



# Teaching in Focus #46


Unravelling the layers of  
teachers' work-related stress



Teaching & Learning



## Unravelling the layers of teachers' work-related stress

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- Teachers in disadvantaged schools are more likely to have stress from maintaining classroom discipline than those in advantaged schools in half of TALIS participants with available data.
  - Classroom discipline is the source of stress that is most often related to decreased job satisfaction and a reduced desire to continue teaching.
  - Teachers' job satisfaction is also related to stress from too many lessons and changing requirements in most TALIS countries and territories. However, these stressors are only associated with a reduced desire to continue teaching in a minority of TALIS participants.
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Teachers across the globe are committed to giving young people the best possible chance of a better future. But a common complaint is the level of stress linked to the role. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, an average of 48% of teachers across the OECD said they experience “quite a bit” or “a lot” of stress in the 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). This is worrying, since work-related stress is often a key factor relating to teachers' job satisfaction, well-being and desire to continue teaching.

With many countries struggling to boost the attractiveness of the teaching profession, it is important to understand the sources of teacher stress better. Although 90% of teachers agree that they are satisfied with their jobs overall on average across the OECD, only 76% consider that the advantages of being a teacher outweigh the disadvantages. In addition, a third of teachers wonder if it would have been better to choose another profession. An examination of the sources of teachers' stress and how these are distributed across schools could help to identify which key areas could be leveraged to improve teachers' perceptions of their work.

Therefore, this brief explores data on lower secondary teachers from TALIS 2018 to investigate whether stressors vary according to students' socio-economic background. In addition, it looks at which stressors are more likely to be associated with teachers' job satisfaction and plans to continue in the role.

While the post-COVID landscape has led to new challenges for teachers, TALIS 2018 can still provide relevant insights for policy makers and school leaders. It can indicate which stressors are more relevant to particular contexts, and which are associated with teacher retention. This can help to develop more informed strategies, which are sorely needed to support teachers and prevent teacher shortages.

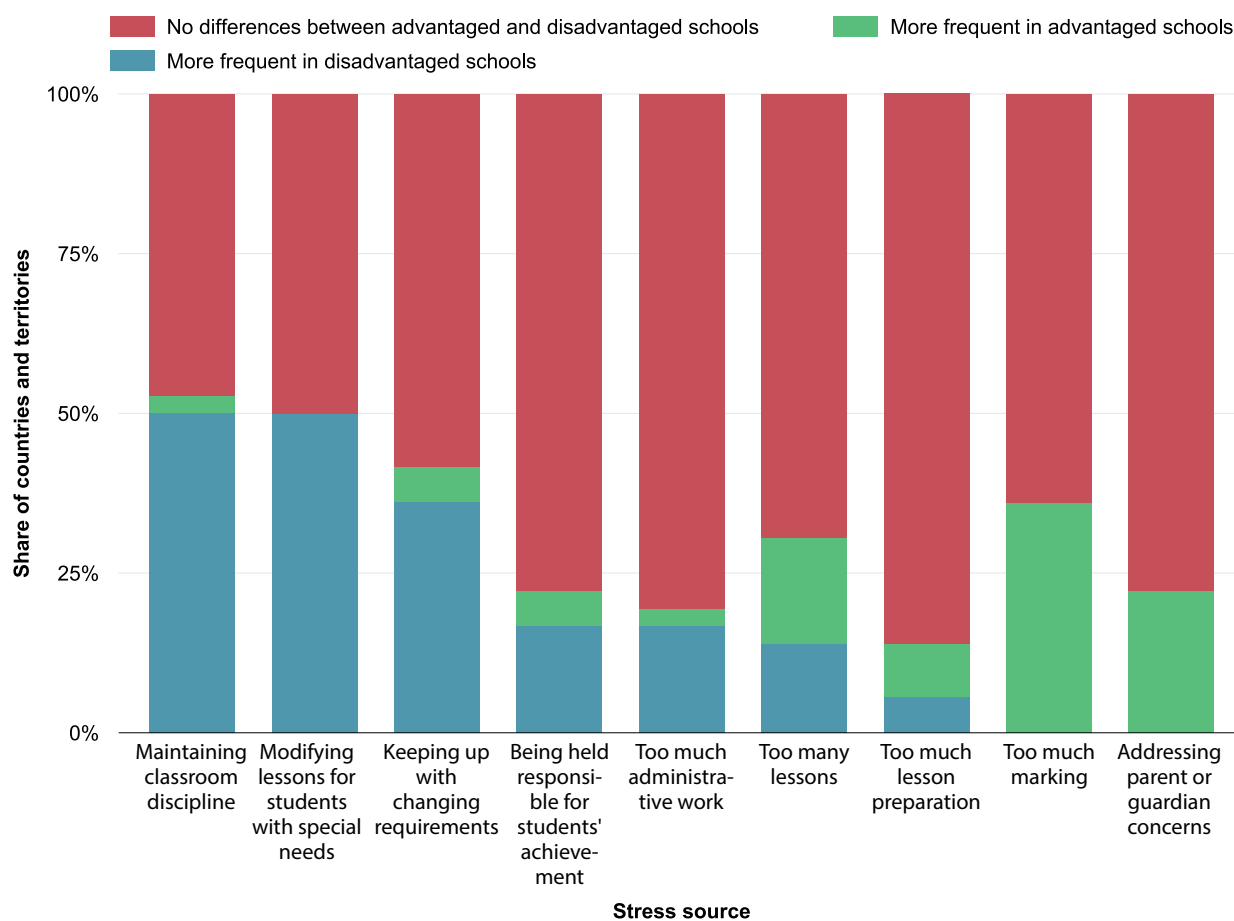
### How do teachers' sources of stress compare between schools of different backgrounds?

