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Job satisfaction and well-being of primary school teachers

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► **To cite this version:**

Axelle Charpentier, Laetitia Longhi, Christelle Raffaëlli. Job satisfaction and well-being of primary school teachers. 2021, pp. 1-4. 10.48464/ni-21-34-eng . halshs-03726660

HAL Id: halshs-03726660

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03726660v1>

Submitted on 18 Jul 2022

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NOTE D'INFORMATION

n° 21.34 – Septembre 2021

Job satisfaction and well-being of primary school teachers: results of the 2018 TALIS survey

- In 2018, more than eight out of 10 primary school teachers in France express a positive perception of their work environment, marked by a strong culture of collaboration. School principals also share this observation. Primary school teachers, like their counterparts at the lower secondary level, feel that their job has little social value, although this does not affect their motivation. Among its European neighbours, France is the country where the support provided following a teacher's evaluation is the least frequent, regardless of the method used. Support for students with special educational needs is identified as a priority need for investment by more than six out of ten teachers in France and as a major teaching issue by school principals. French primary school teachers report a lower level of well-being at work than lower secondary school teachers. More than eight out of ten teachers cite having to adapt lessons to students with special educational needs or being held accountable for student success as the main sources of stress.

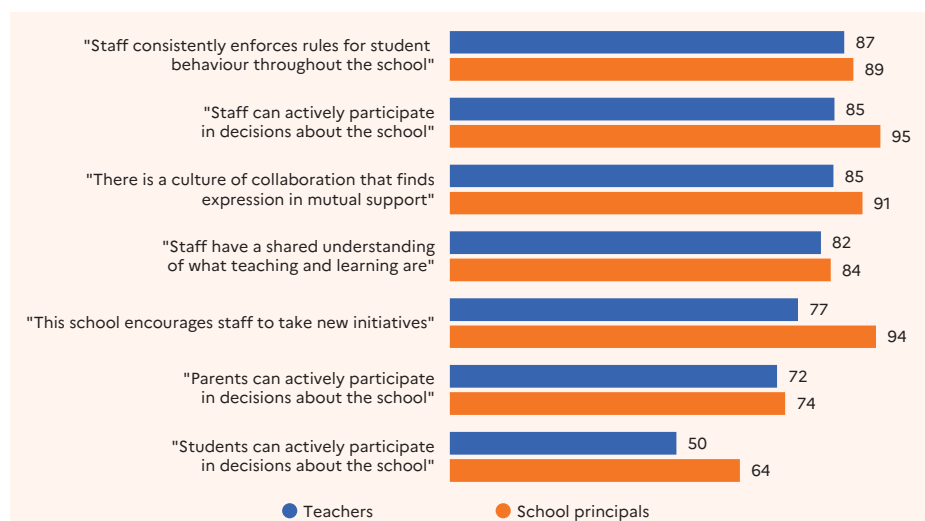
Ministère de l'Éducation nationale,
de la Jeunesse et des Sports
Directrice de la publication : Fabienne Rosenwald
Auteurs : Axelle Charpentier, Laetitia Longhi,
Christelle Raffaëlli, DEPP-B4
Édition : Bernard Javet
e-ISSN 2431-7632

► In 2018, primary school teachers in France were asked to participate for the first time in the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) conducted by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). This survey is based on representative national samples in order to provide an unprecedented overview of the teaching profession through a description of

their practices, their working conditions and their perception of their work and training. The data was collected via a self-administered questionnaire in fifteen countries, including six in the European Union (Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, England, France, Spain and Sweden). This represents a sample of nearly 50,000 teachers, including more than 1,400 in France, surveyed by the Evaluation,

Forecasting and Performance Department (DEPP) of the Ministry of National Education. School principals were also surveyed on that occasion. The results presented in this note focus more specifically on the job satisfaction of school teachers, the way schools operate and the issues that can be identified in terms of well-being at work for both teachers and principals. They complement the findings previously identified (NI 19.22; NI 20.11).

► 1 Description of the work environment: comparison of teachers' and principals' responses, in %



Note: in 2018, 50% of primary school teachers (versus 64% of principals) «agree» or «strongly agree» that students have the opportunity to actively participate in decisions about the school.

Field: French primary school teachers and principals in the 2018 TALIS sample.

Source: MENJS-DEPP, OECD, TALIS international survey.

