

Teacher Perceptions and Practices Around the World

Analyzing the TALIS results from a Latin American perspective

By Belén Cumsille R.



The present brief will analyze the results of the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013, an international comparative survey of teachers' and principals' perceptions and practices. TALIS 2013 surveyed more than 100,000 teachers and principals in 34 countries, including three in Latin America: Brazil, Chile and Mexico. It provides an international perspective of the situation of teachers, and offers the possibility of comparing countries in Latin America with highly effective educational systems in other parts of the world. The results include a characterization of teachers and principals, teachers' professional development opportunities, teacher appraisal and feedback practices in the schools, teaching practices, and teachers' perception of self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Who are the Teachers and Principals?

TALIS reveals that the average teacher is a 43 year-old female, with 16 years of experience in the profession. The Latin American teachers surveyed have a similar profile. Brazilian female teachers represent a higher proportion of the total (71%) compared to the TALIS average of 68% female teachers while Mexico's proportion of female teachers is below that figure (53%). Nevertheless, in all those cases women constitute the majority of teachers. Brazilian, Chilean and Mexican teachers are slightly younger and less experienced than the average TALIS teacher, as Table 1 shows.

Unlike the case of teachers, a majority (51%) of principals are men. The average principal is 52 years old, has been a principal for 9 years, and has considerable experience as a teacher (21 years). The average principal in Chile and Mexico has been in that position for longer (12 and 11 years respectively), and has more

PREAL Policy Briefs provide nontechnical overviews of key education policy topics. In this issue, Dialogue Intern and master's student at The University of Texas at Austin, Belén Cumsille R. analyzes the 2013 TALIS results examining Latin American teachers' perception and practices from a comparative perspective. The analysis includes a characterization of teachers and principals, teachers' professional development opportunities, teachers' appraisal and schools feedback practices, teaching practices, and teachers' perception of self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Additional information on TALIS 2013 can be found on the [TALIS 2013 website](#) including survey questionnaires, country specific profiles, and the official OECD report.

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teaching experience (25 and 24 years, respectively). Brazilian principals have been in their position for a shorter period (7 years) than the TALIS average and also have less experience teaching (14 years). Given their role as instructional leaders, teaching experience is a valuable characteristic for principals. As shown in the 2007 McKinsey report¹, successful school systems have selected highly qualified teachers to become principals, who spend most of their working hours coaching and mentoring teachers.

| | Brazil | Chile | México | TALIS Average |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Average Teacher Age | 39 | 41 | 42 | 43 |
| Average years as a teacher in total | 14 | 15 | 16 | 16 |

Source: Own elaboration based on TALIS 2013 Data on Education GPS

Teacher preparation in the Latin American countries differs from the TALIS average. While, on average, almost 9 out of 10 teachers surveyed completed a teacher-training program, this number is lower in the Latin American countries. Chile has the

highest rate of teachers completing a teacher-training program among the three Latin American countries with 86% of the teachers surveyed. In Brazil almost 1 out of 4 teachers have not completed a specialized training program although most

Teacher Survey for Latin America

The Inter-American Dialogue conducted a survey among Latin American teachers with the support of the Inter-American Teacher Education Network. The survey was available online through the PREAL Blog and the ITEN website during the month of July, 2014. The survey received 251 responses from 14 countries in the region. Ecuador had the highest participation rate with 50% of the respondents. Chilean teachers comprised 20%, Peruvians 10%, Colombians 6%, Mexicans 6%, and the rest were divided among the other countries in Latin America. The majority of the surveyed teachers were women (63%) and had 6 or more years of experience teaching (51%). Most of them worked in public schools (75%) and 41% of them had completed graduate studies. Below are some of the main results:

- **Limitations for teaching:** The main problem for teaching according to the surveyed teachers is students' lack of interest (22%) followed by the lack of resources in schools (19%), and the high number of students in the classrooms (18%), which averages 34 students in a typical Wednesday class.
- **Teacher Appraisal:** Almost one third of the teachers were never evaluated in the form of classroom observations in the 18 months previous to the survey. This result differs from the Latin American countries participating in TALIS, where classroom observations reached around 90% of teachers in the last 12 months. It should be noted that our sample was not representative and included information from more countries than TALIS, which may explain the difference in the prevalence of teacher evaluation.
- **Professional Development:** Some teachers have very limited access to professional development activities -one out of ten teachers have not attended any kind of professional development activity in the 18 months previous to the survey; two out of ten teachers have only attended once during that same period. Other teachers, on the contrary, have had frequent professional development opportunities; 24% have participated more between 3 and 5 times in the past 18 months, and 22% participated in more than 5 opportunities.
- **Job Satisfaction and Teaching Profession:** In line with TALIS results, the survey reflects a high satisfaction with the teaching profession. Interestingly, most of the surveyed teachers are satisfied with their job (92%), despite a widespread perception of low salaries (93%), long working hours (73%) and, the perception that the teaching profession is socially undervalued (91%).

