Teaching in Focus #32

How prepared are teachers and schools to face the changes to learning caused by the coronavirus pandemic?

Teaching & Learning

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How prepared are teachers and schools to face the changes to learning caused by the coronavirus pandemic?

- Insights from TALIS 2018 shed light on the level of preparedness of teachers and schools to adjust to new ways of working in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. This will allow education systems to learn from the crisis and be better prepared for the challenges of teaching and learning in this new environment.
- Prior to the crisis, only 53% of teachers reported using information and communications technology (ICT) for classwork on a frequent basis, and between 19% and 25% of schools faced shortages or inadequacy of digital resources, or issues with Internet access. Moreover, only 67% felt that they could support student learning through the use of digital technology (e.g. computers, tablets, smart boards).
- In spite of these challenges, nearly 75% of teachers regarded most teachers in their school as open to change, and nearly 60% of principals reported frequent engagement in actions to support co-operation among teachers to develop new teaching practices in their school.
- However, there was a limited degree of communication between teachers and parents prior to the crisis.

What is TALIS?

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), established in 2008, is the first major international survey of teachers and school leaders on different aspects that affect student learning. It gives a voice to teachers and school leaders, allowing them to provide input into educational policy analysis and development in key areas.

The international target population for TALIS 2018 is lower secondary teachers and their school leaders in mainstream public and private schools. In each country, a representative sample of 4 000 teachers and their school principals from 200 schools was randomly selected for the study. Some countries also opted to survey teachers and school leaders in primary or upper secondary schools, as well as in schools participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Across all survey components, approximatively 260 000 teachers responded to the survey, representing more than 8 million teachers in 48 participating countries and economies.

An OECD average is estimated based on the arithmetic average of lower secondary teacher data across the 31 OECD countries and economies participating in TALIS. The report refers to the average teacher "across the OECD" as equivalent shorthand for the average teacher "across the 31 OECD countries and economies participating in TALIS".

More information is available at www.oecd.org/education/talis.

When the COVID-19 outbreak struck at the end of 2019, few teachers, school leaders or education ministers foresaw a localised disease as likely to disrupt the operations of their own schools, nor that its impact could be so wide ranging. However, a few months down the road this localised outbreak has turned into a global pandemic, with many governments around the world "locking down" their populations and closing schools in an attempt to contain the spread of the virus. As of 3 May 2020, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics reported country-wide school closures in 182 countries, impacting nearly 1.3 billion students worldwide.

While a number of countries have made the decision to keep schools closed for the next few months, others are now starting to reopen their schools. However, even in those systems reopening schools it is becoming increasingly clear that they will not go back to normal operations for some time, and that the COVID-19 threat is likely to impact their operations in the months (and possibly years) to come. Indeed, some of the first countries to experience the COVID-19 outbreak in Asia – Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong (China) and Singapore – are now fighting a second wave of infections. It is clear that some teachers with medical conditions may not be able to resume onsite teaching for some time, while students with individuals at risk in their household are also likely to stay away from schools until a COVID-19 therapy or vaccine becomes available.

In this context, some degree of remote teaching and learning is likely to remain a feature of education provision in the foreseeable future. Now that the emergency response to the crisis is somewhat behind us, it is of the utmost importance to take the time to critically assess the level of preparedness of teachers, schools and systems to adjust to these new ways

of working, as well as to identify promising education continuity stories around the world so that education systems can learn from this first wave of school closures to be better prepared for the upcoming challenges of teaching and learning in this new environment.

On 2 June 2020, education ministers and union leaders of the world's top-performing and fastest-improving education systems will gather virtually for an extraordinary session of the International Summit on the Teaching Profession to initiate this peer learning process and discuss lessons from the COVID-19 crisis. This *Teaching in Focus* issue intends to inform these deliberations by providing TALIS insights into teachers' and schools' preparedness for the COVID-19 crisis across the OECD. Country-specific notes complement this *Teaching in Focus* brief, drawing upon TALIS, PISA and *Education at a Glance* data, together with other sources of information.

How familiar were teachers and students with using ICT for teaching prior to the crisis, and what do we know about teachers' preparedness?