Teachers and principals portray a satisfactory work environment

In France in 2018, both primary school teachers and principals reported working in schools characterized by positive relationships within the educational team. For example, more than eight in 10 primary school teachers consider that there is a collaborative culture in their school that finds expression in mutual support and that staff can actively participate in decisions about the school (figure 1). Principals are more likely than teachers to emphasize the scope for staff initiative and the opportunity for students to participate in school decision-making processes. On the latter point, France stands out from its European neighbours: only 50 % of primary school teachers believe that students have the opportunity to participate actively in school decisions, compared

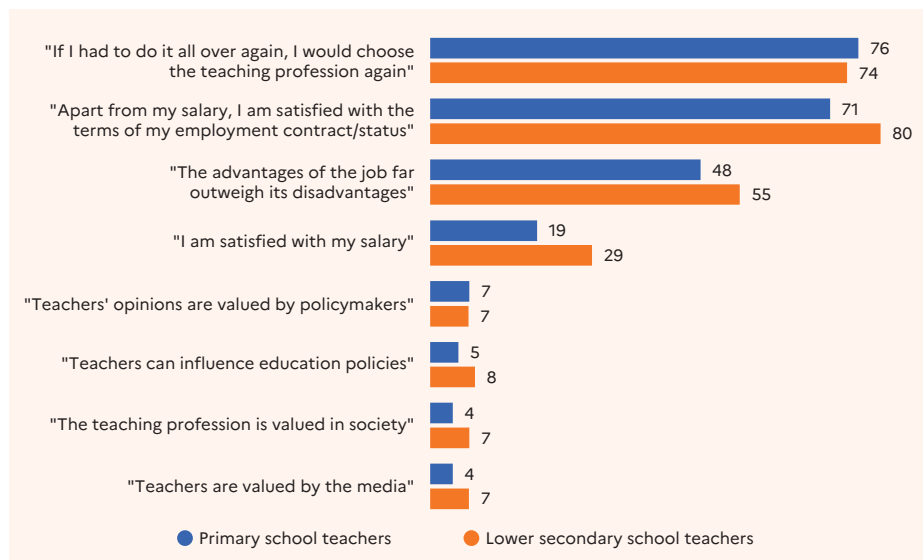
with more than 80 % of their English and Swedish counterparts (Figure 2 web). Other differences in perception also appear according to the school context: for example, in France, 88 % of public school teachers agree that staff can actively participate in decisions concerning the school, compared with 70 % of those in private schools. Overall, the data on job satisfaction among school teachers show the same discrepancy as that observed among lower secondary school teachers (NI 20.11) : while they are very satisfied with their work environment, they are more nuanced about their career choice (Figure 3 web). Thus, slightly less than one teacher out of two considers that the advantages of the job largely outweigh its disadvantages (figure 4). Even fewer primary school teachers than lower secondary school teachers are satisfied with their pay (19 % versus 29 %) and the other terms of their employment contract (71 % versus 80 %). Compared to other European countries, French school teachers are the least likely to feel that their profession is associated with a positive social image, be it from policy makers, the media or society. Only 4 % of them feel that their profession is valued in society, compared to 11 % in Sweden and up to 34 % in England (Figure 5 web).

However, three out of four teachers say they would make the same career choice again. This may be in line with the selfless motivations reported by almost all teachers when asked about their reasons for choosing the profession: 36 % of primary school teachers consider the opportunity to contribute to society through teaching to be very important (Figure 6 web). In comparison, only 15 % consider the financial stability offered by the profession to be very influential.

Teacher collaboration is more common in primary schools than in lower secondary schools

In Europe, Swedish and Spanish teachers are among the most likely to report implementing the range of collaborative practices described in figure 7 at least once a month. The most common practices reported by French school teachers were discussing student progress with colleagues or attending team meetings (80 % did so at least once a month, more often than the Asian countries surveyed). Fewer regularly collaborate to apply common scoring scales (36 %, close to the proportion in the Asian countries surveyed), regularly participate in activities organized for several classes (28 %,