The sources of stress reported by teachers can vary significantly based on the socio-economic backgrounds of the schools they work in. This may not be surprising since teachers often face additional challenges if they work in disadvantaged schools, defined in TALIS as schools where more than 30% of students are from socio-economically disadvantaged homes.

TALIS data show that teachers in disadvantaged settings often face particular challenges regarding student behaviour. In half of TALIS participants with available data, teachers are more likely to experience stress from classroom discipline in disadvantaged schools than in advantaged ones, where less than 10% of students are from socio-economically disadvantaged homes (Figure 1).

## Figure 1. Are sources of teacher stress more frequent in disadvantaged schools?

Share of countries and territories by differences between advantaged and disadvantaged schools, regarding teacher reports of the following sources of stress “quite a bit” or “a lot”



**Note:** This chart excludes countries and territories where there are too few or no observations to provide reliable estimates and/or to ensure the confidentiality of respondents (i.e. there are fewer than 10 schools/principals and/or 30 teachers with valid data; and/or the item non-response rate [i.e. ratio of missing or invalid responses to the number of participants for whom the question was applicable] is above 50%).

**Source:** OECD, TALIS 2018 Database; [www.oecd.org/education/talis/TIF-46-Data.xlsx](http://www.oecd.org/education/talis/TIF-46-Data.xlsx)

TALIS data reveal some differences between disadvantaged and advantaged schools regarding stress from responding to stakeholders (Figure 1). Teachers in disadvantaged schools are more likely to report stress from modifying lessons for students with special needs in half of countries and territories, and adapting to changing requirements in over a third of participants with available data. This discrepancy may stem from limited resources available to teachers in disadvantaged schools for these tasks. In contrast, teachers in advantaged schools are the ones who are more likely to report stress in terms of addressing concerns from parents or guardians, albeit only in a handful of countries and territories.

Regarding workload-related issues, excessive marking is more likely to be reported as a stress factor by teachers in advantaged schools in over a third of countries and territories with available data. However, there is no consistent pattern of workload stress between advantaged and disadvantaged schools when it comes to having too many lessons or lesson preparation. This suggests that working in advantaged schools can have its own specific workload-related challenges, but that workload is generally an issue that is perceived equally between schools of different backgrounds.

