Global survey shows high use of AI by Australian teachers

By Robyn Shields



Australian teachers are more likely to be using artificial intelligence (AI) than their counterparts around the world, according to a new international survey.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) latest teaching and learning international survey also shows Australian teachers are reporting high levels of stress and not enough training to manage student behaviour.

What is this survey? And what else does it tell us about Australian teachers?

What is the survey?

The Teaching and Learning Survey (also known as TALIS) is a large-scale survey of 280,000 teachers in 55 education systems around the world, including Australia.

Most of the teachers surveyed came from primary schools and lower secondary schools (typically up to Year 10 in Australia).

This is the fourth round of TALIS since it began in 2008 and the first since 2018.

Use of AI

Amid ongoing debate about the use of AI in education, many Australian teachers report they are using this emerging technology in their work.

About two-thirds (66 per cent) of lower secondary teachers reported using AI in the past year. This puts Australia as the fourth highest country within the OECD and far above the OECD average of 36 per cent.

Of Australian teachers who used AI, the most common purposes were brainstorming lesson plans and learning about and summarising content. This was happening for 71 per cent of Australian teachers who used AI.

Australian teachers were unlikely to use AI to review data on student performance (nine per cent of those who use AI, compared to 28 per cent across the OECD) and to assess student work (15 per cent, compared to 30 per cent across the OECD).

These results suggest many Australian teachers are using AI to improve their approach to teaching. But their hesitancy to use it in certain situations suggests there is awareness of concerns around privacy (if student data is uploaded to large language models) and the need to keep using professional judgement (such as when assessing work).



Teacher stress

In Australia, these survey results also arrive at a time of continued concerns about teacher shortages, burnout and dissatisfaction.

Results show a marked increase in reported stress among Australian teachers, who reported the third highest levels of stress among all OECD countries, up from a ranking of 15th in 2018.

Among lower secondary teachers, Australia ranked highest among all countries where teachers reported experiencing stress frequently at work (34 per cent in Australia compared to 19 per cent across the OECD).

The top sources of stress were “too much administrative work,” “too much marking,” and “keeping up with curriculum changes”.

These results support research showing a drastic decrease in Australian teachers’ professional satisfaction since 2015, particularly in the first 10 years of their careers.

Teacher education

In recent years, Australian policy makers have increasingly focused on teacher education programs – the university degrees that train teachers for the classroom. Following a 2023 report, teacher education programs are required to include topics such as the brain and learning, teaching methods and classroom management.

Australian teachers in the TALIS survey appeared, on the whole, happy with their university education. Some 70 per cent of respondents indicated that overall the quality of their teacher education was high, on par with 75 per cent of teachers across the OECD.

While Australian teachers say their training provided sufficient curriculum knowledge, they were less positive about

preparation for managing classroom behaviour.

According to my analysis of the survey data, approximately 50 per cent of Australian teachers were positive about their behaviour training, compared to 63 per cent across the OECD. This matches media reports of teachers struggling with poor student behaviour in their classrooms.

What now?

This survey provides high-quality data to understand our education system at a time of rapid change.

It suggests Australian teachers are global leaders in their use of AI. However, much work needs to be done to improve teachers' wellbeing at work.

Sustaining the teaching profession and the quality of teachers' work is a key national priority, more careful analysis of these results can help guide this work.

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