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# IEA COMPASS: BRIEFS IN EDUCATION

## TEACHER JOB SATISFACTION

International evidence on the associations with teacher workload, school leadership, and student discipline



### SUMMARY

Teacher job satisfaction is pivotal for retaining competent, qualified teachers, and for enhancing their overall well-being. School working conditions play a vital role in shaping teachers' perspectives on their career and profession. However, international comparative research is still limited in pinpointing the specific elements of the school-working conditions that correlate with teacher job satisfaction. Using data from TIMSS 2019 (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), this brief investigates the association between school-working conditions, school leadership, student discipline, teacher workload, and teacher job satisfaction from the perspective of eighth-grade mathematics teachers. We present evidence of a significant relationship between school leadership, student discipline, and teacher workload with teacher job satisfaction, highlighting the strong connection between school-working conditions and teacher job satisfaction.

### IMPLICATIONS

- ▶ Improving working conditions in schools is a promising approach to address the global teacher shortage, both in terms of retaining teachers and in providing attractive positions for the new generation of teachers.
- ▶ We find that supportive school leadership, better student behavior, and lower perceived workload, are linked with greater teacher job satisfaction.
- ▶ Investing in leadership training and mentorship programs, implementing strategies to promote positive student behavior and support classroom management, and reducing teacher administrative workload can be productive initiatives to improve teacher job satisfaction.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Teacher shortages are a global issue. By 2030, an estimated 44 million additional primary and secondary teachers will be needed worldwide (UNESCO, 2024). This challenge affects many countries, including the United States, Australia, China, and England (Ingersoll, 2017). A lack of qualified teachers leads to larger class sizes, heavier workloads, and lower educational quality. Addressing this problem requires a range of solutions, and improving teacher job satisfaction is a key part of the response (Education International, 2024).

Teacher job satisfaction is not just important for reducing shortages, it also improves teachers' daily experiences and their ability to support students. Satisfied teachers are more likely to create positive learning environments and help students succeed. Research shows that job satisfaction predicts teachers' confidence in their abilities (Burić & Kim, 2021) and is also linked to longer careers and stronger commitment to the profession (Blömeke et al., 2017). High satisfaction levels contribute to better teaching, greater dedication, and long-term career success.

Studies have identified factors within schools that affect teacher satisfaction. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) found that student behavior significantly impacts satisfaction in Norwegian schools. Similarly, Malinen and Savolainen (2016) showed that a positive school climate boosts satisfaction among Finnish teachers.

Using data from the TIMSS 2015 study, Toropova et al. (2020) reported that workload and student discipline influence teacher satisfaction in Sweden. School leadership also plays an important role. Sims (2018; 2020) highlighted this factor in England, while Boyd et al. (2011) and Kraft et al. (2016) showed that supportive school administration is crucial for teacher retention in New York City.

Despite these insights, there are challenges in applying research findings across different countries. Much of the existing research is based on single-country studies, which limits how broadly the results can be applied. To address this gap, our study uses data from TIMSS 2019. The data covers a wide range of education systems and allows us to explore factors influencing teacher satisfaction on an international scale.

We focus on three key aspects of school conditions: student discipline, leadership support, and teacher workload. Our research examines how these factors are related to job satisfaction among eighth-grade mathematics teachers. By providing updated and globally relevant insights, we aim to contribute to ongoing efforts to improve teacher satisfaction and enhance the quality of mathematics education during this critical stage of student learning.

## DATA & SAMPLE

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Data from the mathematics teachers of eighth-grade students who participated in TIMSS 2019 were analyzed. We used data from all 46 participating countries and regions. Teacher job satisfaction was measured through responses to five statements about their feelings as teachers: contentment with their profession, finding their work meaningful and purposeful, enthusiasm for their job, inspiration from their job, and pride in their work. *Figure 1* shows variations in teacher job satisfaction across countries, which suggests that teacher job satisfaction levels may differ internationally.

