

Research Paper

Teacher Work and Job Satisfaction among Romanian Lower Secondary Teachers

Katalin Zoller¹, Katinka Bacskai²

Recommended citation:

Zoller, K., & Bacskai, K. (2020). Teacher work and job satisfaction among Romanian lower secondary teachers. *Central European Journal of Educational Research*, 2(2), 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.37441/CEJER/2020/2/2/7918>

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an empirical based understanding of the Romanian context of teacher work, which provides an opportunity to identify characteristics considered to affect teaching activities and gives a basis for planning and conducting other research on teachers working conditions. The paper is based on authors' research which is a secondary analysis of Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013 database. The database contains the survey responses of teachers of lower secondary education (ISCED 2) and the principals of their schools. During the investigation cross/tables, cluster analysis, linear and logistical analyses were used. Based on our research results, we can see that the factors attributed both to the individuals and to the elements of pedagogical culture show a strong correlation with the characteristics of the teaching and the satisfaction with the teaching. Considering the factors attributed to the individuals, professional development and the total career time is the most influential factor of job satisfaction and teacher's self-efficacy. Among the variables included in the school culture dimension, the effectiveness of teacher work, the disciplined atmosphere, the values of student/teacher relationships and the positive effects of teacher-teacher relationships indicated satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Keywords: job satisfaction; teacher quality; Romania; TALIS

Introduction

Over the years, educational researchers have investigated many factors considered to affect student learning. At the core of these investigations is the belief that teachers make a difference.

Teachers have extended pedagogical roles which are continuously evolving as a result of changes in social, economic, educational policy and educational technology. Based on this, there is a growing interest in education. In fact, teacher research becomes a divers and complex area of educational studies. All parties – students, parents, stakeholders, educational institutions – are interested in having well qualified teachers in schools. A spectacular element of teacher attention is the fact that alongside international research on student performance, there is a systematic international research-based study on teachers' working conditions, their attitudes to school, the characteristics of their teaching and learning environments and the specifics of institution management.

In this paper we connect to these studies, and we are examining the ways in which teachers work. Based on an international survey (TALIS 2013) we intend to provide a more nuanced approach to the issue of teaching in Romanian lower secondary schools. Although we focus on data selected for Romania, the reader can get an idea of all the results of the TALIS 2013 survey as well, as almost all the issues have surfaced that are causing problems in teachers' society in the examined countries.

¹ Babeş-Bolyai University, Department of Pedagogy and Applied Didactics Cluj-Napoca, Romania; katazoller@gmail.com

² University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary; bacskai.katinka@arts.unideb.hu

Research design and Methods

In our analysis, we seek to answer the question: who are the lower secondary teachers in Romania, what the schools' environments are where they are working, and what are the opinions, perceptions, beliefs and accounts of their activities? According to this, we examined the individual characteristics of the organization, and the work of teachers as perceived in their own schools. Our main research question has been subdivided into further research questions:

- Q1 Based on the analysis of data selected for Romania, what are the individual and school characteristics of the differences in the work of teacher? Based on the analysis of the data selected for Romania, can we talk about school effect? If so, what are the individual and school characteristics of schools that differ from each other? What factors influence teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy and positive perceptions of their school?
- Q2 What groups of teachers can be distinguished in term of job satisfaction and what are their characteristics? What personal and workplace factors determine satisfaction with teaching?
- Q3 What are the factors related to their above-average or below-average perceived school satisfaction in terms of job and workplace?

The empirical study was conducted along the questions described above. The research was concretized using the hypotheses based on the results already predicted in the literature.

The first set of hypotheses was referring to the relationships among variables. We assumed that teacher performance is much more influenced by attitudes than hard variables, and that school-specific indicators have a stronger impact on teachers' performance.

In our second set of hypotheses, we assumed that we can create teacher clusters based on job satisfaction, and that the differences between these clusters are mainly due to background variables of teachers, educational characteristics, methodological culture and school climate.