## Keeping teachers satisfied and committed: which stressors to avoid?

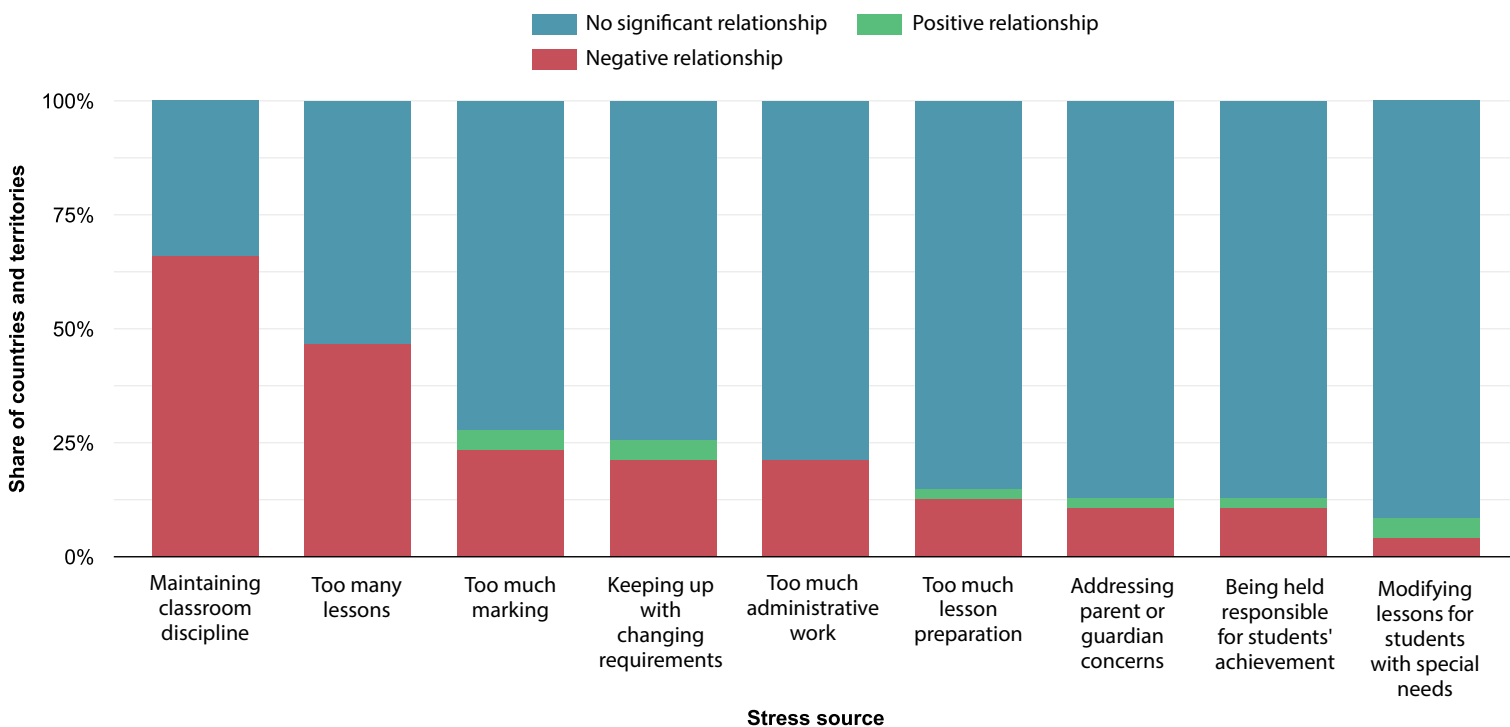
One of the key takeaways from the data is the link between stress factors and teachers' job satisfaction and commitment to teaching. While many stressors can take a toll, two types stand out as particularly influential: student behaviour and workload.

Maintaining classroom discipline is the source of stress that is most commonly related to teachers' commitment to teaching (Figure 2). In two-thirds of TALIS countries and territories, there is a statistically significant negative relationship between this stress source and the number of years teachers plan to stay in the profession. This is followed by stress from having too many lessons to teach, which has a significant negative association in nearly half of countries and territories.

Figure 2. Which sources of stress most often relate to teachers' desire to continue teaching and their job satisfaction?

