Teaching in Focus #25

How education systems respond
to cultural diversity in schools:
New measures in TALIS 2018

Teaching & Learning

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- Responsiveness to student diversity in learning environments is identified as a key area of research in the OECD's [Teaching and Learning International Survey \(TALIS\)](#) 2018.
 - The self-reported nature of TALIS 2018 survey data is especially useful for shedding light on the experiences, attitudes and challenges faced by teachers in the context of increased cultural and socio-economic diversity in classrooms.
 - TALIS 2018 questions on diversity include the cultural composition of classrooms and schools, the presence and frequency of diversity-related pedagogical practices and school policies, and the self-efficacy of teachers in multicultural environments.
 - TALIS 2018 data on diversity contributes a great deal towards the larger policy goal of improving school effectiveness.

Issues concerning the tailoring of school policies and teaching approaches for diverse cultural environments have become increasingly relevant in recent years. As such, education systems across OECD countries are working towards improving the quality of education for all students by adopting a student-centered framework; a “one size fits all” approach is no longer enough. One of the ways this can be done is by supporting teachers to foster inclusion and respect for diversity in their classrooms. This Teaching in Focus brief introduces the research framework on diversity and the survey items used in TALIS 2018.

Box 1. What is TALIS?

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), established in 2008, is the first major international survey of teachers and school leaders on their working conditions and the learning environments in their schools. It is designed to help countries face diverse challenges, learn from each other and advance policy.

TALIS 2018, the first results of which will be released in mid-2019, has continued to focus on lower secondary education, with the added options of primary and upper secondary levels. It now covers close to 50 countries around the world.

Key parameters in brief:

- International target population: lower secondary education (ISCED level 2) teachers and the principals of their schools. A teacher is defined as a person whose professional activity involves the transmission of knowledge, attitudes and skills to students enrolled in an education programme.
- International options: primary (ISCED level 1) and/or upper secondary (ISCED level 3) education; school-level link to PISA 2018 aimed at teachers teaching 15-year-olds in schools taking part in PISA 2018.
- Sample size: minimum 200 schools per country, 20 teachers in each school.
- Sampling: probability samples of schools and of teachers within schools.
- Target response rates: 75% of sampled schools, aiming for a 75% response rate from all sampled teachers in the country.
- Questionnaires: separate, adaptable questionnaires for teachers and principals, each requiring around 45-60 minutes to complete.
- Modes of data collection: self-administered on line or using paper and pencil.
- Phases: pilot study (focus group pre-testing), field trial (with experiments), and main data collection.

More information is available at: www.oecd.org/education/talis

What does existing evidence suggest?

The OECD has a substantial body of work on the role of socio-economic and cultural factors in educational achievement. This work reveals that students with immigrant backgrounds, who are usually culturally and ethnically different from those of their country of schooling, systematically perform less well compared to other students (Figure 1). Results from the [Programme for International Student Assessment \(PISA\)](#) also suggest that the psychological and social well-being of immigrant students is affected by differences between their country of origin and country of destination, based on indicators such as student-reported sense of belonging at school.

It is clear from research on student outcomes that education systems can do more to support students from diverse backgrounds in their teaching and learning environments. However, knowledge gaps in research on input processes that shape the learning experiences of culturally diverse classrooms are a barrier to tackling these inequities. TALIS attempts to bridge some of these gaps.

Figure 1. Immigrant students' reading performance – PISA 2012

Note: For each chart, countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the mean score of first-generation immigrant students.

Source: Based on OECD (2015), *Immigrant Students at School: Easing the Journey towards Integration*, Figure 2.1, OECD Reviews of Migrant Education, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264249509-en>.

TALIS 2013 data on teachers' professional development needs for teaching in a multicultural setting established the groundwork for further research on this theme (Figure 2). Across 38 TALIS participating countries and economies, 12.7% of teachers, on average, reported a high need of professional development in this area, indicating that teachers may feel challenged in diverse teaching and learning environments.

The identification of diversity-centered research questions for TALIS 2018 emerged in this context and as a result of several priority rating exercises among participating countries and economies and the European Commission in early 2015.

Figure 2. Teachers' needs for professional development for teaching in a multicultural setting

Percentage of lower secondary teachers who indicated that they have a high level of need for professional development in the area of teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting

Note: Countries are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of lower secondary teachers.

Source: Based on OECD (2015), *Immigrant Students at School: Easing the Journey towards Integration*, Figure 4.18, OECD Reviews of Migrant Education, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264249509-en>.