Our third hypothesis is about good teacher jobs and good school criteria. We assumed that teachers in high-satisfaction schools are more experienced, more constructivists tend to maintain good external and internal relationships and are more cooperative.

For the purpose of our investigation, results are derived from secondary analysis of Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013 database. The database contains the survey responses of teachers of lower secondary education (level 2 of the International Standard Classification of Education – ISCED2) and the principals of their schools.

The first cycle of TALIS was conducted in 2008 and surveyed teachers and school leaders of lower secondary education in 24 countries, including Hungary. The second survey was conducted in 34 countries and economies, including 24 OECD countries and 10 partner countries and economies. Romania participated for the first time in the survey as a partner country.

The Romanian subset of data was provided by a questionnaire collected from teachers and principals in 197 institutions. Out of 197 institutions 91 are rural and 105 are urban. The number of teachers surveyed is 3286 representing 68810 teachers at ISCED level 2 (grades 5–8). The database contains data at school and individual levels (teachers and principals), which were both addressed in the research paper.

Thus, a major advantage of the analysis is that it is based on reliable and representative sampling. The possibility of international comparison is also an advantage, which allows researchers of national systems to examine their own education on this basis.

During the investigation cross-tables, cluster analysis, linear and logistical analyses were used. During the examination of our statistical hypotheses, we tested the significance level as well. In cross-tabulation studies, adjusted residuals were considered as the relevant index. We looked at the value found in a cell relative to the random distribution.

The database also allows for school-level examination, which has significantly contributed to a more nuanced presentation of the work of lower secondary teachers in Romania. In school-level analyzes, the first step was to aggregate teacher-level data to school-level. Each school site was assigned to the answers of the teachers teaching in the given institution, and the variable created was divided into three equal parts, expressing that the teachers of the given school had below average, on average or above average characteristics of their practice and work.

The level of data aggregation influences the interpretations of results. Aggregating data to the school level produces different results that one would find if one looked at similar kind of data in the individual teacher level. Our analyses have repeatedly shown that the explanatory power of school site data is greater than that of individual teacher characteristics.

Results

Teachers' job satisfaction and self-efficacy

In the section below, we first provide an overview of the relationships among variables. Linear regression was used to look at the individual and pedagogical culture variables influencing different aspects of the teaching profession. The variables were sorted into three different categories: individual demographic as professional development, overall career time, gender, age or the subject taught by the teacher; methodological culture dimension as teacher self-efficacy, disciplined atmosphere, teacher collaboration or the type of evaluation, and the climate dimension such as involvement of stakeholders or the principal's leadership style.

In our analysis, we first examined how variables related to individual demographic and pedagogical culture influence teachers' job satisfaction, teacher efficiency and school climate. Based on the beta and significance of the coefficient table (Table 1), among the individual variables, satisfaction with teaching work is most influenced by effective professional development and overall career time.

Table 1. Factors influencing teachers' job satisfaction (dependent variable).

Variables	Coefficient Beta	Significance
Effective professional development	.122	.000
Overall career time	.106	.044
Teacher efficiency	.081	.000
A disciplined atmosphere	.187	.000
Teacher collaboration	.052	.005
Teacher/student relationships	.383	.000
Participation of stakeholders	.432	.000
Instructional leadership style	.036	.036

Data source: OECD, TALIS 2013.

It appeared that participation in effective professional development programs has the greatest impact on the job satisfaction of Romanian teachers. This relationship indicates that teachers are fundamentally fond of learning and have an internal need for professional development.

Moreover, several characteristics of teaching and learning, described as variables belonging to the methodological culture dimension, influence teacher job satisfaction: teacher effectiveness, a disciplined atmosphere, and teacher-student relationships. Based on the literature, few empirical studies indicate that students' motivation and behavior have a significant impact on teacher satisfaction (Collie, Shapka & Perry 2012), and students' lack of discipline also influences their satisfaction with their work (Friedman, 1995; Landers et al., 2008). The qualitative research of Squillini (2001) with the teachers of Catholic schools also emphasizes the importance of collegial relationships and cooperation for the satisfaction of teachers. Hoffman (2002) states that, that depends on the quality of relationships, how effectively teachers', school's values and norms are transmitted.

