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Teacher job satisfaction

Surveys such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) enable educators, policymakers and the wider community to compare Australian students with each other, as well as their counterparts across the world.

In November 2018, the Australian Government announced an inquiry into the status of the teaching profession that would examine ways to ensure that the profession remains fulfilling and rewarding for educators. While the inquiry's proceedings lapsed with the calling of the federal election in April 2019, large-scale surveys do provide us with a nationally representative picture of teachers' views of their profession. TIMSS includes questions about job satisfaction in its teacher questionnaire, and the data extracted from these can be used to shine some light onto what contributes to job satisfaction. This *Snapshot* examines Year 4 and Year 8 mathematics and science teachers' job satisfaction from TIMSS 2015 data and some potential aspects of schools and teaching environments that may impact on it.

A note about the presentation of results: TIMSS is set up to focus on student outcomes, so the results from the teacher questionnaire are presented with regard to students. That is, each result is reported as the percentage of students who had a teacher that responded in a particular way.

How satisfied are Australian teachers with their job?

The TIMSS 2015 teacher questionnaire included a teachers' job satisfaction scale. Figure 1 shows the percentage of Australian Year 4 and Year 8 students according to how their mathematics and science teachers responded to this job satisfaction scale. Australian Year 4 and Year 8 students are generally taught by *very satisfied* or *satisfied* teachers, which is good news! However, teachers' levels of satisfaction appeared to decrease in secondary school. More Year 8 students were taught by teachers who were *less than satisfied* with their job than was the case at Year 4.

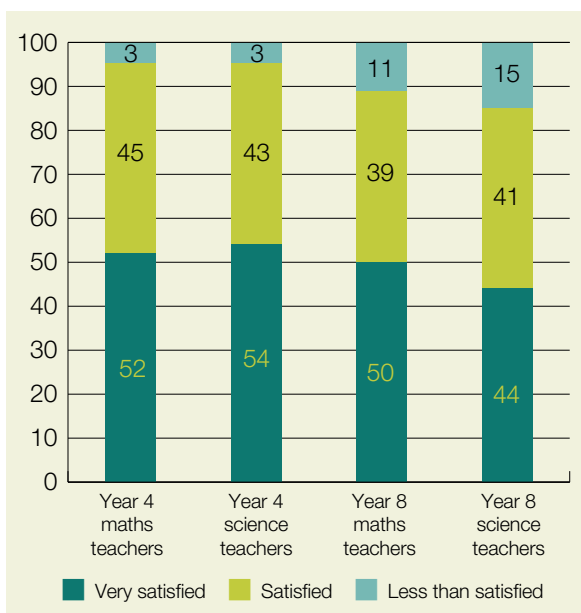


Figure 1 Australian teachers' levels of job satisfaction

What does it mean for a teacher to be satisfied with their job?

The TIMSS teacher job satisfaction scale was made up of seven statements (listed in the following bullet points). The mathematics and science teachers of the participating students responded to each and classified the frequency of their feelings about being a teacher in relation to the statement.

- I am content with my profession as a teacher.
- I am satisfied with being a teacher at this school.
- I find my work full of meaning and purpose.
- I am enthusiastic about my job.
- My work inspires me.
- I am proud of the work that I do.
- I am going to continue teaching for as long as I can.

Figure 2 shows the percentages of students who had a mathematics or science teacher that responded 'often' or 'very often' to each of the statements. Similar to Figure 1, a majority of students had teachers who responded positively to each statement. There were more Year 4 students who had teachers who responded positively to these statements than Year 8 students.



Did you know?

Australia's results in terms of teacher job satisfaction were very similar to the international average, and placed us in the middle of all participating countries. Qatar scored high on this scale with around 75 per cent of students in both Year 4 and Year 8 having mathematics and science teachers who were *very satisfied* with their job. Japan scored lowest on this scale with between 19 per cent (Year 8 science) and 27 per cent (Year 4 science) of students who had teachers that were *very satisfied* with their job.

Students were scored according to how often their teachers responded positively to the seven statements on the teacher job satisfaction scale. Students with *very satisfied* teachers had a score on the scale that corresponded to their teacher responding, on average, 'very often' to four of the seven statements and responding 'often' to the other three, on average. Students with *less than satisfied* teachers had a score that corresponded to their teacher responding, on average, 'sometimes' to four of the seven statements and 'often' to the other three. All other students had *satisfied* teachers.

