

TALIS

More teachers participate in non-school than school embedded professional development

Embedded professional development refers to teacher learning that is embedded in the school context, sustained, and in which teachers collaborate with their same-school colleagues, which focuses on problems of practice and utilises real student work and curriculum examples. Research shows that this kind of professional development has a positive impact on teachers' classroom practices. Unfortunately, teachers participating in TALIS 2013 indicate they participated less in these kinds of 'school-embedded' professional development activities (the average number of activities reported is 2) and more in non-school embedded activities that take them out of their classrooms and schools (the average number of activities reported is 3). As Figure 1 shows teachers are more likely to participate in non-school based courses and workshops (70%) than school-based collaborative professional learning (61%). Similarly, they are more likely to participate in conferences and seminars (43%) than in a network of teachers for professional learning (36%), mentoring and coaching (30%), or to observe other teachers (32%).

Figure 1 • **Percentage of teachers who indicate participating in professional development activities in the 12-month period prior to the survey, by type of activity**

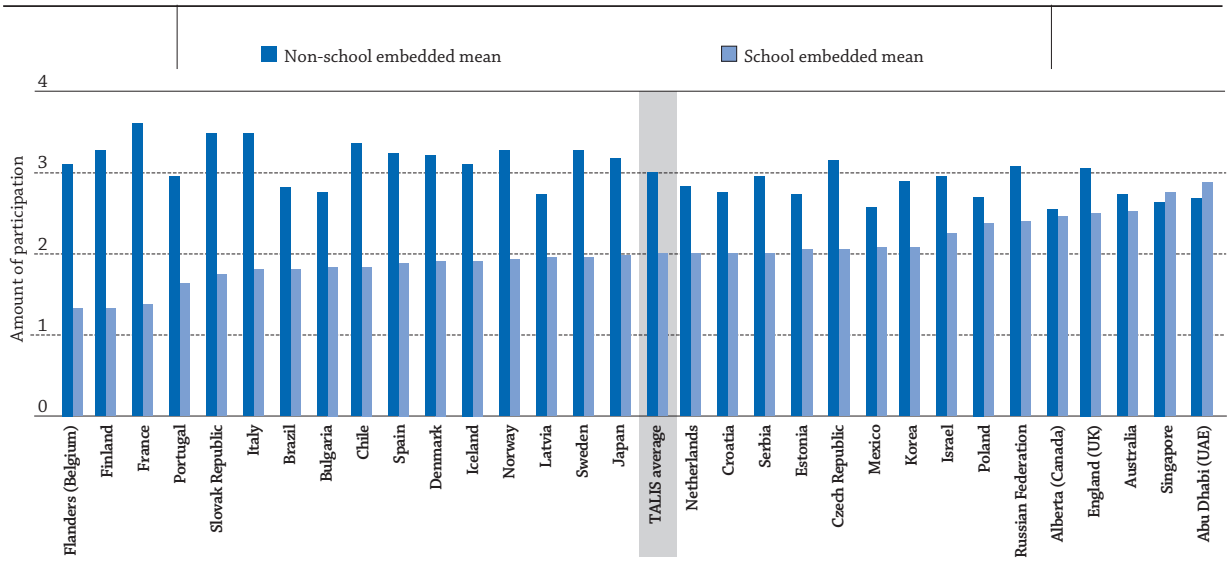


Source: OECD, TALIS 2013 Database.

Participation in non-school and school embedded professional development varies greatly between countries

There are high levels of participation in non-school embedded professional development activities in most countries, but large differences between countries are reported, as illustrated in Figure 2 below. Teachers in Chile, France, Italy and the Slovak Republic indicate participating in non-school embedded professional development activities at much higher than average levels. Conversely, teachers in Mexico, Singapore, Alberta (Canada) and Abu Dhabi (Unites Arab Emirates) indicate participating in these types of activities at lower than average levels.

Figure 2 • **Difference in participation in school and non-school embedded professional development**



The "amount of participation" is the standardised participation rate of teachers in professional development activities where 0 represents no participation and 4 represents a high level of participation.
Source: OECD, TALIS 2013 Database.

There are also significant differences in levels of teachers' participation in school embedded professional development. Figure 2 demonstrates that teachers in countries and economies such as Finland, France, Portugal and Flanders (Belgium), indicate significantly below average participation in school embedded professional development, whereas teachers in Australia, Singapore, Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) and England (United Kingdom) all indicate significantly higher than average levels of participation.

School embedded professional development has more impact on teacher practice than non-school embedded professional development

Results from TALIS 2013 indicate that participation in non-school embedded professional development may be less effective than participation in school embedded professional development. Teachers were asked about whether their professional development participation had positive impacts on a number of aspects of their practice, including:

- knowledge and understanding of my subject field(s)
- pedagogical competences in teaching my subject fields(s)
- knowledge of the curriculum
- student evaluation and assessment practices
- ICT (information and communication technology) skills
- student behaviour and classroom management
- teaching cross-curricular skills
- student career guidance and counselling.