Furthermore, among the variables of the climate dimension of pedagogical culture, the involvement of stakeholders in school life and the instructional leadership style influence the satisfaction of teachers with their work. Instructional leadership is a school management style closely associated with shared leadership in OECD teacher research, that effectively supports teaching and learning processes. This leadership style involves the planning, coordination, evaluation and development of teaching and learning processes (TALIS conceptual framework 2013). Moreover, the result suggests that it may be valuable to facilitate the principal's engagement in the teaching-learning processes.

In addition, we also investigated how individual characteristics of teachers, methodological and climate-related factors of pedagogical culture influence teacher self-efficacy. The findings led to similar results as in the case of teachers' job satisfaction outcomes. Both analyses show that continuous learning and relationships (with each other, with students, stakeholders and the principal) are a real resource for teachers. Our conclusion is that having efficient and satisfied teachers is not only a question of individual competences of teachers, but

also of using relationship resources in the schools. We consider the findings of these correlations for Romanian lower secondary teachers as the results of our research.

School climate

Linear regression was used to examine how individual factors and characteristics of the pedagogical culture influence school climate (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of the analysis: effect of school climate (dependent variable) on:

	Explanatory variables	Coefficient Beta	t	Significance
1	Principal's job satisfaction	.535	29.586	.000
2	Principal's job satisfaction	.524	29.389	.000
	Shared leadership style	.153	8.560	.000
3	Principal's job satisfaction	.520	29.157	.000
	Shared leadership style	.154	8.634	.000
	Teacher-student relationships	.056	3.126	.002
4	Principal's job satisfaction	.502	26.046	.000
	Shared leadership style	.144	7.886	.000
	Teacher-student relationships	.056	3.127	.002
	Instructional leadership style	.046	2.340	.019
5	Principal's job satisfaction	.502	26.051	.000
	Shared leadership style	.144	7.924	.000
	Teacher-student relationships	.063	3.485	.001
	Instructional leadership style	.047	2.373	.018
	Teacher collaboration	-.037	-2.015	.044

Data source: OECD, TALIS 2013.

In Table 2., the results show an above score for the principal's work satisfaction, which is the most influential factor in the school climate. Interestingly, within our studies teacher satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy is influenced by instructional leadership, while the school climate is more influenced by shared leadership style. The basis of the shared leadership concept is that effective school management is not a single leadership competence and activity, but a task for each member of the teaching community as much as possible. At the same time, our findings show that school climate is also influenced by the relationships, especially the teacher-student relations in this respect. Hence, schools should strive to stimulate a variety of such activities.

Discussion

As mentioned in research design, the database used enables school-level examination, where school id can be used to aggregate teacher responses to the school level. In the aggregation process, we calculated the average teacher response per school for each variable, so that instead of individual responses, we reinforced the picture that the teachers surveyed (typically 20 teachers per school) entered into the database together.

During the analyses, we examined the differences between schools based on several characteristics of teaching. We consider it important to highlight two results, one focusing on the background variables of the teaching profession and the other on the methodological features of the pedagogical culture.

Our results show that there are differences in the teachers' attitudes to schoolwork and teaching performance, with regard to male and female teachers. In schools where the proportion of male teachers is higher than the average the class management effectiveness, the use of effective teaching strategies, or keeping students engaged is below average. An explanation for this might be that more implicit or indirect effects of school exist than could be shown in present analysis. To investigate this line of reasoning, we thought it may