| | Brazil | Chile | México | TALIS Average |
|---|--------|-------|--------|---------------|
| % Teachers who report a high level of need to develop skills to teach students with special needs | 69 | 26 | 47 | 22 |
| % Teachers who report a high level of need to develop ICT skills for teaching | 28 | 13 | 21 | 19 |

Source: Own elaboration based on TALIS 2013 Data on Education GPS

of them have a higher education degree (94%). Mexico has a somewhat higher proportion (39%) of teachers who have not completed a teacher-training program although, as in the case of Brazil, most teachers have a university degree (90%). In successful educational systems, such as the ones in Singapore and Finland, more than 90% of the teachers have completed a teacher-training program. However, as the TALIS report points out, research on the relationship between teacher education and student achievement is inconclusive.²

Professional Development of Teachers

TALIS measures professional development as a broad range of activities that include participating in courses or workshops, attending conferences or seminars, visiting other schools and public and non-governmental organizations, among others. TALIS reveals that 88% of teachers have engaged in any kind of professional development activity in the previous year. In the case of Brazil and Mexico this

figure is higher: 92% and 96% of the teachers, respectively. Chile, meanwhile, has lower rates of participation in professional development – only 72% of the teachers participated in these activities during the previous year.

Two areas constitute the main needs for professional development according to teachers: preparation for teaching students with special needs, and the development of information and communication technology (ICT) skills for teaching (Table 3). The need of skills to work with mentally, physically or emotionally disadvantaged children is even stronger for the Latin American teachers, being more critical for the Brazilian case. In a context with high levels of poverty, rurality and a significant number of indigenous or afro-descendant populations, these numbers are not surprising,

particularly because teacher training programs do not incorporate skills to work in these complex contexts.³

A higher proportion of Mexican and Brazilian teachers, compared to the TALIS average, identified ICT skills for teaching as a higher priority for professional development.

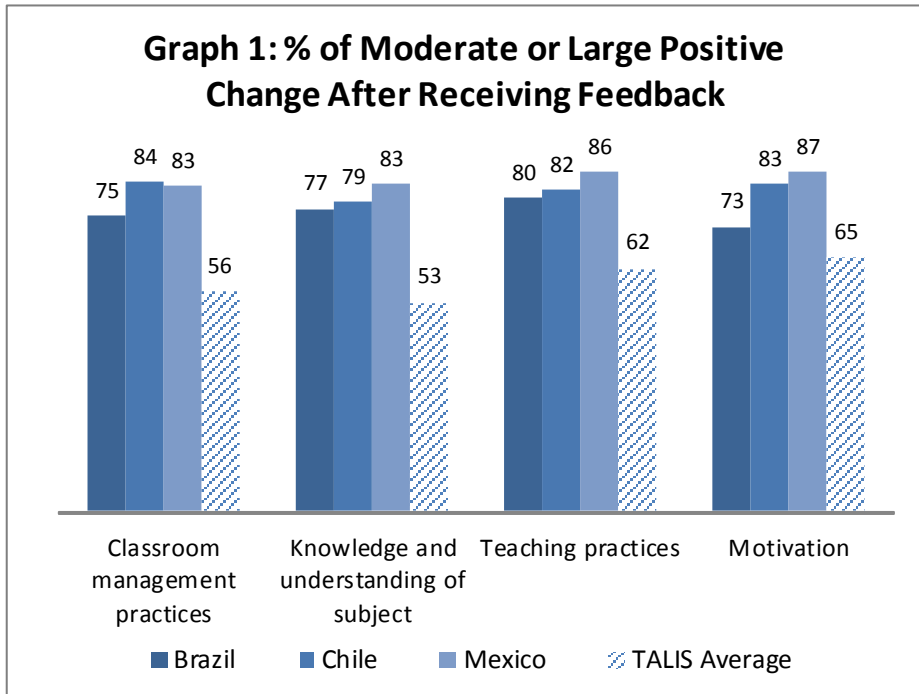
TALIS also identifies participation in formal induction program for new teachers. Induction programs allow teachers to adapt to new schools or to the teaching profession in the case of novice teachers. On average, 49% of teachers reported that formal induction was available to them. Teachers in the top-performing systems reported a much higher rate: 72% of teachers in Korea and 80% of teachers in Singapore have been part of an induction program. As observed in Table 2, Mexico has made great strides towards the establishment of induction programs, but Brazil and Chile lag behind. Brazil and Mexico have also advanced more than the TALIS average in providing mentorship programs.