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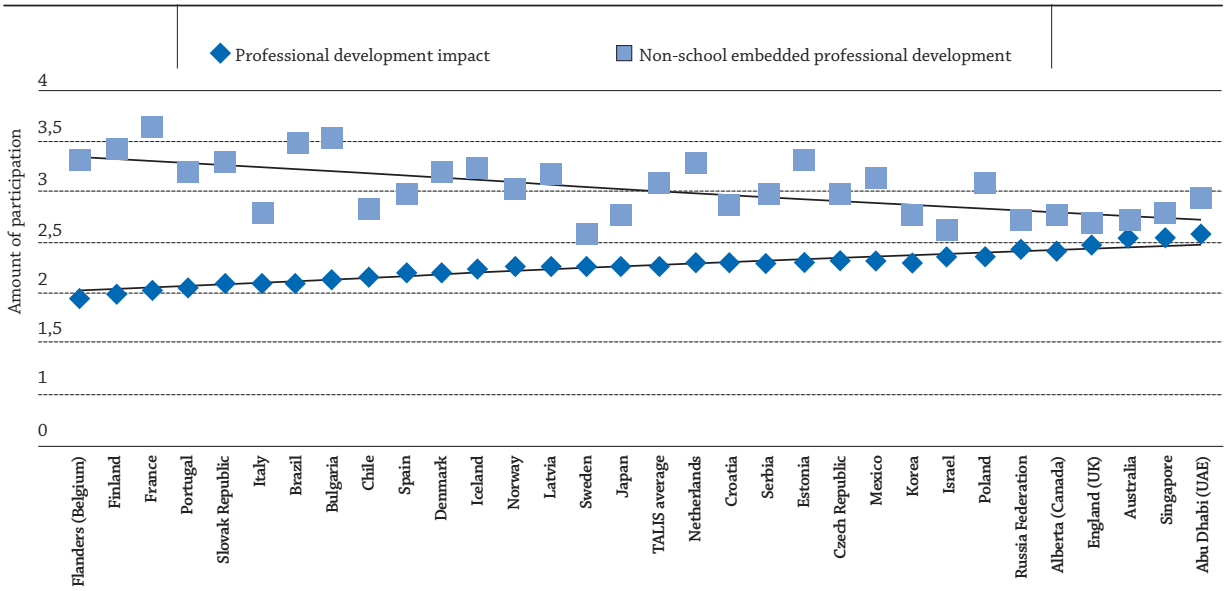
Figure 3 • **Participation in non-school embedded professional development and teacher reports of instructional impact by country**



The "amount of participation" is the standardised participation rate of teachers in professional development activities where 0 represents no participation and 4 represents a high level of participation.
Source: OECD, TALIS 2013 Database.

When we consider the relationship between the two types of professional development (school embedded and non-school embedded) and the impacts on teacher knowledge and classroom practice indicated by teachers, we find that school embedded professional development has a significant, positive association with teacher reports of impact whereas non-school embedded professional development activities has a significant, negative association with reported professional development impact. Analysis of the results from TALIS 2013 indicate that the more teachers participate in non-school embedded professional development, the lower the impact on teaching knowledge and practice reported by teachers. This negative association is explored in Figure 3, which shows non-school professional development and impact reported by country. Teachers in Chile, Finland, France, Italy and the Slovak Republic participate in high levels of non-school embedded professional development and report lower levels of impact on their instruction practices from their professional development. Teachers in Korea, Latvia, Singapore and Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) report low levels of participation in non-school embedded professional development, and indicate significantly higher levels of instructional impact.

A similar analysis of the relationship between an index of school embedded professional development activities and teacher reports of instructional impact demonstrated a positive relationship; when teachers participate in more school embedded professional development they also report more impact on instruction as a result of professional development participation.

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What this means in practice

When teachers participate in school embedded professional development that involves collaboration with their same-school colleagues on problems of practice, they report positive impacts on their pedagogical knowledge and practices.

Unfortunately, teachers report being more likely to participate in professional development activities which are disconnected from their school environment, such as conferences, lectures, and workshops. The more teachers report participating in this type of professional development, the lower the levels of instructional impact reported.

Teachers, school leaders and policy makers should prioritise professional development activities that take place in school settings and that are sustained, collaborative, and focused on problems of practice.

The bottom line Countries that wish to improve the effectiveness of professional development provided to teachers should increase the amount and variation of school embedded offerings such as mentoring and coaching, creating networks of teachers who learn together, and supporting collaborative research and instructional problem solving by teachers. Non-school embedded professional development such as conferences, seminars, courses and workshops, especially those that take place outside of the school where teachers are employed, should be limited as they are associated with low levels of reported impact on instruction.

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To learn more
OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris.
OECD (2014), *A Teachers' Guide to TALIS 2013*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris.

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