be worthwhile to study the literature. To gain a further understanding we might look at the phenomenon of performance-based contra selection of educators entering teacher training programs. The phenomenon has been reported in the United States, Great Britain and Australia (Chavelier & Dolton, 2004; Leigh & Ryen, 2008). The Hungarian literature (Varga, 2007; Ercsei, 2011) also indicates performance-based contra selection among candidates for the teaching profession. After 1998, the expansion of university training in Romania also had a negative impact on teacher training (Birta & Székely, 2005; Birta & Székely, 2012), which has led to persistent problems such as the theoretical predominance of training and contra selection (Fodor, 2000; Șerbănescu, 2011a, 2011b) or the loss of the prestige of teaching work (Iucu & Pănișoara, 1999, 2000; Jucu, 2005; Péter, 2006). We could assume that due to the low social prestige of the teaching profession and its financial esteem, contra selection is even more pronounced in male teachers. Although this problem has been recognized, relatively little research was carried out in this context. In Hungary, Veroszta (2015) is citing several international studies that indicate an ambivalent or even negative perception of men's choice of teaching career. Obviously, these differences ask for a further explanation in future research.

Consequently, we found that aggregating data to the school level produces different results. The school level results had greater explanatory power than individual teacher characteristics. However, we could not distinguish between schools in terms of methodological features of pedagogical culture. In all schools where the constructivist approach to the teaching and learning process of teachers is above average, all practical solutions in classroom are above average. Both, student- and teacher-centered solutions are popular among teachers. However, based on the data available on classroom processes, this distinction cannot be clearly justified.

Teacher clusters

In our second hypothesis, we assumed that we can create teacher clusters based on job satisfaction, and that the differences between these clusters are mainly due to background variables of teachers, educational characteristics, methodological culture, and school climate. We distinguished three clusters based on the complete sample of teachers: teachers without better opportunity, drifters and happy, positive, satisfied teachers. We were able to identify differences between teacher groups based on effective professional development, which represents an individual teacher characteristic based on our classification. There is a clear relationship between job satisfaction and effective professional development. It is an important achievement for us because we can capture a group of teachers who are satisfied with their workplace and job; they express a special love for learning and need for professional development. All this is encouraging given that Romanian teachers are often accused of taking part in further training for financial reasons and for keeping their job. More specifically, our findings indicated that teachers job satisfaction and effective professional development activities are positively related, which could be an intervention area for schools. It is a fact that Romania has a career-based employment policy, with the initial salary of teachers increasing significantly as a result of time spent in progression through a career development system. Thus, it is very difficult to explain the motivational background of further training. However, by examining the relationship between continuous learning and workplace satisfaction, it is possible to confirm a group of educators who have a truly internal and natural need to expand their knowledge as part of their professional life.

Based on the methodological culture we can also identify differences in the teacher groups. The group of teachers who are most satisfied with their work is more constructivists and their teaching and methodological culture is more student-centered. The difference between established teacher groups is also evident in the teacher-teacher relationship within the school. Positive, satisfied teachers are characterized by above-average collaboration, sharing of professional knowledge and content. Our results confirmed our hypothesis of differences between teacher groups.

We also tried to develop additional clusters. We succeeded in separating groups of teachers based on methodological culture. Our results indicate that the group of teachers above the average age is characterized by a reassessment of methodological culture and a change from teacher-centered, knowledge-based teaching practices to student centered teaching. The clusters also vary according to gender. Women teachers are the most receptive to the pedagogical culture change, and there are significantly more women among the teachers in the group which is focused on student-centered and activity-oriented teaching practices. At the same time, the group of teachers who is renewing their methodological cultures along modern pedagogical principles tends to have good cooperation with their colleagues and good relations with students and stakeholders.

To sum it up, we can conclude that teachers are possibly the most important resources of student learning, but the way teachers perceive their working activities and act according to may stimulate learning outcomes more directly.

Good teaching jobs–good schools

Our third hypothesis is about good teacher jobs and good school criteria. We assumed that teachers in high-satisfaction schools are more experienced, more constructivist, tend to maintain good (external and internal) relationships, and are more cooperative.