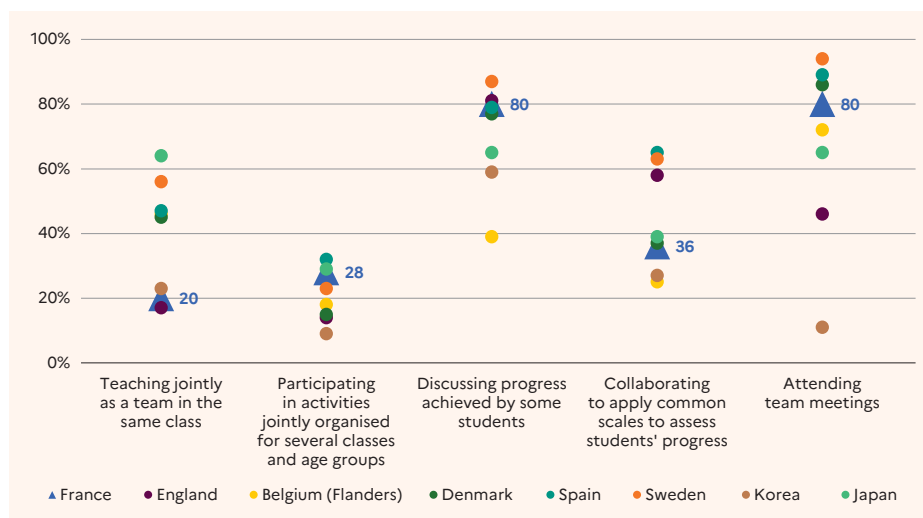
4 Teachers' job satisfaction related to career choice: a comparison by level of education, in %



Note: in 2018, 4% of primary school teachers «agreed» or «strongly agreed» with the statement that teachers are valued by the media. Field: French primary and lower secondary school teachers in the 2018 TALIS sample. Source : MENJS-DEPP, OECD, TALIS international survey.

Réf. : Note d'Information, n° 21.34. © DEPP

7 Primary school teachers' collaborative practices implemented at least once a month: an international comparison, in %



Note: in 2018, 20% of primary school teachers in France reported teaching jointly as a team in the same class at least once a month. Field: French, European, Korean and Japanese primary school teachers in the 2018 TALIS sample. Source : MENJS-DEPP, OECD, TALIS international survey.

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which still places them among the countries that most often report this practice) or regularly co-teach classes (20 %, among the lowest proportions, as in South Korea). For these last two items, the proportion is much higher among teachers working in "priority education" schools (48 % and 41 % respectively). It is also interesting to note that more than half of French primary school principals express a need for continuing training in order to be able to develop cooperation among teachers.

Overall, primary school teachers in France report more frequent collaborative practices than their lower secondary school colleagues (Figure 8 web), a result consistent with that highlighted by the EPODE (*Enquête PériODique sur l'Enseignement*) survey (NI 20.32). It is worth noting, however, that the additional time spent working and interacting with colleagues within the school is only one hour and twenty minutes more in a month than for lower secondary school teachers.

The duties of French school principals lead them to be among the least involved in Europe in the development of teachers' professional skills

TALIS surveyed principals about the frequency of activities they conducted in their school in the 12 months prior to the survey. In France, 59 % of principals reported that they “often” or “very often” work with teachers to address classroom discipline issues and 41 % reported taking initiatives to promote cooperation among teachers to develop innovative teaching practices (Figure 9 web).

In general, French principals are less involved than their international counterparts in activities to develop teachers' professional skills. For example, only 22 % frequently take concrete steps to engage teachers in improving their teaching skills (compared to 72 % in South Korea, 60 % in Spain, or 38 % in Sweden), and only 14 % regularly provide feedback to teachers based on their own observations (compared to 78 % in England or 49 % in Spain or Japan). These differences can be explained by the fact that the job descriptions of principals vary from one country to another.

In Europe, French and Spanish principals are also among the least likely to report that teachers have access to a support program (provided for in the legislation or in an informal setting) when they take up their duties in the school (60 % compared with over 80 % in England, Denmark, Flanders and Sweden). For a very large majority of school principals, ranging from 68 % in Spain to 84 % in England (compared to 9 % in France), such a program, when it exists, is aimed at all newly arrived teachers in the school.

France also stands out in terms of the support provided within the school following a teacher's evaluation (Figure 10 web). For example, only 12 % of principals reported that a training plan is “often” or “very often” developed in their school, compared with 37 % in Denmark and up to 61 % in Spain. Fewer than one in ten principals report that it is common to appoint a tutor to help teachers improve their work methods, while the proportion is about four times higher in England and Sweden. Nearly one in three principals identify the discussion of measures to reduce possible pedagogical weaknesses with the teacher as a frequent outcome of teacher evaluation, which is once again a much lower proportion than in the other countries.

