TEACHING in Focus

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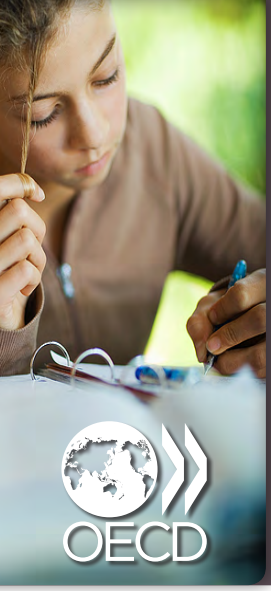


What TALIS reveals about teachers across education levels

- The report *New insights from TALIS 2013: Teaching and Learning in Primary and Upper Secondary Education* (OECD, 2014a) presents an overview of teachers and teaching in primary and upper secondary education for a sample of countries that participated in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in 2013.
- Women represent the majority of the teaching workforce for most countries at all levels of education. Despite this and the fact that most principals are former teachers, significantly fewer principals are women at all education levels.
- Primary teachers tend to work in schools where principals report material and personnel shortages that hinder the delivery of quality education more often than upper secondary teachers. Moreover, schools with high proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged students face greater shortages in terms of key resources in many countries. This further exacerbates the already-challenging circumstances for teachers and students.

What is TALIS?

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.

Although TALIS 2013 focused on lower secondary education teachers and their principals in over 30 countries and economies, it also offered countries the option to survey their primary and upper secondary school teachers and school leaders. Six countries chose to survey their primary school teachers and principals: Denmark, Finland, Mexico, Norway, Poland and Flanders (Belgium). Ten countries and economies chose to survey their upper secondary school teachers and principals: Australia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Singapore and Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates). At each education level, TALIS sampled 200 schools and 20 teachers and 1 school leader in each school.

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

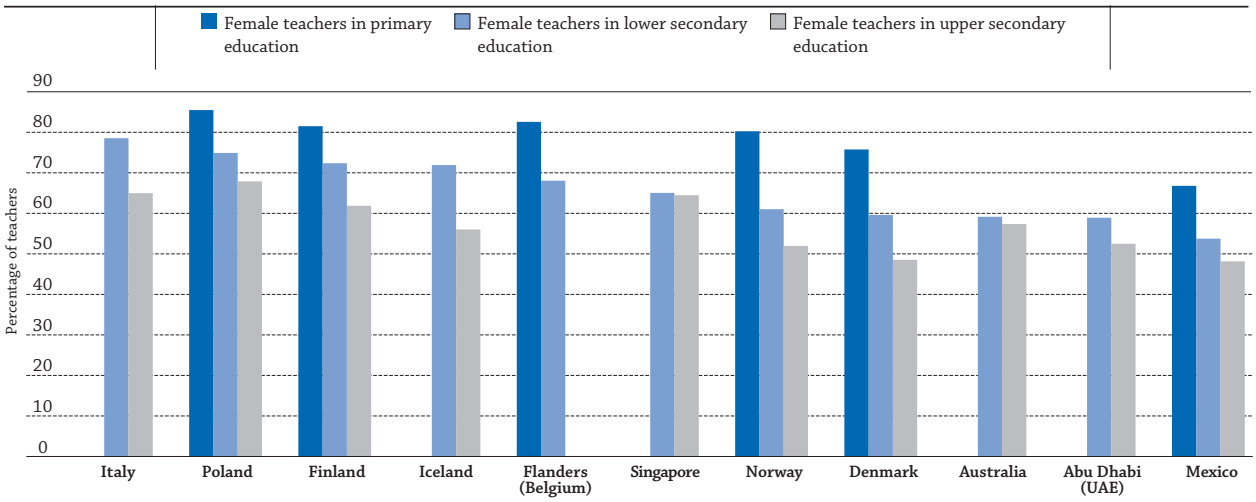
TALIS

Profiles of teachers in primary and upper secondary schools

The previous TALIS 2013 reports (OECD, 2014b; c) focused on teachers and teaching in lower secondary schools. The new OECD report, *New insights from TALIS 2013: Teaching and Learning in Primary and Upper Secondary Education* (OECD, 2014a), focuses on primary and upper secondary education, comparing diverse schools resources. Among the most vital school resources are teachers who are the key actors in supporting students learning.

Looking across education levels one of the biggest differences in teacher characteristics is the gender distribution of teachers (see Figure 1). On average, across the countries that participated in the primary and upper secondary TALIS options, between 67% (in Mexico) and 86% (in Poland) of primary teachers are female, while between 48% (in Denmark) and 68% (in Poland) of upper secondary teachers are female.