Logistic regression was used to examine what explains teachers' point of view in judging their school better than average or worse than average workplace. Schools were divided into two groups based on the perception of teachers. Compared to the total sample of teachers involved we identified the group of teachers who perceive their school as a good workplace and the group of teachers who perceive as a less good workplace. According to our results, the chances of teachers judging their schools as a good workplace increases in accordance with the number of years spent as a teacher, to disciplined climate at school, to good relationships between teachers and students, to caring parents, and to a principal who involves teachers in decision-making. Another result is that in the case of schools in small towns or rural areas there is a greater chance that the years spent as teacher, mutual respect in schools, and shared management practices will increase teacher job satisfaction. A more disciplined learning environment is more likely to impact work and job satisfaction among teachers in schools in cities. In public-funded schools it is more likely that teacher-student relationships, a climate of mutual respect plays a role in teachers' job satisfaction, whereas the odds ratio in the case of mostly privately founded schools is not significant. In schools with more disadvantaged students, the odds of needing discipline stands out. Teachers' job satisfaction is more likely to be increased by a disciplined atmosphere in schools where the proportion of disadvantaged students is over 30% than in those where disadvantage is at a lower percentage. As a summary, in schools with high satisfaction rates teachers are more experienced, likely to have good relationships, and work in schools where shared leadership styles are dominant. Compared to the results of the overall sample, we obtained a more nuanced picture of the characteristics of good and less good schools if we divided them by settlement type, funding type, or student composition.

Conclusions

In closing, both individual variables and elements of the pedagogical culture have a strong correlation with teacher job satisfaction. The satisfaction and self-efficacy of Romanian teachers working in lower secondary education is mainly determined by professional development, a disciplined atmosphere, teacher-student relationships and stakeholder relations. We have examined the effects of these variables in several dimensions - individual characteristics, characteristics of the methodological culture, and characteristics of the school climate - but the research shows that these dimensions are not so sharply distinguished. The professional development of educators has been classified as individual variable, although this cannot be fully described as an individual characteristic. Professional development is also the interest of the school community. In this sense, the explanatory power of the pedagogical culture and the institutional level is stronger for the teachers' job satisfaction. Schools and school communities came to the forefront. In our research, we also looked at this and conducted studies to capture school effects. In light of this, we can state that there are school effects, which we could identify based on individual teacher background variables. However, according to the characteristics of the pedagogical culture, no differences were seen in the schools. Nevertheless, we can take a stand on what factors are involved in how teachers view their schools. Here, elements of the pedagogical culture are decisive, such as a disciplined atmosphere, the positive effects of social relationships, or the leadership style of the school principal. We also found a relationship between high levels of job satisfaction and good teaching practices: satisfied teachers are characterized by above-average practical implementations in teaching and learning processes (Table 3).

Table 3. Multistage logistic regression analysis of factors influencing teacher job satisfaction

	1. step	2. step	3. step	4. step
	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)
1. Teacher characteristics and qualifications				
TT2G01 Male/female ratio	.961	.987	1.006	1.004
TT2G02 Age	.973	.974	.968	.970
TT2G05A Carrier time within the same school	1.002	1.001	1.005	1.005
TT2G05B Overall career time	1.033**	1.030**	1.032**	1.031**
TEFFPROS Effective professional development	1.006	.987	.982	.975
TPDPEDS Need of professional development of special subject knowledge and of pedagogical knowledge	.995	1.012	1.018	1.023
2. Methodological culture				
TCONSBS Constructivist attitude		1.023	1.016	1.017
TSELEFFS Teacher self-efficacy		1.050	1.004	1.028
TCDISCS Disciplined learning environment		1.128***	1.109***	1.102***
TANAR_TANULO_KOZP Teacher-, student-centered teaching practice		1.048*	1.047*	1.035
3. Pedagogical cultural relations and climate				
TSCSTUDS Teacher – student relationship			1.072*	1.088**
TCOOPS Teacher cooperation			.970	.974
TSCSTAKES External and internal relations			1.115***	1.105**
PSCDELIQS School crime and violence				
PSCMUTRS Mutual respect			1.109**	1.080*
			1.206***	1.232***
4. Characteristics of school management				
PDISLEADS Shared leadership				1.151***
PINSLEADS Learning outcome - focused leadership				.792
Constant	2.120	.084	.001	.002

