Novice teachers under pressure

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Reports of teacher shortages in many countries around the world raise questions about teachers' wellbeing and job satisfaction. Which teachers are thriving? Which ones are struggling? What might make teachers more likely to leave the profession? What could support teachers to stay? Data from the fourth cycle of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2024) help to shed light on common areas of concern and potential policy levers moving forward.

Teachers are generally satisfied with their jobs

Although teaching can be a highly demanding profession, teachers reporting "a lot" of stress in their work are in the minority (19 per cent on average across the OECD). It is also uncommon for teachers to report that their job negatively impacts their physical (eight per cent of teachers) or mental (10 per cent of teachers) health "a lot" across the OECD.

Furthermore, the majority of teachers respond positively to questions about their job satisfaction and work environment: 89 per cent of teachers are satisfied with their jobs all in all and 90 per cent enjoy working at their schools on average.

For education systems concerned about teacher shortages, the experience of newcomers to the profession is of particular interest. Are novice teachers being set up for success in their early years? Is the investment (both public and personal) into initial teacher training likely to last?

In terms of their general wellbeing and job satisfaction, TALIS data suggest that novice teachers are faring just as well as their more experienced counterparts. In most education systems, there is no statistically significant difference between novices and experienced teachers in the share of teachers who are satisfied with their jobs, nor in the share of teachers who experience “a lot” of stress overall.

Novice teachers are more stressed about maintaining classroom discipline

However, novice teachers are affected by certain sources of stress more frequently than experienced colleagues, namely:

- Maintaining classroom discipline (55 per cent of novices on average; 41 per cent of experienced teachers).
- Having too much lesson preparation (38 per cent of novices on average; 33 per cent of experienced teachers).
- Keeping up with professional learning (26 per cent of novices on average; 24 per cent of experienced teachers).
- Being intimidated or verbally abused by students (19 per cent of novices on average; 17 per cent of experienced teachers).

The prevalence of novice teachers’ stress related to classroom discipline is a particular concern. When teachers struggle with student behaviour and classroom management, student learning suffers as teachers lose class time to interruptions.

Furthermore, stress from classroom discipline is especially harmful to teachers’ job satisfaction and retention. On average, teachers who find maintaining classroom discipline stressful are twice as likely to want to leave teaching within five years.

Supporting novice teachers with classroom management should therefore be a key priority for policymakers and school leaders looking to boost teacher retention. Although teacher shortages are not universal, TALIS suggests that this concerns many education systems, with more than 20 per cent of novice teachers intending to leave teaching within the next five years in nearly one-third of participating education systems.



Tackling stress from classroom discipline – where to start?

It may not be surprising to hear that novice teachers struggle more often with classroom discipline than experienced teachers. Novice teachers may lack some of the practical knowledge that comes with experience and discovering which approaches suit them – and their students – best. One might therefore expect some accommodations to be made for novices to be in somewhat less challenging environments whilst they develop their skills in this area.

However, it is not uncommon for novice teachers to be allocated to more difficult classroom environments. For example, novice teachers are more likely to have a higher share of students with difficulties understanding the language of instruction in numerous education systems – even though teachers are more likely to report stress from classroom discipline when their class groups are more diverse (including a broad range of behavioural, linguistic and special education needs).

Professional learning activities focused on classroom management can help teachers with maintaining classroom discipline – and novice teachers tend to participate in such training more frequently than their more experienced colleagues.

However, there is a gap between participation and access to such training. In Austria, more than a quarter of novice teachers have a high need for professional learning in classroom management for student behaviour but did not participate in any relevant development activities in the past year.

Teachers – and especially novices – can also benefit from regular feedback on their classroom practice. On average, three-quarters of novice teachers, who received feedback on their teaching, consider that it had a positive impact on their management of student behaviour in the classroom. This paints a generally positive picture.

We might wonder, though, about how to better support the quarter of novice teachers who do not receive impactful feedback, as well as those who do not receive feedback at all. On average, about 20 per cent of teachers report that they have never received feedback based on observations of their classroom teaching in their schools.

One approach could be to improve mentoring programs, whereby novice teachers can receive (impactful) feedback and advice from their more experienced peers. Indeed, TALIS data confirm that there are positive relationships between having an assigned mentor and higher levels of job satisfaction and wellbeing.

There have been modest increases (six percentage points on average) in the share of novice teachers who currently have an assigned mentor since 2018. However, most novice teachers (75 per cent on average) do not currently have an assigned mentor.

Key takeaways

The vast majority of teachers are satisfied in their jobs and report doing well on occupational wellbeing indicators. However, novice teachers are particularly affected by stress from classroom discipline. The prevalence of this stressor needs careful monitoring given its negative association with both student and teacher outcomes.

For education systems concerned, there are several areas for review. For one, novice teachers are often more likely to be allocated to teach diverse student groups, although experienced teachers are more likely to have developed the classroom management skills needed to thrive in such environments.

Furthermore, some novice teachers are falling through the cracks when it comes to improving their practices in classroom management, regarding access to mentorship, professional learning activities and impactful feedback.

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