In terms of school-working conditions we consider three key factors:

- **Teacher workload:** Scale based on the five items measuring the extent to which teachers agree with various statements about their workload at school, such as having too many teaching hours and needing more time for class preparation.
- **Student discipline:** Scale based on five items assessing teachers' perceptions regarding their agreement with

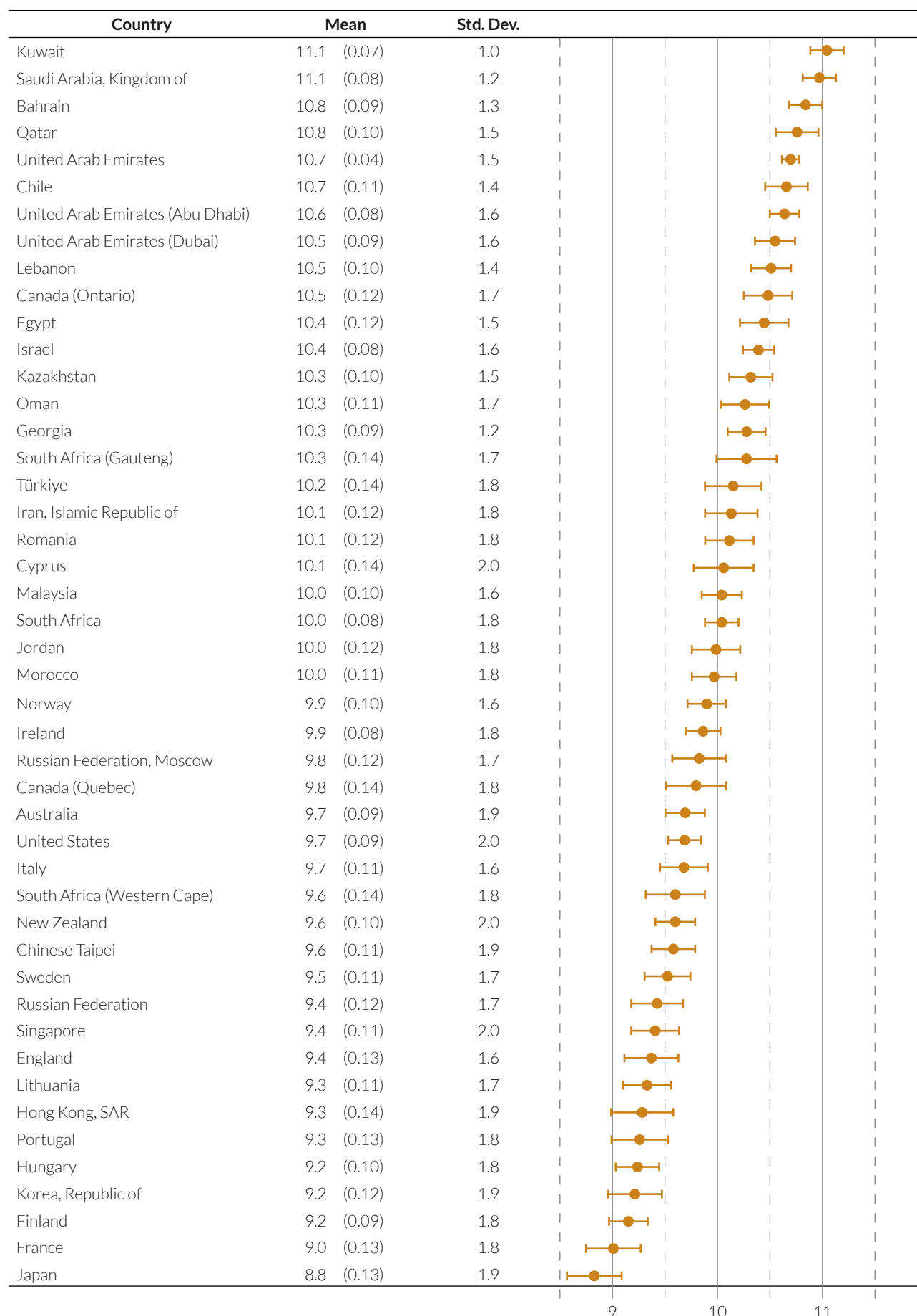
descriptions of student behavior and conduct at their school, such as if students are respectful of the teachers and behave in an orderly manner.

