

Theses of Doctoral (Phd) Dissertation

TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

**The investigation of teacher work and job
satisfaction among Romanian lower
secondary teachers**

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1. Thesis objective, theme delimitation

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 is becoming a diverse 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 the dissertation 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 that are causing problems in teachers' society in the examined countries have surfaced.

The aim of the research is to provide an empirical based understanding of the international and Romanian context of teacher work, which provides an opportunity to identify characteristics considered to affect teaching activities and also gives a basis for planning and conducting other research on teachers' working conditions.

The choice of country is justified by the permanent resident status of this country as a

minority citizen. At this point we have to mention that educational science research published in Hungarian is organized mostly by minority education research guidelines, such as the right to use the mother tongue, the right to education, regional identity, equal opportunities, linguistic-cultural identity, multiculturalism or intercultural education. Several Hungarian researchers in Romania emphasize that minority education as a subsystem of the majority education system has certain features, but formally the regulations of the Romanian education system are applicable to it. That means that the specific problems of Hungarian minority education can only be understood and addressed in the context of Romanian education as a whole. The novelty of the dissertation lies in the fact that the study extends to all Romanian teachers at lower secondary level (ISCED 2).

The theoretical structure of our thesis is built around the background of teacher research, in which we summarize the results of decades of history on the subject that have contributed to the emergence of

a new discipline – school effectiveness research. We list and present the factors that determine the effectiveness of teaching work according to the literature. Also, we consider all the approaches that are relevant to the factors that determine the quality of teaching. In the thesis we do not examine teachers' performance, but all the factors that contribute to their effectiveness and determine the quality of their work.

2. Research methods

For the purpose of this 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 of 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 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 dissertation.

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 analyses, 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.

3. Research findings

In our thesis we seek the answer for the question who are the lower secondary teachers in Romania, how the schools' environments are where they are working, and what are the opinions, perceptions, beliefs and accounts for 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:

1. According to TALIS 2013, what are the characteristics of Romanian lower secondary teachers? Based on the use of data from international comparative analysis, according to the surveyed indicators of teaching work, which countries are the most similar to the trends in Romania? What possible

explanations can be found behind similar patterns?

2. 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?
3. 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?
4. What are the factors related to their above-average or below-average perceived school satisfaction in terms of job and workplace?

Our empirical study was conducted along the questions described above. In accordance with empirical social science traditions, the research was concretized using hypotheses based on the results already predicted in the literature.

According to the first hypothesis of research, the post-socialist interpretative framework behind the teacher attitudes and working conditions similar to that of Romania has not expired, but exists in parallel with the processes of globalization experienced in education. It is assumed that Romania and other post-Soviet states will produce similar results throughout the comparative analyses. Based on this assumption, in our comparative analysis we found that teachers in the countries of the socialist bloc often have the same view on areas of teaching work. In general, the characteristics of teachers are closest to those of Romania in the education systems of Serbia, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Croatia.

All analysis in this part includes teachers and principals only. At a descriptive level, we provided insights into the characteristics of teacher

demographic and quality such as gender, certification status, education level, proportion of all school staff who are teachers etc. We also examined in detail the teaching and learning environments with focus on teacher work, teacher evaluation, continuous professional development etc. These analyses confirmed which countries are the closest to approach the trends in Romania. Although in this chapter we distinguished the Central, Eastern European countries, in this context the readers could get an idea of the results of the whole TALIS 2013 measurements.

The second 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. These analyses confirmed several findings:

- It was found that individual teacher characteristics such as their professional development and the duration of their entire

career so far are significantly correlated positively with teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy. Schools that support their teachers in their professional development and discuss their professional issues are perhaps the most important source of satisfaction for them.

- Among the variables classified into the methodological culture dimension, the effectiveness of the teacher work, the disciplined atmosphere and the values of the teacher-student relationships indicated job satisfaction and self-efficacy.
- Among the climate dimensions, the results highlight the importance of the positive effects of relationships. The linear regression odds ratio for teacher collaboration in our study did not indicate an impact on workplace satisfaction, but teacher-student relationships and school stakeholder involvement can be a real resource for educators.

In this sense, it can be said 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.

During the analyses, we examined the differences between schools on the basis of 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 school work and teaching performance, with regard to male and female teachers.
- 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 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. Based on the data available on classroom processes, this distinction cannot be clearly justified.

In our third 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 particular love for learning and need for professional development. 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 constructivist 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 varies 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 tend to have good cooperation with their colleagues and good relations with students and stakeholders.

Our fourth 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.

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 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.

To sum up, 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, 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.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

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