How Are Teachers Appraised?

The proportions of Mexican and Chilean teachers (95% and 96%

| | Brazil | Chile | México | TALIS Average |
|--|--------|-------|--------|---------------|
| % Teachers having taken part in a formal induction program | 32 | 37 | 57 | 49 |
| % of Teachers having a mentor assigned | 34 | 5 | 17 | 13 |

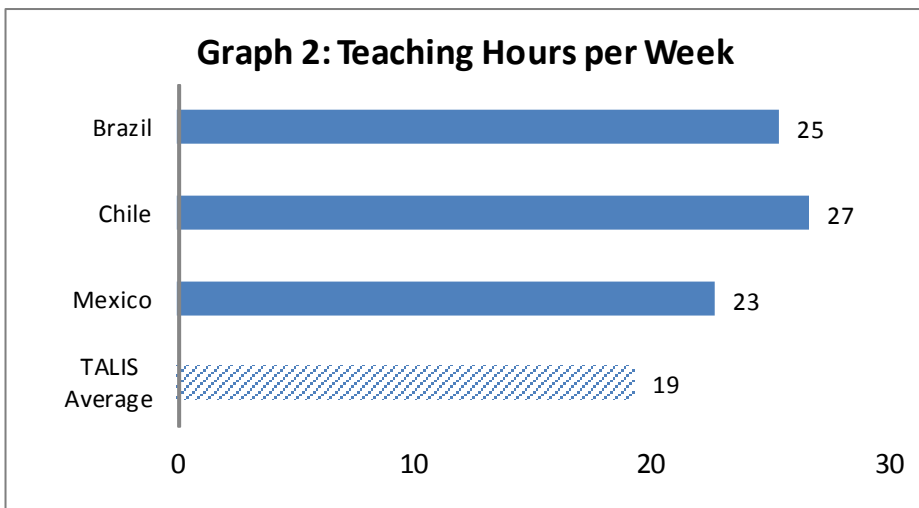
Source: Own elaboration based on TALIS 2013 Data on Education GPS



Source: Own elaboration based on TALIS 2013 Data on Education GPS

respectively) that work in schools that formally evaluate them are similar to the TALIS average (93%), whereas the proportion of Brazilian teachers is slightly below (87%). Class observations are a common appraisal practice of teachers. According to TALIS, all the Mexican and Chilean teachers surveyed were subjected to classroom observations as a formal assessment practice.

Evaluation is fundamental for improving teaching practices, and receiving feedback is part of that process. TALIS defines feedback as any type of communication – formal or informal – received by teachers about their teaching. The proportion of Latin American teachers surveyed reporting improvements after receiving feedback is higher than the TALIS average (See Graph 1). Brazilian,



Source: Own elaboration based on TALIS 2013 Data on Education GPS

Chilean and Mexican teachers report that feedback has a positive effect in their classroom management practices, knowledge and understanding of subjects, teaching practices and motivation. Also, feedback appears to have consequences in the hours of professional development teachers undertake. About 70% of Brazilian, Chilean and Mexican teachers report an increased number of hours dedicated to professional development after they receive feedback, compared to the 46% of the TALIS teachers.

Teaching Practices

Latin American teachers in Brazil, Chile and Mexico are assigned more teaching hours than the average teacher in TALIS. While TALIS teachers average 19 hours of teaching time per week, the average for the Latin American countries in the survey is around 25 hours (Graph 2). However, the total working hours of Latin American teachers are below the TALIS average, suggesting that teachers do not necessarily lengthen their workday but reduce the time assigned to other relevant tasks such as planning, training or meeting with parents. Long hours in front of classrooms accelerate teachers' burnout and undermine teachers' participation in outside-the-classrooms activities that are equally important for education quality.

Despite having more weekly hours assigned to teaching, Latin American teachers surveyed in TALIS spend less time in teaching and learning inside the classroom. Actual teaching and learning tasks amount to 67% of classroom time in Brazil, 73% in Chile and 75% in Mexico while the TALIS

average is 79%. More time is dedicated to administrative tasks in all three countries and to keeping classroom order in the cases of Brazil and Chile, compared to the TALIS average. Maximizing instructional time is relevant for improving student learning. [Best practices benchmarks](#) indicate that 85% of the classroom time needs to be devoted to teaching. However, even top-performing educational systems have not reached this figure: Singapore teachers spend on average 71% of the class time teaching, Korean teachers 77% and Finland instructors 81% of the class time.