The third cycle of TALIS identified diversity as a key area of focus for the first time, as the role of educators has become increasingly relevant in the context of multicultural environments. The research questions on diversity are, thus, grounded in the policy goal of school effectiveness and improvement. The extent to which a school is “effective” in providing quality education relies on its ability to acknowledge and tackle the potential effect that the diverse background of students has on their learning. The following research questions centered on diversity also guide the investigation of this issue, in line with other themes.

Research themes and questions for TALIS

- How much have learning environments changed in recent years regarding school and classroom composition?
- What practices are implemented in schools in relation to student diversity?
- What practices do teachers use to teach students from diverse backgrounds?
- How do teachers’ feelings of preparedness and their professional development needs for teaching in a mixed ability setting vary according to the composition of their classrooms?
- How confident do teachers feel about teaching a culturally diverse class? Do different types of schools exhibit different patterns in this regard?
- How do teachers’ feelings of preparedness and self-efficacy and their professional development needs for teaching a culturally diverse class vary according to the proportion of second language students, students with a migrant background and students who are refugees in their class?

Guided by these areas of inquiry, TALIS 2018 indicators and questionnaire items have been developed across three dimensions of diversity:

1. **Composition:** cultural composition of classrooms and schools.
2. **Practice:** presence and frequency of diversity-related pedagogical practices and school policies.
3. **Attitudes:** self-efficacy of teachers in multicultural environments.

The TALIS 2018 questionnaires also define diversity for its respondents as: “...the recognition and appreciation for differences in the backgrounds of students and staff. In the case of cultural diversity, it refers most notably to cultural and ethnic backgrounds.”

The measures (see Box 2) of diversity developed for TALIS will be used for analysis as follows:

- To present central tendency statistics, e.g. the most frequently cited practice in schools related to diversity across countries.
- To triangulate information on student diversity by comparing data reported by teachers and school principals, e.g. how do teachers and principals report each of the policies and practices related to diversity present in their schools? This approach will allow greater validity of data on diversity, as well as identify differences between teacher and principal sources that could be insightful.
- TALIS scales for diversity will be used to observe correlations in responses to items under a particular construct, e.g. teachers responding similarly to self-efficacy questions within a country would generate system-level insights. These patterns within countries also encourage enquiry into specific policies and programmes related to how a country’s education system responds to multiculturalism.

Teachers and school principals are the first-hand witnesses to student diversity in education systems. Thus, the self-reported nature of TALIS 2018 survey data is especially useful in shedding light on the experiences, attitudes and challenges faced by teachers in the context of increased cultural and socio-economic diversity in classrooms.

Box 2. Snapshot of diversity-related items in the TALIS 2018 teacher and principal questionnaires

Cultural composition of classrooms and schools

Have you ever taught a classroom with students from different cultures?

Does this school include students of more than one cultural or ethnic background?

Diversity-related practices

In this school are the following policies and practices implemented?

- Teaching students to be inclusive of different socio-economic backgrounds.
- Explicit policies against gender discrimination.
- Explicit policies against socio-economic discrimination.
- Additional support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In this school, are the following practices in relation to diversity implemented?

- Supporting activities or organisations that encourage students' expression of diverse ethnic and cultural identities.
- Organising multicultural events.
- Teaching students how to deal with ethnic and cultural discrimination.
- Adopting teaching and learning practices that include global issues throughout the curriculum.

Self-efficacy in teaching diverse classrooms

In teaching a culturally diverse class, to what extent can you do the following?

- Cope with the challenges of a multicultural classrooms.
- Adapt my teaching to the cultural diversity of students.
- Ensure that students with and without a migrant background work together.
- Raise awareness of cultural differences.
- Reduce ethnic stereotyping among students.

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes

In your view, approximately how many teachers in this school would agree with the following statements?

- It is important to be responsive to differences in cultural backgrounds.
- It is important for students to learn that people from other cultures have different values.
- Respecting other cultures is something that children and young people should learn as early as possible.
- Children and young people should learn that people of different cultures have a lot in common.
- Schools should encourage students from different socio-economic backgrounds to work together.
- Students should learn how to avoid gender discrimination.
- It is important to treat female and male students equally.
- It is important to treat students from all socio-economic backgrounds in the same manner.

The bottom line

Today's multicultural learning environments are both a challenge and an opportunity for countries. Education systems not only play a critical role in the integration of students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, but should also aim to have all students value diversity and contribute to the building of a diverse yet inclusive society as global citizens. TALIS 2018 survey questions on diversity are centered on the context of students' experiences at both the school and classroom level. Therefore, this data is an opportunity to compare teachers' and schools' capacities to respond to these objectives, as well as to supplement the body of existing research on student outcomes and achievement. The insights from this data are one-of-a-kind, as they address a critical information gap in educational policy making.

www.oecd.org/education/talis

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