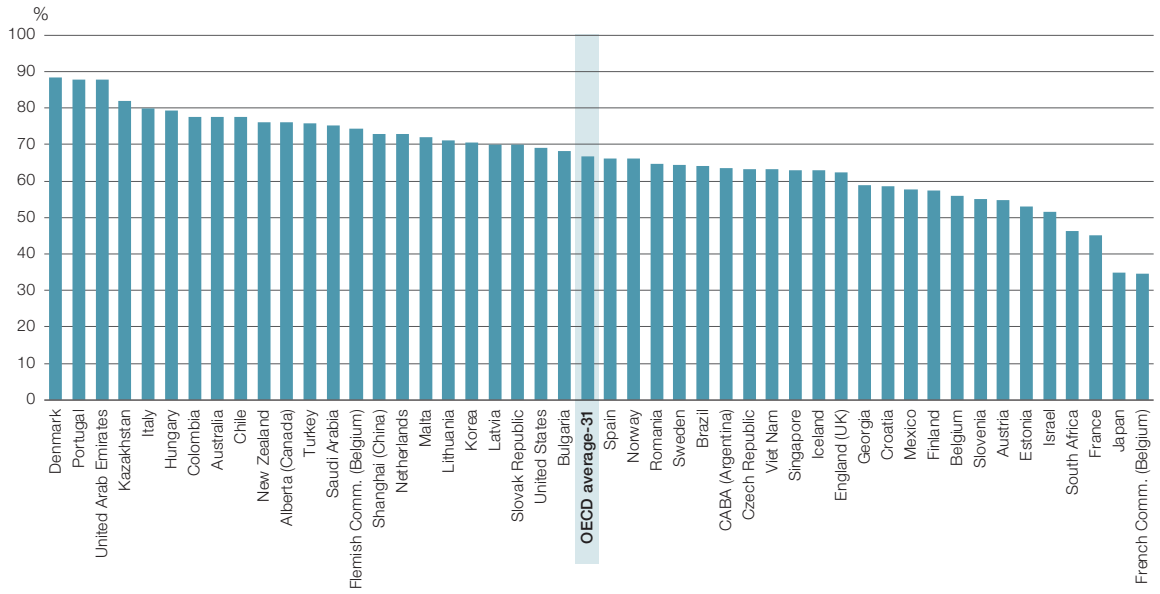
A good starting point to assess the extent to which teachers and their students were prepared for school closures is to examine how frequently ICT was used for teaching before the crisis hit. On average across the OECD, only slightly more than half of lower secondary teachers (53%) reported letting students use ICT for projects or classwork "frequently" or "always" when the TALIS 2018 data were collected, which means that nearly half of teachers were not particularly familiar with this way of teaching.

Principals' views on the school resources issues that hinder the capacity of their school to provide quality instruction shed light on possible blockages to a wider use of ICT for teaching in OECD schools: in 2018, 25% of school principals reported a shortage or inadequacy of digital technology for instruction as a significant hindrance, and insufficient Internet access was reported as an issue in almost one in five schools (19%).

Regarding teachers' preparedness, 56% of teachers covered the use of ICT for teaching in their initial education or training. At the time of the survey, only two out of three teachers (67%) felt that they could support student learning through the use of digital technology (e.g. computers, tablets, smart boards) (Figure 1) and 8.5% reported a high need for professional development in this area. These pre-crisis reports suggest that the transition to remote teaching and learning may have been challenging for about one third of teachers, and particularly so for nearly one in ten teachers.

Figure 1. Teacher's self-efficacy in supporting student learning through the use of ICT

Percentage of lower secondary teachers who feel they can support student learning through the use of digital technology "quite a bit" or "a lot"



Note: CABA (Argentina): Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (Argentina).

Values are ranked in descending order of teachers' self-efficacy in supporting student learning through the use of ICT.

Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database, Table I.2.20.