Teacher's Perceptions: Efficacy, Value of the Teaching Profession, and Job Satisfaction

The Latin American teachers surveyed perceive themselves as more effective than their average TALIS counterpart. Four out of five TALIS teachers believe they can motivate their students to value learning –this figure exceeds 90% of the teachers in the Latin American countries (See Table 4). Teachers' belief in their own effectiveness to develop critical thinking skills in students follows the same trend. This perhaps suggest an unjustified sense of confidence in a region that has a low performance in standardized tests -among TALIS participants, Brazil, Chile and Mexico exhibit the lowest average performance in 2012 math PISA scores.

Table 4: Perception of Self-Efficacy

| | Brazil | Chile | México | TALIS Average |
|---|--------|-------|--------|---------------|
| % Teachers who believe they can help their students to value learning | 95 | 91 | 91 | 81 |
| % Teachers who believe they can help their students to think critically | 95 | 90 | 89 | 80 |

Source: Own elaboration based on TALIS 2013 Data on Education GPS

Less than one third of surveyed teachers perceive that the teaching profession is valued in society (31%). This figure is higher for principals (44%) but still more than half of the principals surveyed do not feel that the teaching profession is prestigious. The numbers for Brazil are dramatic: only 13% of the teachers and 25% of the principals agree with the statement that the teaching profession is valued in society, which is consistent with the findings of the [2013 Global Teacher Status Index](#). By contrast, in the case of Mexico half of the teachers and almost 60% of the principals agree with the statement. However, this numbers are far from those in successful educational systems where the teaching profession is more prestigious. In Korea 67% of the teachers and 90% of the principals believe that the teaching profession is valued in society, while in Singapore this numbers reach 68% of teachers and 95% of the principals.

Surprisingly, most teachers are satisfied with their job, even in Latin America. Around 91% of TALIS teachers are satisfied with their jobs, and Chilean and

Mexican teachers surpass that figure (95% and 98% respectively). Brazil is below the TALIS average for teacher satisfaction with 87% of Brazilian teachers satisfied with their job; also, four out of ten Brazilian teachers believe that the disadvantages of becoming a teacher outweigh the advantages.

Lessons from TALIS

TALIS provides a valuable source of information on teachers' perceptions. Clearly, perceptions may be biased and other sources of data could show different results (for example on time use). But, designing and implementing education policies without a full understanding of how teachers see themselves, their teaching experience and the opportunities and challenges they face, can be treacherous. The scarcity of nationally representative data of this type is, thus, a serious limitation. Acknowledging the limitation of having information from only three countries from the region, the main lessons that can be drawn from TALIS for teacher policies in Latin America are the following:

- There is a need to develop skills to work with students

with special needs and ICT skills for teaching. Participation levels in professional development activities are high, particularly in Brazil and Mexico (Chile lags behind), but the content of these should be adequate to teachers' needs in the classrooms.

- Induction and mentorship programs need to be strengthened. Providing permanent support to teachers allows them to adapt effectively to their specific teaching environment.
- There is room to improve and enhance the provision of regular feedback to teachers about their teaching. Feedback is generally well received by teachers and can be an important instrument for improving teaching practices.
- Time use appears to be a problematic area. The amount of working hours allocated to teaching and time-management inside the classroom (as also suggested by the [July 2014, PREAL Policy Brief](#)) are areas in which more research and measurement is needed.

Whether by participating in initiatives like TALIS, or through the development of national teacher surveys, more countries in Latin America ought to collect information on what teachers do, feel and experience.

ENDNOTES

¹Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed, *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come out on the Top* (McKinsey & Company, September 2007), http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf.

²OECD, *TALIS 2013 Results*, TALIS (OECD Publishing, 2014), http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/talis-2013-results_9789264196261-en.

³OREALC and UNESCO, *Antecedentes Y Criterios Para La Elaboración de Políticas Docentes En América Latina Y El Caribe* (Santiago de Chile: Acción Digital, 2012), http://www.orealc.cl/educacionpost2015/wp-content/blogs.dir/19/files_mf/antecedentesycriteriosparapol%C3%ADticaspublicasparadocentesfinal.pdf.



1211 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 510

Washington, DC, 20036

Web: thedialogue.org & prealblog.org

Email: education@thedialogue.org

Phone: 202-463-2574