Figure 1 • **Gender distribution of primary, lower and upper secondary teachers**

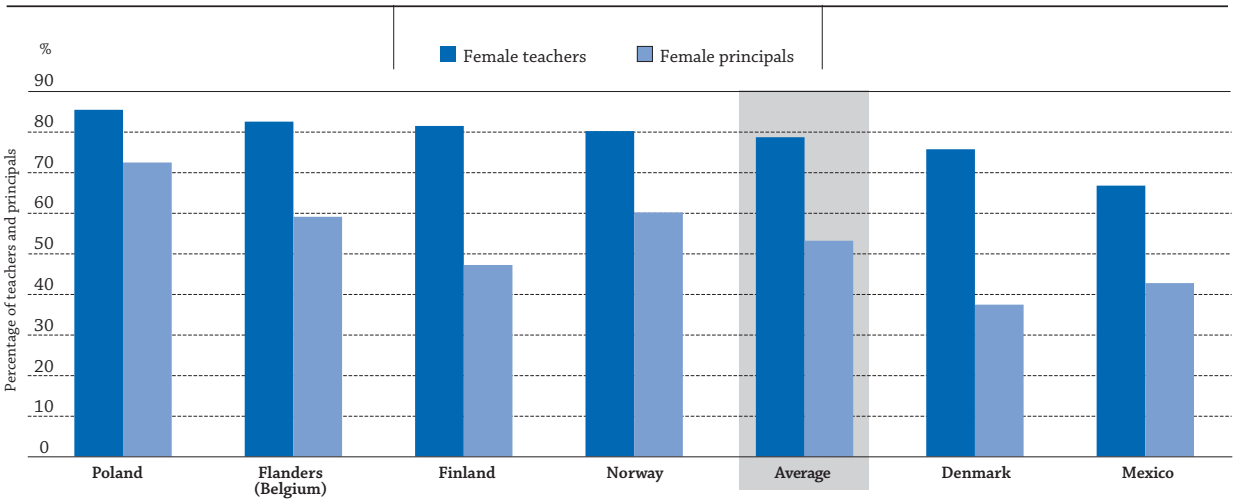


Source: OECD, TALIS 2013 Database.

Profiles of principals in primary and upper secondary schools

Notably, the gender distribution of teachers is not reflected in school leadership positions, especially at the primary level, even though most principals (about 80%) have more than 10 years of experience as teachers. There are differences between the countries, though: in primary education, 86% of teachers against 72% of principals are female in Poland, while 76% of teachers and 37% of principals are female in Denmark (Figure 2). Thus, in some countries women face greater obstacles to their aspiration for primary school leadership positions than in others. The gender imbalance exists also at the upper secondary level, but to a smaller extent: across the ten countries, there are between 39% of female principals in Australia (against 59% of teachers) and 54% in Singapore (against 65% of teachers), on average.

Figure 2 • **Distribution of female primary principals and teachers**



Source: OECD, TALIS 2013 Database.

What this means in practice

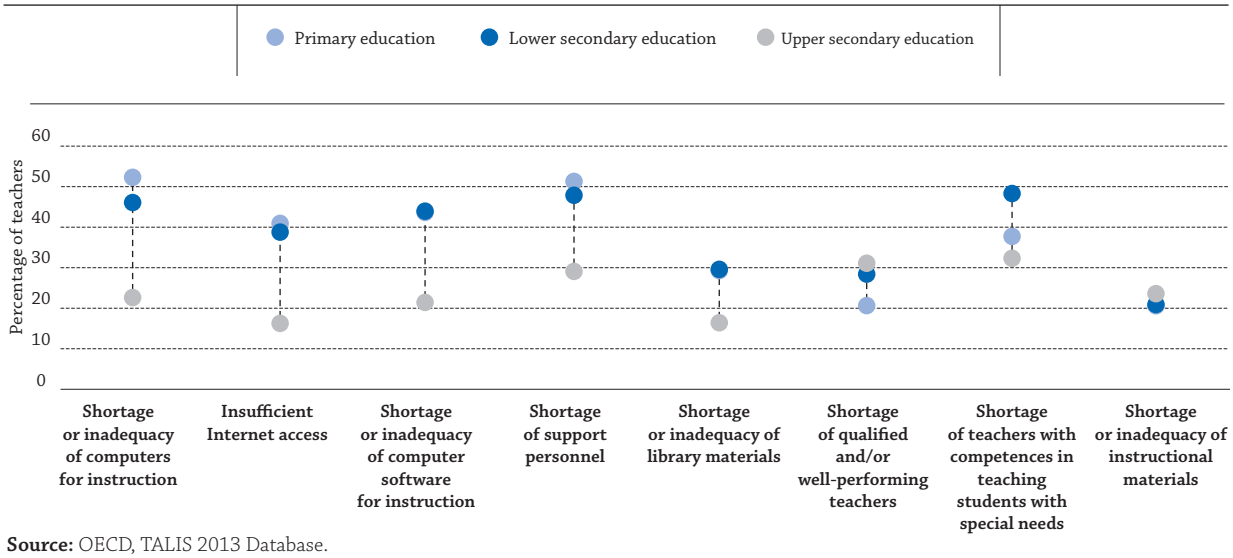
The proportion of male teachers in primary schools is relatively low in many countries, which may impact the availability of male role models in primary schools. In contrast, there is an overrepresentation of male principals, relative to male teachers, especially at the primary level. It means that male teachers tend to be promoted to principal positions more often than female teachers. Countries should reflect if there are system-level barriers preventing males from choosing to be teachers and women from becoming school leaders, especially at the primary level.

