

Teachers love their job but feel undervalued, unsupported and unrecognised, says OECD

25/06/14 - Most teachers enjoy their job, despite feeling unsupported and unrecognised in schools and undervalued by society at large, according to a new OECD survey.

The OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) finds that more than nine out of ten teachers are satisfied with their jobs and nearly eight in ten would choose the teaching profession again. But fewer than one in three teachers believe teaching is a valued profession in society. Importantly, those countries where teachers feel valued tend to perform better in PISA.

More than 100,000 teachers and school leaders at lower secondary level (for students aged 11-16) in 34 countries and economies took part in the OECD survey. It aims to help countries develop a high-quality teaching profession by better understanding who teachers are and how they work.

The survey shows that too many teachers still work in isolation. Over half report rarely or never team-teaching with colleagues and only one third observe their colleagues teach. Feedback is also rare, with some 46% of teachers reporting they never receive any from their school leader, and less than a third (31%) believe that a consistently underperforming colleague would be dismissed.

But the survey shows that there is a lot teachers and school leaders can do about this: teachers who engage in collaborative learning have higher job satisfaction and confidence in their abilities. Participation in school decisions also boosts job satisfaction and makes teachers feel more valued in society.

“We need to attract the best and brightest to join the profession. Teachers are the key in today's knowledge economy, where a good education is an essential foundation for every child's future success,” said Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills, launching the survey in Tokyo. “This survey provides strong evidence that teachers are open to change and keen to learn and develop throughout their careers. At the same time, they need to take more initiative to work with colleagues and school leaders, and take advantage of every opportunity for professional development.”

The survey challenges some stereotypical views of the profession. For example, job satisfaction rates are much more affected by classroom behaviour than class size.

And most teachers find appraisals and feedback constructive: 62% of teachers, on average across countries, said that the feedback they receive in their school led to moderate or large improvements in their teaching practices. But between 22% and 45% of teachers in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Spain, and Sweden said that they have never received feedback in their current school, compared to an average of 13% across the 34 countries surveyed.

Other key findings include:

Teacher profiles

The teaching profession has become more feminised, with 68% of teachers being women, except in Japan. The average age is 43, with Singapore having the youngest teachers and Italy the oldest. More than nine in 10 (91%) have completed a university education and had teacher training (90%). A typical teacher has taught for around 16 years, usually full-time (82%) and on a permanent contract (83%).

School leaders

Around half of school leaders are male (51%), are around 50 years of age and have 21 years of teaching experience. They spend most (41%) of their time managing people and resources, planning and reporting. And while those with higher levels of instructional leadership reported higher job satisfaction, more than one in five (22%) have never had leadership training and 31% only after they became a principal.

In the classroom

The average class size is 24 students. Teachers spend an average of 19 hours per week teaching, ranging from 15 hours in Norway to 27 hours in Chile. But in about half of the countries, one in four teachers said they spend at least 30% of lesson time handling classroom disruptions and administrative tasks.

Of an average total of 38 hours of work, seven hours per week are spent preparing lessons, five hours per week marking, and two hours per week on school management, working with parents and extracurricular activities.

Most schools are well-resourced and teachers report positive relationships with their peers and school leaders. But more than a third of teachers work in schools where the principal reports significant staff shortages of qualified teachers, teachers for students with special needs, and support staff.

Starting at school and professional development

Two-thirds (66%) work in schools with formal induction programmes. The exceptions are Brazil, Mexico, Poland, Portugal and Spain, where only between 20% and 30% of teachers work in schools with formal programmes.

Around nine in ten (88%) of teachers have had professional development in the past year, with more than three-quarters (between 76% and 91% of teachers) reporting it had had a positive impact on their teaching.

Teaching students with special needs was the area most teachers (22%) said they

needed more training, followed by information and communications technology skills (19%).

Appraisals and feedback

Nearly 80% of teachers get feedback following classroom observation and two-thirds (64%) from analysis of student scores.

But formal appraisals have little impact on career advancement or financial recognition, according to most teachers. Annual pay rises are awarded regardless of performance in four-fifths (78%) of schools and 44% of teachers work in schools where formal appraisals have no impact on career advancement.

Around half of teachers also report feeling that most appraisals are carried out merely as administrative exercises and 43% say they are not strongly related to how they teach in the classroom.