

Teachers around the globe feel undervalued, researchers find

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Results of the study co-authored by Penn State Professor of Education Soo-yong Byun indicate a need for policy reforms to encourage teachers to stay in the profession and continue to improve teaching practice. Credit: Pixabay

A significant number of teachers across 28 high-income countries feel undervalued in their respective societies, which consequently impacts their level of job satisfaction and how they engage in their work, according to a study co-authored by a Penn State College of Education researcher.

The study was published in [AERA Open](#).

Soo-yong Byun, professor of education who specializes in educational theory and [policy](#) and co-authored the paper, said the results point to a need for [policy reforms](#) to encourage [teachers](#) to stay in the profession and continue to improve teaching practice.

"Our findings empirically demonstrate that if teachers feel valued in society and by media and policymakers, their [job satisfaction](#) will increase and thus [they will] make more efforts to adopt new ideas and methods to change and improve their schools," Byun said. "We strongly believe that this will in turn positively affect the [student learning](#) and outcomes not only directly, but also indirectly presumably via reduced teacher attrition."

To examine the global pattern in teachers' perception of occupational value and identify possible outcomes and predictors, Byun and colleagues analyzed the 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) data, which includes submissions from about 112,000 teachers.

They found an overwhelming majority of teachers reported feeling undervalued in almost all Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. OECD is an intergovernmental organization with 38 [member countries](#), founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade.

The researchers then examined possible consequences and predictors of perceived occupational value in four countries with different teacher policy contexts—the United States, Australia, Finland and Korea.

In the TALIS data, teacher perception of occupational value was measured with four survey items asking teachers to indicate the level of agreement—one for strongly disagree to four for strongly agree—on the statements that teachers are valued in society by the media and by policymakers; and that teachers can influence educational policy. This dataset included about 20 teachers from each school, with a target sample of 200 schools per country.

The results, Byun said, indicated that globally, an overwhelming majority of teachers feel undervalued in society and by the media and policymakers.

Only 24.5% of teachers expressed that they feel valued in society, and just 18.4% of teachers reported feeling valued by the media. Their perception of value by policymakers is even lower, with only 13.3% reporting that they feel valued on average. Additionally, only 22.5% reported they have influence on [educational policy](#).

"Overall, teachers think they are not valued well in society across different countries," Byun said. "We found that only one of four secondary teachers said they feel valued in society."

In addition, teachers who feel undervalued reported less collective teacher effort for school improvement as well as job dissatisfaction consistently in all four countries.

According to Byun, the study demonstrated between-nation differences in whether compensation and environment of school decision making are significantly related to teachers' perception of occupational value. In the

U.S., the teachers who are satisfied with their salary, given more classroom autonomy and involved in school budget and policy-related decision-making such as budget allocation, disciplinary policies, assessment policies and student admission, are more likely to report that they are valued and influential.

The findings in the U.S., Australia and Finland were generally similar. On the other hand, Byun said, in Korea, teachers who are involved in curriculum decisions are less likely to report that they are valued and influential. Teachers who are given the opportunity to be involved in curriculum decisions may feel restricted due to the standardized national textbooks and content standards, which may lead to frequent locking of horns between teachers and the South Korean government.

"In Korean [society](#), curriculum is standardized," Byun said. "Although teachers have some independence, they have to follow government regulations. The more autonomy they have in their classroom, the more frustrated they may be by continuous pushback from the government."

Overall, Byun said, the study demonstrated that working conditions associated with perceived occupational value varied across countries with different teacher policy contexts, highlighting the importance of identifying county-specific conditions that could be targeted in an effort to improve teachers' perception of occupational value.

According to the researchers, ways to improve morale include improving teacher salary, providing more classroom autonomy to teachers and involving them in policy-related school decision making. Specifically, in the U.S., where teacher policy produces significant disparities in [teacher](#) candidates' qualifications, distribution of qualified teachers and professional control, policy changes initiated by district and [school](#) leaders have the greatest potential to make teachers feel valued, Byun said.

"Quality teachers will likely remain in their profession if they feel more valued and they will play an important role in shaping their student outcomes," Byun said.

More information: Motoko Akiba et al, Do Teachers Feel Valued in Society? Occupational Value of the Teaching Profession in OECD Countries, *AERA Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/23328584231179184](https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584231179184)

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