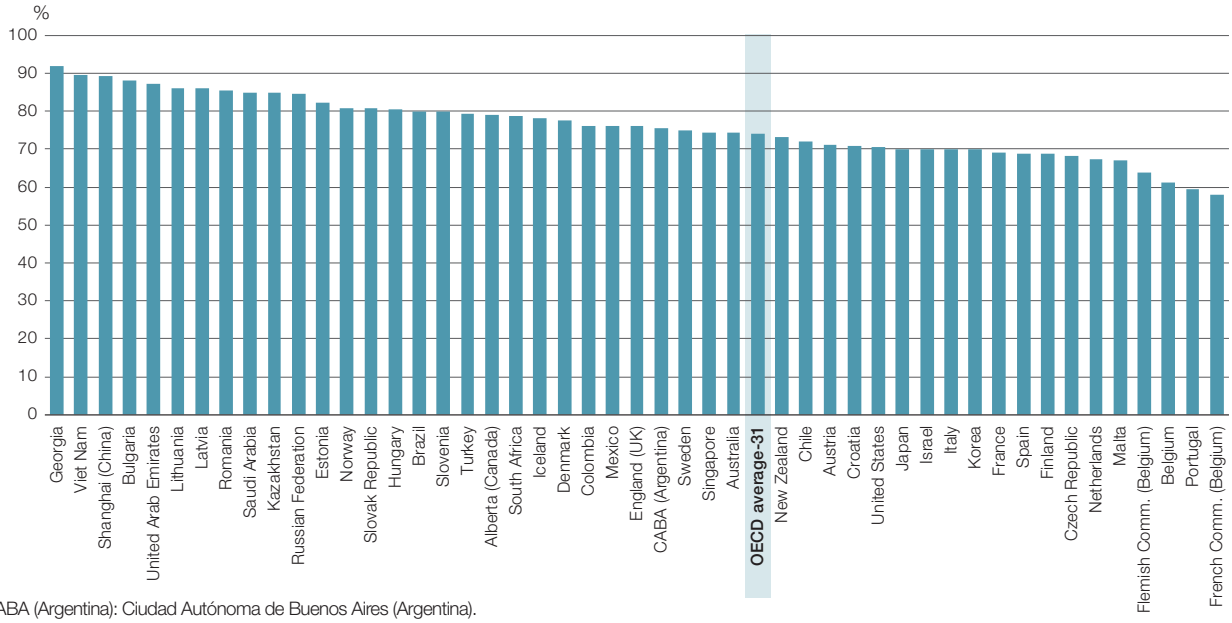
What do we know about teachers' and schools' readiness and capacity to overhaul their ways of working when the crisis hit?

In spite of the challenges that the transition to remote teaching may have entailed for some teachers, the good news from TALIS 2018 is that 74% of teachers surveyed by TALIS "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that most teachers in their school are

open to change, thus suggesting a climate of openness to innovation in OECD schools (Figure 2). However, a possible challenge in adapting to change is that most teachers did not have a tradition of online training before the crisis: only 36% participated in professional development through online courses/seminars.

Figure 2. Teachers' views on their colleagues' attitudes towards innovation

Percentage of lower secondary teachers who "agree" or "strongly agree" that most teachers in the school are open to change



Note: CABA (Argentina): Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (Argentina).