Comment: ***P≤0,001; **P≤0,01; *P≤0,05

Source: TALIS database narrowed to Romanian data, 2013. N=3286

References

- Birta-Székely, N. (2005). Szemelvények az erdélyi magyar tanárképzés múltjából és jelenéből. [Excerpts from the past and present of Hungarian teacher education in Transylvania]. *Pedagógusképzés* 3(32), 93–105.
- Birta-Székely, N. (2012). *A tanárképzés fejlődési irányai a 21. század kezdetén. A pedagógiai elméleti- és gyakorlati képzés integrálásának konstruktív modellje*. [Developments in teacher education at the beginning of the 21st century. A constructive model for the integration of pedagogical theoretical and practical training]. Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó.
- Chavelier, A., & Dolton, P. (2004). *The Labour Market for Teachers*. Centre for Economic Research, Working Paper Series, Department of Economics, University College Dublin.
- Collie, Rebecca, J., Shapka, J. D., & Perry, N. E. (2012). School Climate and Social-Emotional Learning: Predicting Teacher Stress, Job Satisfaction, and Teaching Efficacy. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), 1189–1204.

- Ercsei, K. (2011). Alapszakos hallgatók érdeklődése a tanári mesterképzés és a pálya iránt. [Interest of undergraduate students in teacher education and careers.] In Ercsei K. & Jancsák Cs. (szerk.), *Tanárképzős hallgatók a bolognai folyamatban 2010–2011.* (pp. 74–105.). Oktatókutató és Fejlesztő Intézet.
- Fodor, L. (2000.) Tanárképzés és reform. [Teacher training and reform]. In Fodor L. (szerk.), *Jegyzetek az intézményes oktatás reformjáról* (pp. 47–55). Educatio.
- Friedman, I. A. (1995). Student behavior patterns contributing to teacher burnout. *Journal of Educational Research*, 88(5), 281–289.
- Hoffman, R. (2002). A tanár-diák kapcsolat változásai. [Changes in the teacher-student relationship]. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 52(7-8).
- Iucu, B. R., & Pănișoară, I. O. (2000). *Formarea personalului didactic – raport de cercetare 2, Proiectul de reformă al învățământului preuniversitar.* [Teacher training–research report 2, Pre-university education reform project]. Consiliul Național pentru Pregătirea Profesorilor.
- Iucu, B. R. (2005). *Formarea cadrelor didactice (Patru explicații de politică educațională în România).* [Teacher training (Four explanations of educational policy in Romania)]. Centrul Educația 2000+, UNICEF.
- Landers, E., Alter, P., & Servilio, K. (2008). Students' Challenging Behavior and Teachers' Job Satisfaction. *Beyond Behavior*, 18(1), 26–33.
- Leigh, A., & Ryan, Ch. (2008). How and why has teacher quality changed in Australia? *Australian Economic Review*, 41, 141–159.
- Péter, L. (2006). Romániai magyar tanítók presztízséről a román oktatási reform folyamatában. [About the prestige of Hungarian-speaking teachers in Romania in the process of Romanian education reform]. *Szociológiai Szemle*, 16(3), 87–100.
- Șerbănescu, L. (2011a). *Diagnoza și perspectivele sistemului formării inițiale pentru cariera didactică.* Printech. [Diagnosis and perspectives of the initial training system for teaching career].
- Șerbănescu, L. (2011b). *Formarea profesională a cadrelor didactice – repere pentru managementul carierei.* Editura Printech. [Professional training of teachers - benchmarks for career management].
- Squillini, C. (2001). Teacher Commitment and Longevity in Catholic Schools. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 4(3).
- Varga, J. (2007). Kiből lesz ma tanár? [Who will be a teacher today?]. *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 54(7–8), 609–627.
- Veroszta, Zs. (2015) Pályakép és szelekció a pedagóguspálya választásában, [Career image and selection in the choice of teaching career] *Educatio*, 1, 47–62.



© 2020 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).