In the Nordic countries and even more in England, the mentoring system is much more developed than in France, Belgium or Spain: 89 % of English school principals said that teachers have access to a tutoring system, compared with only 41 % in France (Figure 11 web).

French, Danish and Spanish primary school teachers are those for whom the feedback they have received about their work over the last twelve months has led to the least positive change in their teaching style: they are six out of ten, compared to seven out of ten in Sweden and Belgium and more than eight out of ten in England (Figure 12 web). The French mean, however, hides disparities according to the teachers' individual characteristics and the teaching context. Thus, those with strictly less than three years' seniority, those most satisfied with their career choice, and those working in private schools are more likely to report a positive impact of the evaluations received during the year (85 %, 75 % and 69 % respectively) on their teaching style. In France, among the primary school teachers who consider that the feedback they received has had a positive impact on their teaching, 90 % say that it has affected their teaching practices (Figure 13 web).

Support for students with special educational needs is a major issue for both teachers and principals

Teachers were asked about the measures they would prioritize if the budget allocated to education was increased: reducing class size is the priority measure most frequently cited by French primary school teachers (87 %). This is followed by support for students with special educational needs (64 %) and increasing teachers' salaries (62 %) (Figure 14 web). Investment in digital technology was identified as a priority in 2018 by only 28 % of primary school teachers. Similarly to lower secondary school (see *Éducation & formations* article, 101), those primary school teachers who report the highest levels of self-efficacy are more likely to cite increasing salaries as a priority than their peers who report the lowest levels of self-efficacy (78% versus 51%). This difference can be contrasted with another difference in work time reported by full-time school teachers: those who report higher self-efficacy also report higher weekly work times of about an hour and a half compared to those with lower self-efficacy. Overall, the responses of primary school teachers are very similar to

those of their colleagues in lower secondary education.

Among the problems affecting their school's ability to provide quality education, French primary school principals identified the lack of teachers competent to handle students with special educational needs, the lack of non-teaching staff, and insufficient or inappropriate digital teaching materials, in higher proportions than in other countries (62 %, 57 % and 57 %, respectively) ↘ figure 15.

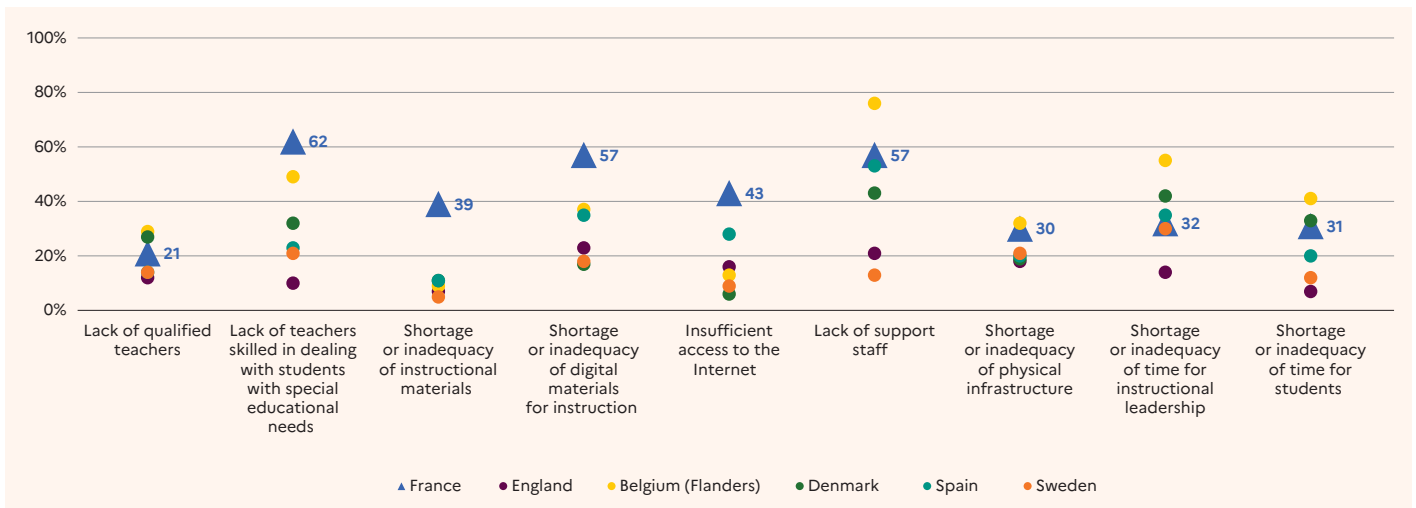
Teachers' well-being seems to be more affected by the job at the primary level than at the lower secondary level