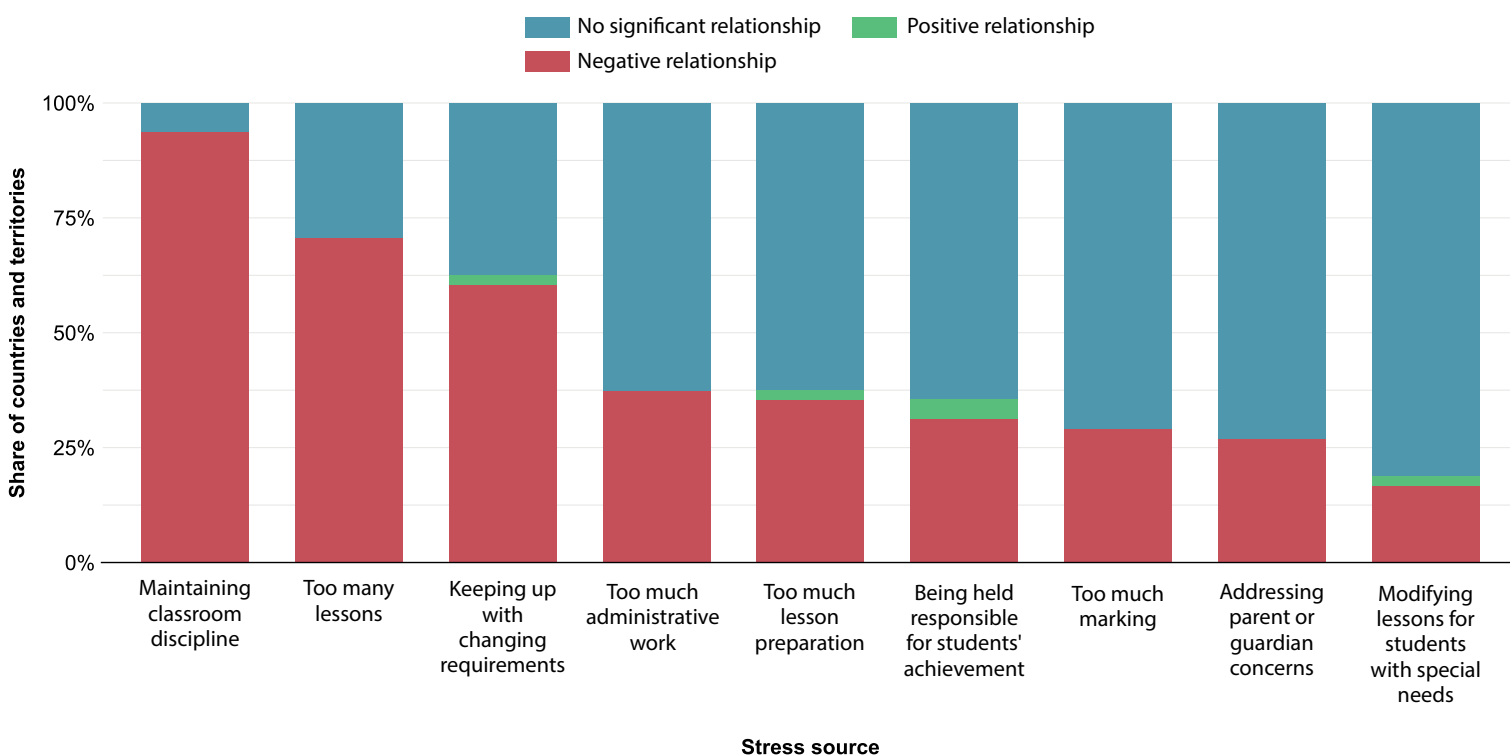
**Panel A. Frequency of relationships with teachers' desire to continue teaching**

Share of countries and territories by type of relationship between the number of years teachers want to continue teaching and their reports of the following sources of stress "quite a bit" or "a lot"



**Panel B. Frequency of relationships with teachers' satisfaction with the profession**

Share of countries and territories by type of relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and their reports of the following sources of stress "quite a bit" or "a lot"



**Note:** For each stress source, regression models control for the other sources of stress, teachers' age and gender in both panels.

**Source:** OECD, TALIS 2018 database; [www.oecd.org/education/talis/TIF-46-Data.xlsx](http://www.oecd.org/education/talis/TIF-46-Data.xlsx)

In terms of teachers' job satisfaction, the same stress factors relating to student behaviour and workload are also particular concerns. Stress from classroom discipline has a significant negative relationship with teachers' job satisfaction in the vast majority of TALIS participants (Figure 2). Regarding workload, the burden of too many lessons is associated with reduced job satisfaction in over two-thirds of countries and territories.

In a small minority of countries and territories, positive relationships are found between certain sources of stress and teachers' job satisfaction and commitment. This might be due to feelings of mastery or accomplishment when teachers encounter stressful situations but are able to manage them successfully. It is, therefore, crucial to consider what supports are available to teachers, and whether these are sufficient to help them navigate the challenges they face at work. It should be noted, however, that positive relationships are present in a very small number of participants and only for certain types of stress.

## The bottom line

In half of participating countries and territories with available data, stress from classroom discipline is more commonly reported by teachers in disadvantaged schools. Stress from classroom discipline has a significant negative relationship with teachers' job satisfaction and their desire to remain in the profession in the majority of countries and territories.

There is a clear need for policy makers to consider ways to improve support systems for teachers that are focused on reducing stress from classroom discipline, especially in disadvantaged schools. This may involve investing in more targeted capacity building for teachers in disadvantaged schools, given evidence from TALIS 2018 that the provision of relevant training and professional development are both significant predictors of teachers' self-efficacy in classroom management. However, structural factors also need to be taken into account: for example, the allocation and distribution of teachers. TALIS data from 2018 shows that teachers' self-efficacy in classroom management is also related to their years of experience, but experienced teachers are less likely to work in disadvantaged schools.

## What is TALIS?

Find out more about the Teaching and Learning International Survey: <http://www.oecd.org/education/talis/>

### Contacts

Heewoon Bae ([heewoon.bae@oecd.org](mailto:heewoon.bae@oecd.org)) and [edutaliscontact@oecd.org](mailto:edutaliscontact@oecd.org)

### Note

The data referred to in this *Teaching in Focus* brief can be found at: [www.oecd.org/education/talis/TIF-46-Data.xlsx](http://www.oecd.org/education/talis/TIF-46-Data.xlsx)

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This *Teaching in Focus* has been authorised by Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD.

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