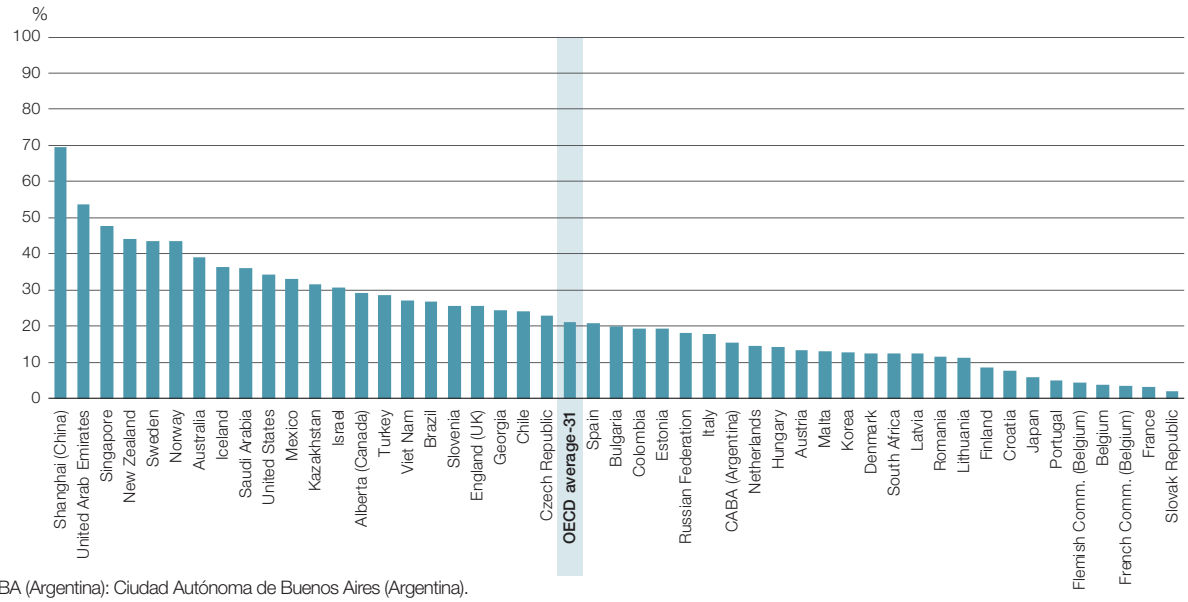
Values are ranked in descending order of teachers' views on their colleagues' attitudes towards innovation.

Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database, Table I.2.35.

As an alternative to individual training through online means, teachers' collaboration can help them learn from each other and adjust to the new reality of remote teaching. TALIS 2018 sheds light on the collaborative culture prevailing in OECD schools prior to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the instructional leadership of school leaders, who can play a key role in fostering collaboration around instructional practices. Overall, before the crisis, 59% of school principals reported engaging "often" or "very often" in actions to support co-operation among teachers to develop new teaching practices in their school but only 21% of teachers reported participating in collaborative professional learning in their school at least once a month (Figure 3), and 40% reported participating in a network of teachers formed specifically for professional development.

Figure 3. Teachers' participation in collaborative professional learning

Percentage of lower secondary teachers who report participating in collaborative professional learning in their school at least once a month



Note: CABA (Argentina): Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (Argentina).

Values are ranked in descending order of the percentage of lower secondary teachers who report participating in collaborative professional learning in their school at least once a month.

Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database, Table II.4.1.

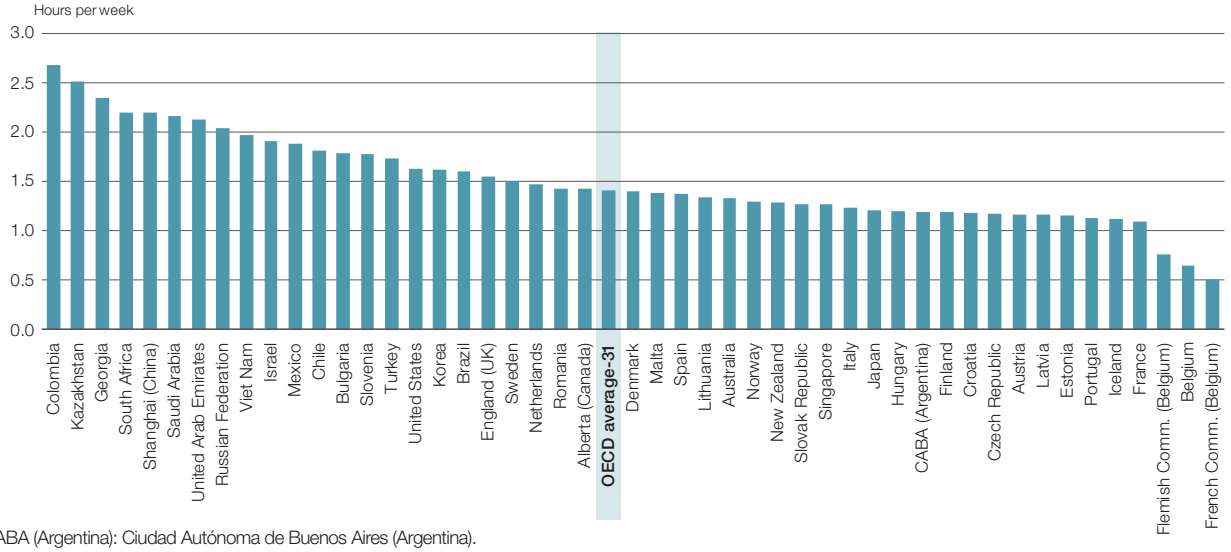
Collaboration across schools was reported as being somewhat less frequent, with only 37% of lower secondary principals engaging in collaborating with principals from other schools on challenging work tasks "often" or "very often" in the 12 months prior to the survey.