- **School leadership:** Single item rating the level of collaboration between teachers and school leadership.

In addition, we also consider teacher gender (male or female), years of teaching experience, primary area of study (mathematics or mathematics education), and the total hours spent in formal professional development for mathematics.

We perform a regression analysis to show which factors have an impact using pooled data. However, the patterns are mostly confirmed using analysis by country (*Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4*). This model explores the relationship between school-working conditions characteristics with teacher job satisfaction after controlling for a variety of teacher characteristics. The analyses were conducted at the teacher level.

Figure 1: Distribution of teacher job satisfaction responses by country





## RESULTS

We estimate a regression using pooled international data to provide a comprehensive overview of the relationship between school-working conditions and teacher job satisfaction after controlling for teacher characteristics.

Our analysis highlights three key factors that are closely linked to teacher job satisfaction: leadership support, student discipline, and teacher workload. These relationships remain strong even after controlling for other teacher characteristics like gender, teaching experience, and participation in professional development (see Table 1).

Supportive leadership plays an important role, teachers who feel supported by their principals and school leaders report higher job satisfaction. Student behavior in the classroom is a critical factor. Teachers are more satisfied when their students are well-

behaved and disruptions are minimal. Finally, the association between workload and outcome is significant despite being smaller compared to the other factors. Teachers with heavier workloads tend to experience lower job satisfaction.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show how the factors—leadership support, student discipline, and teacher workload—are linked to teacher job satisfaction across different countries.

Figure 2 focuses on leadership support. In most countries, there is a clear positive relationship between leadership support and teacher satisfaction. This relationship is statistically significant in 27 countries. Teachers who feel more supported by their principals consistently report higher satisfaction. In two countries the relationship is negative, but it is not statistically significant.

Table 1: Regression estimates for pooled international data

	Estimate	Standard Error
<b>Leadership Support</b>	0.266***	(0.013)
<b>Student Discipline</b>	0.356***	(0.013)
<b>Teacher Workload</b>	-0.113***	(0.012)

\*\*\*p<0.001

► **Note:** A rich set of control variables were included in the regression model (gender, teaching years, mathematics, mathematics education, and professional development) but are not presented in this table.

Figure 2: Relationship between leadership support and teacher job satisfaction, regression result