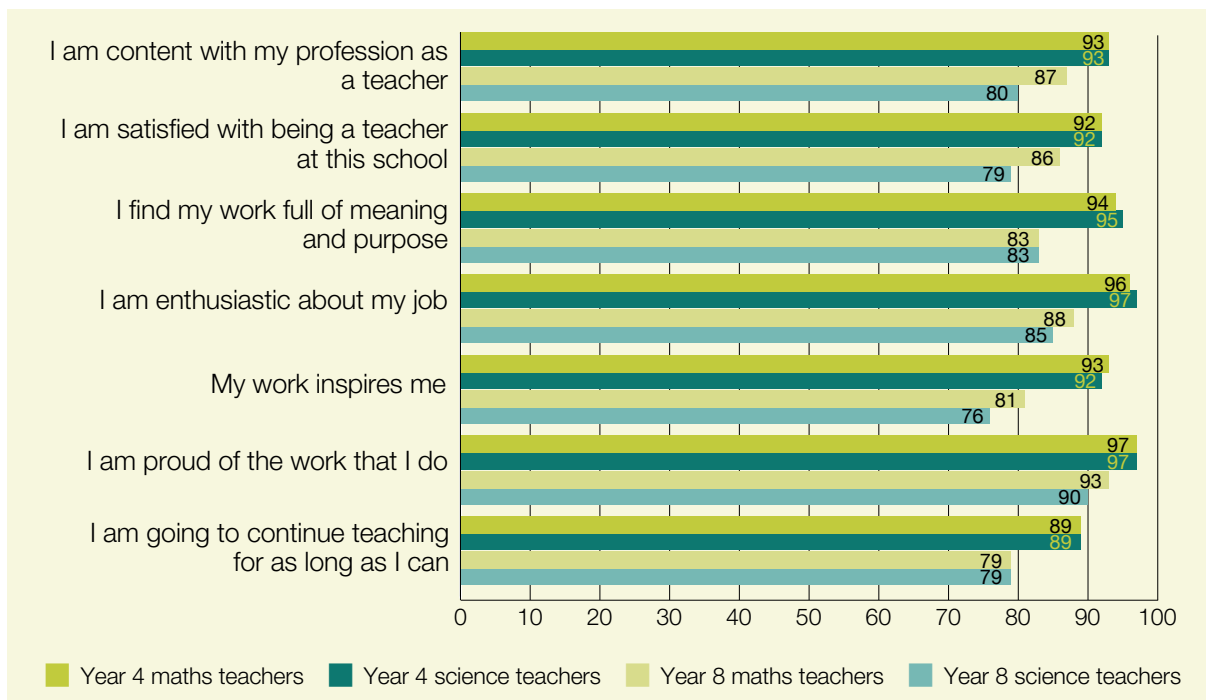


Figure 2 The percentages of students whose teachers responded ‘often’ or ‘very often’ to statements on the teachers’ job satisfaction scale

However, the statement ‘I am proud of the work that I do’ had the strongest positive responses from Year 4 and Year 8 teachers, followed by ‘I am enthusiastic about my job’ and ‘I find my work full of meaning and purpose’. The only variation in that pattern was for Year 8 mathematics teachers who placed ‘I am content with my profession as a teacher’ and ‘I am satisfied with being a teacher at this school’ slightly higher than ‘I find my work full of meaning and purpose’.

What influences Australian teachers’ levels of job satisfaction?

As well as the job satisfaction scale, TIMSS asked teachers questions about their experiences at work such as the challenges that they face (e.g. having too many students in the class, too many teaching hours, insufficient preparation time, too much pressure from the parents etc.); their perception of the school’s emphasis on academic success (including teachers working together to improve student achievement, parental expectations for student achievement, students’ desire to do well in school, etc.); any problems with conditions and resources in the school (such

as need for maintenance or cleaning, or lack of materials in the classroom, etc.); the degree teaching is limited by student needs (such as students lacking prerequisite skills, basic nutrition or sleep); and perceptions of school safety and discipline.

Table 1 shows the correlation between the teacher job satisfaction scale and how teachers felt about aspects of the work environment.

Table 1 shows that, in general, teachers’ perceptions of their school and working environment had a stronger relationship with job satisfaction at Year 8 than at Year 4. However, for both year levels the perception of the school’s emphasis on academic success had the strongest relationship with teacher job satisfaction. At Year 8, perceptions of school safety and discipline also had a relatively strong relationship with job satisfaction, suggesting that school climate (that is, as encompassed by an emphasis on academic success and discipline and respect) has an impact on teachers’ attitudes towards their job, especially in secondary school.

A correlation is a statistical measure that indicates the extent to which two or more variables fluctuate together. The further from zero the stronger the relationship – conventions suggest that 0.10–0.30 is a small correlation, 0.30–0.50 is a medium correlation and 0.50+ is a large correlation.

Table 1 Correlations between the teacher job satisfaction scale and other teacher experience scales

Scales	Year 4 mathematics teachers	Year 4 science teachers	Year 8 mathematics teachers	Year 8 science teachers
Challenges facing teachers	0.23	0.23	0.12	0.31
School emphasis on academic success	0.35	0.37	0.53	0.46
Problems with school conditions and resources	0.20	0.13	0.23	0.21
Teaching limited by student needs	0.13	0.16	0.23	0.28
Safe and orderly school	0.21	0.20	0.49	0.46

Given the weak relationship of environmental factors with job satisfaction, questions about teachers' peer interactions were reviewed to see whether interactions with co-workers might be a stronger influence on job satisfaction. At Year 4, most of the correlations were small (0.20–0.29), except for 'working together to try out new ideas', with a medium correlation of around 0.33. At Year 8, the correlations were also mostly small – with the strongest correlation of around 0.31–0.32 for 'sharing what I have learned about my teaching experiences' for both mathematics and science teachers; 'working together to try out new ideas' and 'working as a group on implementing the curriculum' for science teachers; and 'working with teachers from other

year levels to ensure continuity in learning' for mathematics teachers.

Interestingly, there was no clear relationship between the teacher job satisfaction scale and students' mathematics and science achievement. All differences between groups were relatively small, and the only significant differences found were for Australian Year 8 students whose mathematics teachers reported that they were *very satisfied* compared to those who reported they were *less than satisfied* and for Australian Year 8 students whose science teachers reported that they were *very satisfied* compared to those who reported they were *satisfied*. This may be because of the high percentages of students with teachers who were *very satisfied* or *satisfied*.



ASK YOURSELF:

- ▶ How do you think you or your colleagues would respond to these questions?
- ▶ What aspects of the school environment and the working conditions impact on your or your colleagues' job satisfaction?

Interested in more information about teachers' working conditions?

Volume I of the International Report from the OECD **Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)** 2018 will be launched on 19 June 2019, with an Australian report to follow later in 2019. TALIS asks teachers and school leaders about working conditions and learning environments at their schools in order to help countries face diverse challenges and improve policies. While the questions asked in TALIS are different to those discussed in this paper, TALIS will provide a more in-depth analysis of teachers' and school leaders' work and learning environments.