School resources in primary and upper secondary schools

In addition to collecting information on teachers and principals, the key human resources in schools, the report asks principals about general school resource shortages that hinder their schools' provision of quality education. Figure 3 presents average cross-level differences in the reported shortages for the five countries with data available for three education levels (Denmark, Finland, Mexico, Norway and Poland).

TALIS

Figure 3 • **School resources in primary and secondary education**



Source: OECD, TALIS 2013 Database.

There are substantial differences between countries in terms of shortages. In the six countries with primary school data, teachers work in schools where principals most commonly cite shortages of:

- support personnel (from 31% of teachers in Poland to 71% in Flanders [Belgium])
- computers for instruction (from 33% of teachers in Poland to 81% in Mexico)
- computer software for instruction (from 30% of teachers in Norway to 75% in Mexico).

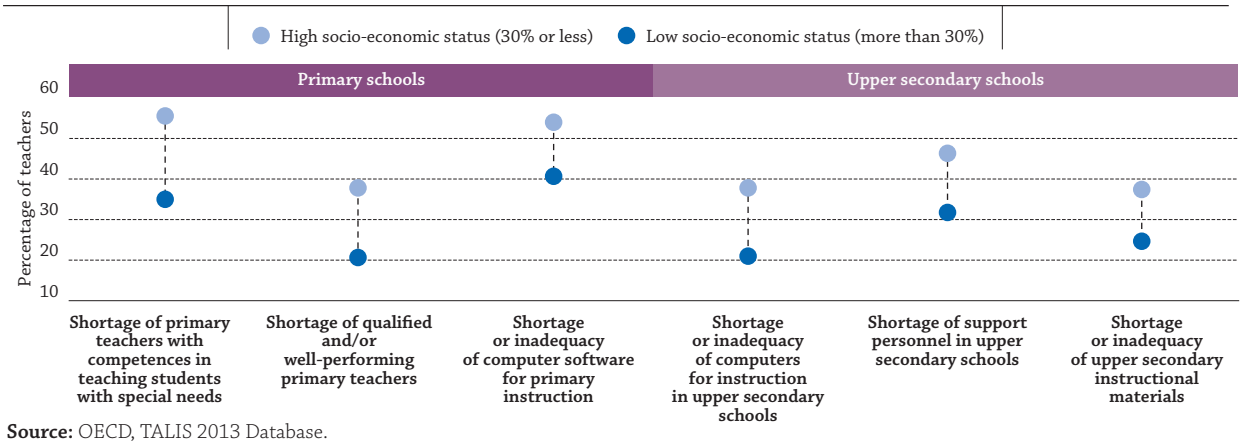
In the ten countries with data on upper secondary schools, teachers work in schools where principals most commonly cite shortages of:

- teachers with competences in teaching students with special needs (from 24% of teachers in Iceland and Poland to 56% in Abu Dhabi [United Arab Emirates])
- qualified and/or well-performing teachers (from 1% of teachers in Iceland to 54% in Australia)
- support personnel (from 20% of teachers in Denmark, Iceland and Norway to 55% in Abu Dhabi [United Arab Emirates]).

Equitable distribution of resources in primary and upper secondary schools

The report also shows that the differences in terms of school resources exist not only across school levels but also within each level. On average, principals of teachers in primary and upper secondary schools with high proportions (more than 30%) of socio-economically disadvantaged students often report more shortage than those in schools with lower proportion of such students. These differences are important, as PISA results suggest that high-performing systems tend to distribute resources more equitably across socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools (OECD, 2013). Figure 4 presents shortage categories with biggest disparities between schools with high and low socio-economic status in primary and upper secondary education.

Figure 4 • **School resources in primary and upper secondary education, by socio-economic level**



Source: OECD, TALIS 2013 Database.

What this means in practice

Teachers in primary and upper secondary schools work in schools with different challenges in terms of staff and equipment shortages. Furthermore, across education levels, many resource shortages are more pronounced in schools with high proportions of socio-economically disadvantaged students. This likely increases the challenges of such schools for both teachers and students. Countries need to strive for an equitable distribution of resources across schools and systems, for the sake of fair learning opportunities for all students.

The bottom line The purpose of the new TALIS report (OECD, 2014c) is to give a snapshot of primary and upper secondary education. The picture that emerges is that of teaching and learning environments presenting, despite certain similarities, different demands and challenges on teachers and schools. Understanding the situation at each education level and the possible imbalances across levels is essential in order to equip all students with skills necessary to achieve future health and wealth.

References

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