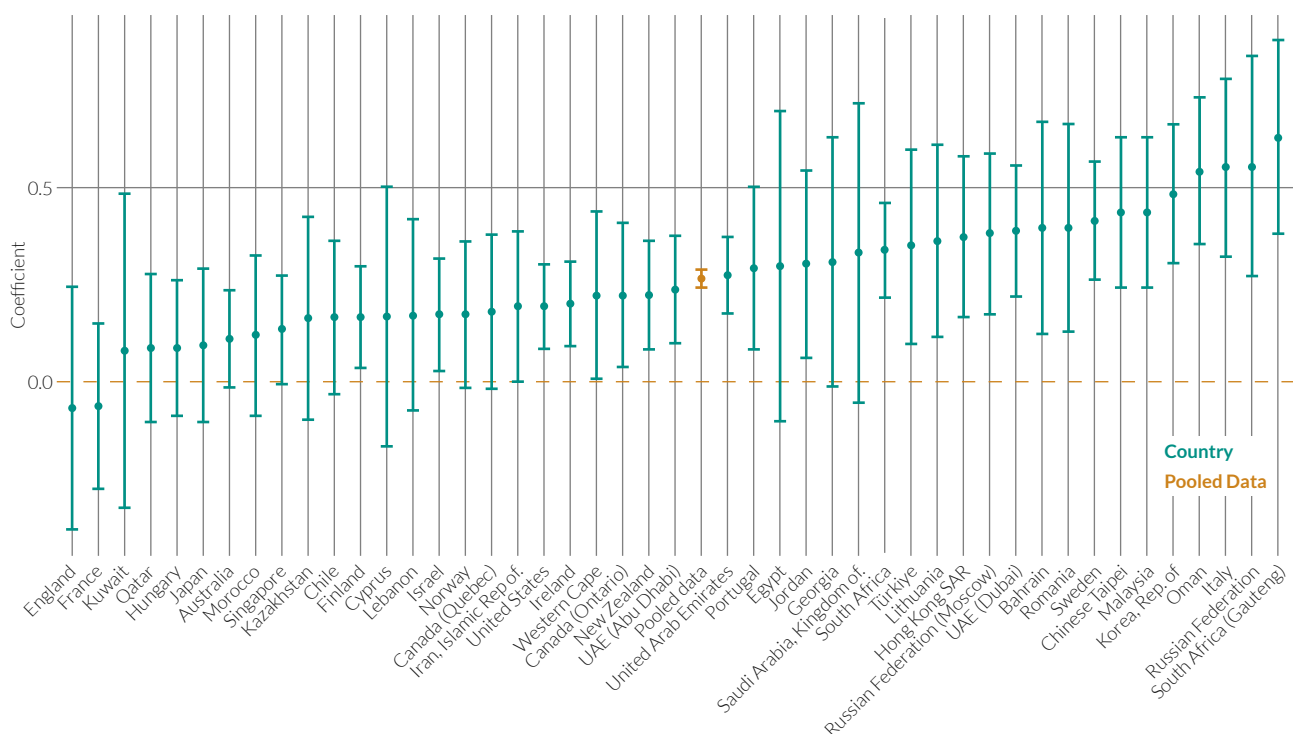


Figure 3 examines the connection between student discipline and teacher job satisfaction. In nearly all countries, better student discipline is linked to higher teacher satisfaction. The only exception is South Africa (Gauteng), where this relationship is not observed. Overall, teachers with well-behaved students tend to report greater job satisfaction.

Figure 4 explores how teacher workload affects job satisfaction.

In about two-thirds of the countries, a heavier workload is associated with lower satisfaction. This relationship is statistically significant in 14 of the 37 countries where the negative trend is observed. While we do observe some positive associations between workload and job satisfaction, it is important to note that these are not statistically significant. These exceptions suggest that the effect of workload on satisfaction may depend on contextual factors within these education systems.

Figure 3: Relationship between student discipline and teacher job satisfaction, regression result