What do we know about teacher-parent interactions prior to the crisis and the scope for parental support?

In a remote teaching and learning context, parents become a key resource for education provision as motivators of student engagement and facilitators of student learning. However, TALIS 2018 data show that interactions with parents and guardians were not very prominent prior to the crisis. Across the OECD, lower secondary teachers spent, on average, 1.4 hours per week on communication and co-operation with parents or guardians, out of a total of nearly 39 working hours (Figure 4). Few teachers (9%) reported a high level of need for professional development on teacher-parent co-operation, suggesting that this reflected a culture of limited parental involvement rather than teachers' difficulties in liaising with their students' families.

Figure 4. Total hours teachers spent on communication and co-operation with parents or guardians

Average number of hours (i.e. 60 minutes) lower secondary teachers report having spent on communication and co-operation with parents or guardians during the most recent complete calendar week



Note: CABA (Argentina): Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (Argentina).

Values are ranked in descending order of the average number of hours (i.e. 60 minutes) lower secondary teachers report having spent on communication and co-operation with parents or guardians during the most recent complete calendar week.

Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database, Table I.2.27.

The bottom line

With the prospect of further waves of COVID-19 and new episodes of school closures in the future, as well as the likely extended confinement of some teachers and students due to COVID-related risks in their households, remote teaching and learning is likely to remain an enduring feature of education provision in the months or years to come – at least for some education stakeholders or for specific periods of time.

In this context, TALIS 2018 pre-crisis insights shed light on possible strategies for teachers, school leaders and education systems to prepare for this new and uncertain reality:

- At the level of teachers, efforts should focus first and foremost on developing their expertise in using ICT for teaching, and making use of available digital training opportunities and resources. Teachers should also seek to learn from and collaborate with their peers in this area. TALIS findings also suggest that more emphasis should be given to strengthening communication and developing partnerships with parents so that students can be best supported in remote learning settings.
- At the level of school leaders, efforts should aim to ensure that the school is as closure-proof as possible by encouraging collaboration and peer learning among teachers to make sure that

all educators are ready for future episodes of school closures. Offering collaborative professional learning opportunities within the school, exchanging promising strategies experimented during the first wave of school closures, and encouraging teachers to collectively rethink their practice in the new reality can provide an effective mechanism to prepare the school community for future outbreaks. Efforts should also focus on addressing resources issues that impede the use of digital technologies within the school wherever this is an issue.

- At the system level, efforts should focus on developing training opportunities – including virtual learning opportunities – for teachers to develop and strengthen their expertise in teaching and assessing students remotely, and in using ICT and digital technologies in their teaching. Education authorities could also usefully compile, curate and make available resources content that teachers, students and their parents could use in the event of further school closures, as well as virtual platforms allowing teachers to exchange best practices. Policy should target support, such as catch-up programmes, to disadvantaged students who have been particularly impacted by the first wave of school closures, as well as to those who will have to stay away from school in the long run due to medical conditions in their households. For this latter group, developing distance learning provision that includes regular virtual interactions with teachers and peer students would seem particularly important to sustain students' social interactions and their cognitive and socio-emotional development despite a context of prolonged confinement.

Visit

www.oecd.org/education/talis/

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For more information

UNESCO (2020), *COVID-19 Impact on Education*, https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse (accessed 3 May 2020).

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