Primary school teachers report a lower level of well-being at work than lower secondary school teachers. Thus, 61 % report experiencing stress associated with at work “to some extent” or “a lot”, 44 % that their job has a negative impact on their mental health and 45 % on their physical health (compared to 52 %, 34 % and 38 % respectively). Seven out of ten primary school teachers consider that their job leaves them time for their personal life ↘ figure 16. The teachers most satisfied with their career choice report much higher levels of well-being (and vice versa for those least satisfied): only 33 % report that their work is a source of stress, 17 % that it has a negative impact on their mental health and 20 % on their physical health (Figure 17 web).

Primary school teachers are also more likely to consider that a lot of noise disturbs the classroom (41 % vs. 32 % in lower secondary school). As teaching time is statutorily higher in primary schools than in lower secondary schools, the differences in teachers' well-being at work according to the level of education could be explained at least in part by greater exposure to difficulties in classroom management. Besides, many more primary school teachers than lower secondary school teachers cite classroom management as a need for continuing professional development (51% versus 35%).

Figure 18 web also shows disparities between primary school and lower secondary school teachers in terms of sources of job-related stress. Eight out of ten primary school teachers report having to adapt lessons for students with special educational needs or being held accountable for student success as sources of stress (the proportion is close to six out of ten in lower secondary school). Responding to parent concerns is also more frequently identified as a source of stress in at the primary level (+21 points). The context of

15 Challenges to educational quality at the school level: a European comparison, in %



Note: In 2018, 62% of primary school principals in France report that the lack of teachers skilled in dealing with students with special educational needs undermines their school's ability to provide quality education.

Field: French and European primary school principals in the 2018 TALIS sample

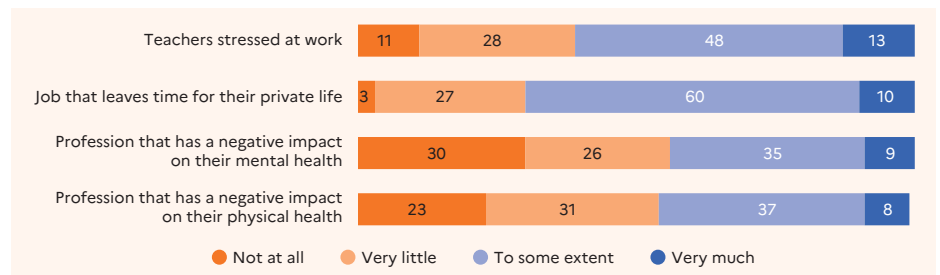
Source: MENJS-DEPP, OECD, TALIS international survey.

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practice and individual characteristics have a strong influence on primary school teachers' responses (Figure 19 web). For example, almost five times more teachers teaching in "priority education" schools than in private schools identified being intimidated or verbally abused by students as a source of stress (32 % versus 7 %). Those who report the lowest levels of self-efficacy cite maintaining school discipline as a source of stress (78% versus 55 %). Newly hired teachers were also much more likely than other teachers to cite having too many lessons to prepare as a source of stress (85 % versus 72 %).

Finally, primary school principals were also asked about their sources of job stress figure 20 web: they most frequently cited having too much administrative work, having to comply with new authorities' requirements, or having to respond to family concerns (94 %, 83 % and 79 %, respectively). Of the nine potential sources of stress surveyed by TALIS, seven stand out as being the most frequently cited by French principals compared to their European peers, suggesting that they may be more exposed to a multitude of stressors in the course of their work, bearing in mind, moreover, that they are unique in Europe in terms of their status and their missions. ■

16 Teachers' workplace well-being, in %



Note: in 2018, 11% of primary school teachers in France report not being stressed at all at work.

Field: French primary school teachers in the 2018 TALIS sample.

Source: MENJS-DEPP, OECD, TALIS international survey.

Réf. : Note d'Information, n° 21.34. © DEPP

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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