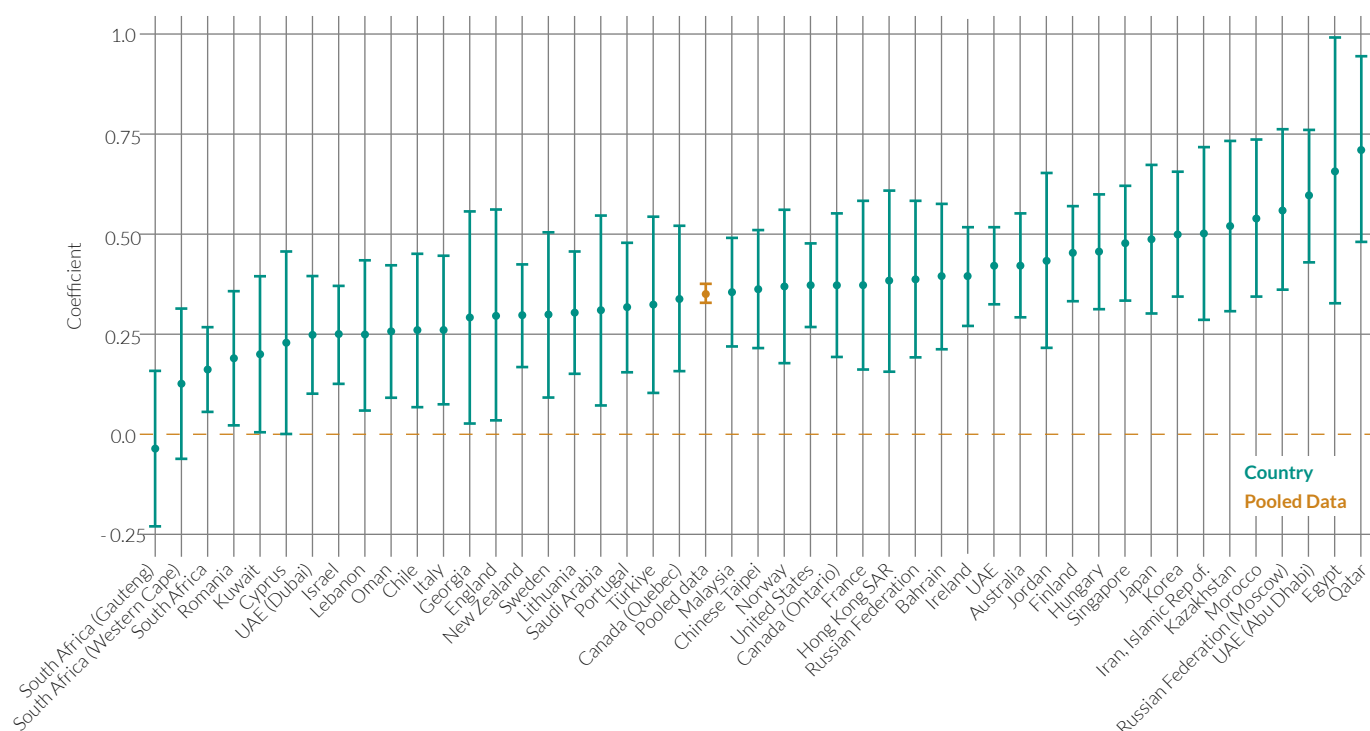
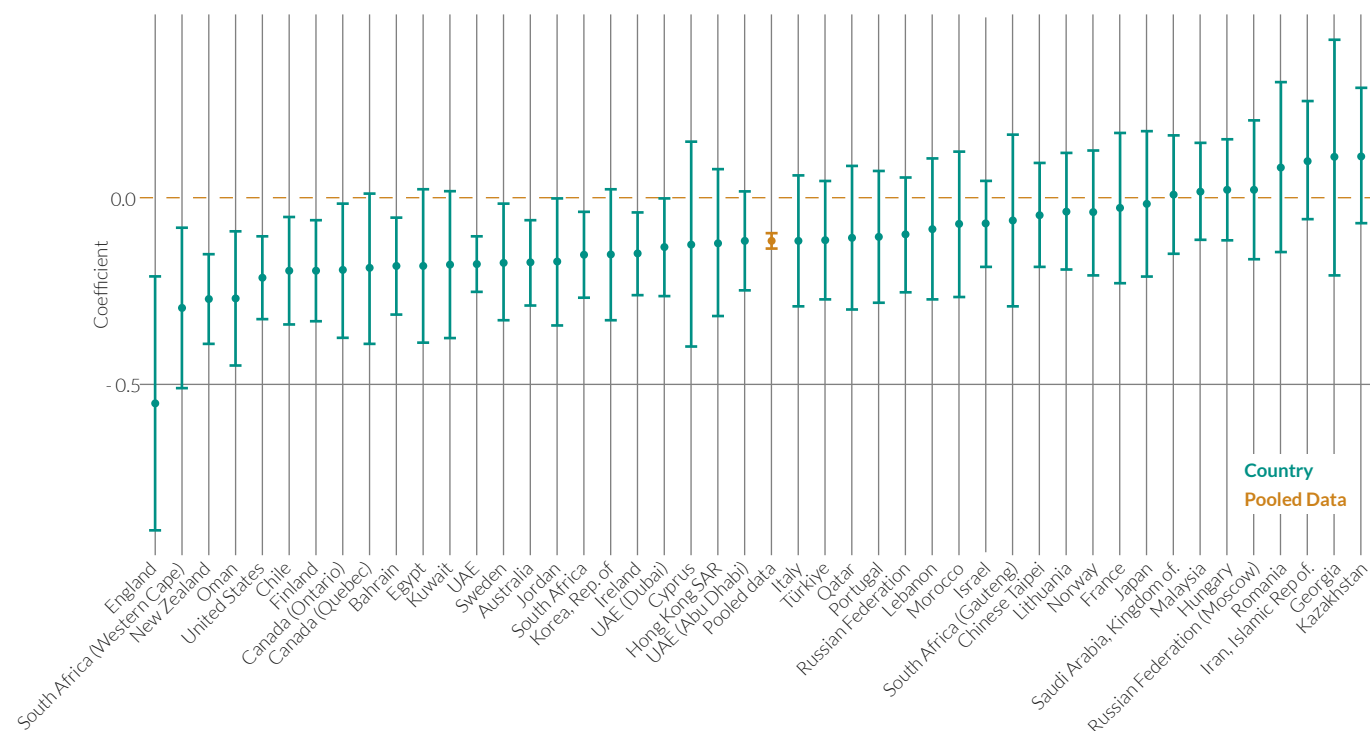


Figure 4: Relationship between teacher workload and teacher job satisfaction, regression result





## CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH & POLICY

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Teacher working conditions are a significant challenge, especially as the world faces a growing teacher shortage. Satisfied teachers are essential for delivering high-quality education and ensuring the teaching profession remains stable and attractive (Education International, 2024). Our analysis highlights the importance of leadership support in improving teacher job satisfaction. Teachers who feel supported by their school principals are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. Investing in leadership training and mentorship programs can help create a more supportive environment. This finding is consistent with research from Australia (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016), Sweden (Toropova et al., 2020), Israel (Bogler, 2001), and England (Sims, 2020).

Student discipline also plays a critical role. Teachers with fewer classroom disruptions report higher levels of job satisfaction. This suggests that schools should promote positive student behavior and support teachers in managing classroom challenges. Previous studies (e.g., Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2017; Wang et al., 2020; Toropova et al., 2020; Sims, 2018) reinforce the importance of maintaining discipline for improving teacher satisfaction.

Compared to leadership support and student discipline, teacher workload has a more moderate relationship with job satisfaction. Our findings show that heavy workloads negatively affect teacher satisfaction. This aligns with research from Sweden (Toropova et al., 2020) and Norway (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016), where excessive workloads have been linked to burnout and increased teacher turnover. Managing workloads is essential for preventing stress and retaining teachers in the profession. Further research could differentiate between teaching and non-teaching/administrative workload (Creagh et al., 2023). Despite general trends, it is important to acknowledge the observed heterogeneity in our results, suggesting further research could explore institutional factors moderating these relationships. The global teacher shortage calls for urgent action. Addressing this issue requires more than training new teachers—it also involves retaining those already in the profession.

Our study provides valuable insights into factors influencing teacher satisfaction, using data from 46 countries. We found that leadership support, student discipline, and workload are key to improving job satisfaction.

This study focuses on mathematics teachers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings on other subjects. Additionally, the sample was not drawn at random and is thus not necessarily representative of the broader mathematics teacher population. Furthermore, while we controlled for many potential confounding factors, some unobserved variables may still influence the results. Reverse causality is another possible limitation. Based on theory and prior research, we assume that leadership, discipline, and workload affect satisfaction rather than the opposite, but the cross-sectional nature of our data prevents us from testing this assumption directly.

Despite these limitations, our findings align with previous research and provide a global perspective. By examining data from many countries, we confirm that supportive leadership and positive student behavior are vital for teacher satisfaction. These findings are useful for educators, policymakers, and researchers working to enhance the teaching profession worldwide.

Improving teacher satisfaction requires collaboration among policymakers, school principals, and families. While policies set a broader framework, principals have a direct role in shaping the school environment and families can also support schools by promoting positive and disciplined behavior. Satisfied teachers are more likely to dedicate their time and energy to teaching, benefiting students and the education system as a whole. Addressing the nature and amount of teacher workload is also important for reducing stress and improving job satisfaction. School principals play a key role in fostering teacher satisfaction, making their leadership essential for teacher retention. These practical recommendations could be instrumental for supporting teachers' work and well-being.



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