



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper examines teacher satisfaction and public perceptions of teachers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), drawing on the detailed findings of Buckner's (2017) *The Status of Teaching and Teacher Professional Satisfaction in the United Arab Emirates*. Using data from the OECD's 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), it finds that there are significant differences in overall teacher satisfaction among teachers in the UAE. Specifically, expatriate teachers are more satisfied than Emirati teachers, and greater levels of satisfaction are linked with high-perceived status of teaching. Supplementary analyses, based on a survey of UAE residents, reveals public attitudes towards teaching are closely linked to perceived status and salary, with higher salary expectations leading to greater perceptions of status. This paper makes recommendations for strengthening recruitment and retention mechanisms to increase teacher professional satisfaction and improve public perceptions of teacher status.

Policy Options for Improving Teacher Satisfaction in the United Arab Emirates¹

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Introduction

Policymakers worldwide have been increasingly concerned with issues around teacher recruitment, retention, and development, because teacher quality is inherently linked to education system effectiveness (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010). There is a growing focus on understanding and promoting teacher satisfaction, given its impact on teacher absenteeism, productivity, burnout, and career change (Huberman, Grounauer, Marti, & Neufeld, 1993; Sargent & Hannum, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2004). Although the relationship between teacher satisfaction and student outcomes is nuanced, teacher satisfaction is nonetheless an important policy issue, as teacher turnover can be costly and disruptive to school-based reforms.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) teacher labor market faces many challenges; between 2008 and 2012 the number of Emirati teachers employed nationally fell by 20% (Sharif, Hossan, & McMinn, 2014; WAM, 2013), and the public sector generally has seen low teacher retention rates, while the private sector suffers from high teacher turnover (Ahmed, 2011; Dajani, 2016; Dickson, Riddlebarger, Stringer, Tennant, & Kennetz, 2014). However, little is known about teacher satisfaction levels—and related to this, perceptions of status—which impacts upon the overall state of the teacher labor market.

The UAE education system is characterized by federal governance, and emirate-level administration, of approximately 341,191 schools (Abu Dhabi Statistics Center, 2014). It has a large private sector, which serves the vast majority of expatriates and a growing number of Emirati children. In 2014–2015 roughly 68% of the country's 961,607 students were enrolled in private schools, of which an estimated 35% were Emirati (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Within the UAE, the teacher labor market is segmented by sector and gender. In 2014 there were a total of 52,612 teachers working across the UAE, of whom about 56% were in public schools (Abu Dhabi Statistics Center, 2014). Despite efforts to promote Emiratisation, a large proportion of teachers continue to be expatriates, and there is a significant gender disparity among Emirati teachers—nationally, 80% of male teachers are expatriate whereas 15% of female teachers are expatriate (Ridge, 2014).

¹ This policy paper summarizes, and make recommendations based on, the findings of the working paper Buckner, E. (2017). *The Status of Teaching and Teacher Professional Satisfaction in the United Arab Emirates*, Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research.

Figure 1. Female–Male Gap in Teacher Professional Satisfaction, by Country

Countries where male teachers are more satisfied	Countries where female teachers are more satisfied	
Japan***	Australia***	Latvia***
UAE***	Chile***	Poland***
	Croatia***	Romania***
	Czech Republic***	Russia***
	Estonia***	Serbia***
	Finland***	Spain***
	France***	Sweden***
	Iceland***	Slovakia***
	Norway***	

Note. Asterisks denote statistical significant difference * $\alpha=0.05$ ** $\alpha=0.01$ *** $\alpha=0.001$. Adapted from "TALIS 2013 technical report," by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2014a).

Key Findings

TALIS is an international OECD survey which seeks to understand the working conditions of teachers and leaders in schools, with the aim of informing policymaking. TALIS measures satisfaction with the school work environment as well as with the profession (OECD, 2014a). In Abu Dhabi, TALIS surveyed 4,000 Cycle 2 teachers from 200 schools. The data revealed that while teachers in Abu Dhabi experience similar levels of satisfaction to their counterparts in other countries, male teachers are generally more satisfied than female teachers—a result which stands in contrast to the global trend (see Figure 1).²

In addition, male teachers in the public sector are significantly more satisfied than female teachers in the public sector, while the difference between male and female teachers in the private sector is smaller. Indeed, female public school teachers in Abu Dhabi are not only less satisfied than their male and private school colleagues; they are the least satisfied female public school teachers of any TALIS-participating country or region. Furthermore, female public school teachers on permanent contracts are less satisfied than those teachers on annual or short-term contracts. Since Emirati teachers are on permanent contracts and expatriate teachers on shorter-term contracts, this suggests that female Emirati teachers have the lowest levels of professional satisfaction of teachers in Abu Dhabi, followed by Emirati male public school teachers.

A variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors affect teacher satisfaction. Some studies have indicated there is a relationship between gender and satisfaction, with female teachers tending to have higher rates of satisfaction than males (Koustelios, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Other research has found that years of experience can affect satisfaction. Grissmer and Kirby (1987; 1992) found professional satisfaction is high among early-career teachers, but this decreases with experience, until it rises again near the age of retirement. The literature also suggests aspects such as workload and class size (Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan, 2004), perception of competence and self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), and opportunities for professional development (OECD, 2016) influence job satisfaction. Beyond the school, researchers have identified societal attitudes towards teaching, in terms of salary and status, also shape satisfaction (Hargreaves et al., 2007).

Close analysis of the TALIS data confirms that individual, school, and societal level factors are all important predictors of professional satisfaction among Abu Dhabi practitioners. The data shows teachers in the private sector are significantly more satisfied than those in the public sector, those on a permanent contract are less satisfied, and those with more experience are more satisfied. The gender gap described earlier persists, with female teachers generally experiencing lower levels of satisfaction than their male colleagues. In terms of perceptions of status, teachers in public schools, male and female, are more sensitive to the importance of

² This data is taken from the OECD's TALIS 2013 survey where 4,000 lower secondary (Cycle 2) teachers from 200 Abu Dhabi schools were surveyed. Figure 1 lists countries with a statistically significant gap in satisfaction between male and female teachers. Unlike in most OECD countries, in the UAE, males are more satisfied in the profession than female teachers.

status than teachers in private schools. Aggregated by nationality, we see that status is a more important predictor of overall job satisfaction among Emiratis working in the public sector than expatriates working in the public or private sector. School environment also contributes to job satisfaction with greater opportunities for teacher collaboration in public schools narrowing the gap between private and public sector job satisfaction among all teachers.

To place the TALIS analysis findings in context of wider UAE societal perceptions, Emirati and expatriate attitudes towards the teaching profession, salary, status, and work stress were collected in a survey of UAE residents, sampled in Ras Al Khaimah (RAK). Survey data revealed general attitudes towards teaching as a good job are more strongly influenced by perceptions of relative salary and benefits than perceptions of the relative status or difficulty of teaching. Moreover, perceptions of status are strongly linked to salary, meaning teaching as a career choice is seen to offer expatriate men relatively good salaries and job stability, but less so for Emiratis, for whom the salary and benefits are negatively associated with status. In other words, among the Emirati public, those who tend to have higher salaries, have a lower impression of the status of teaching. These findings can potentially explain the varying levels of satisfaction within the different segments of Abu Dhabi's teachers; specifically, the lower levels of satisfaction of Emirati teachers than of expatriate teachers.

Review of Policy Options

The policy implications of these findings are potentially far-reaching insofar as low satisfaction levels and low perceptions of the status of teaching can lead to difficulties with recruitment, retention and teacher quality (Hargreaves et al., 2007).

To manage teacher recruitment, the UAE has a licensing system in place, although standards vary across the Emirates. In Abu Dhabi, expatriate teachers must have a bachelor's degree, be licensed to teach in their home countries, and have a minimum of two years' experience in the classroom before working in the emirate (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2017). Any non-native English teacher must additionally receive a satisfactory result on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Emiratis have a slightly lower barrier to entry, and can teach after they have graduated from university with a teaching qualification (Pennington, 2016b). A more rigorous UAE-wide teacher licensing policy will be implemented in 2017, and the MOE aims to fully roll out the policy across all emirates by 2021. This will require teachers, school leaders, and cluster

managers to take and pass an examination, including submitting a "portfolio of evidence", to secure a license to teach (Pennington, 2016a). These policies are in line with international best practices –where professional eligibility is based on licensure, such as in US states, or on other strict entry requirements as seen in Singapore and Ontario, Canada—which ensure quality within the education system (Clarke, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2000), particularly in terms of attracting experienced expatriate teachers. However, the number of Emiratis in teaching positions indicates current recruitment policies are not attracting sufficiently high numbers of nationals, particularly men, into the profession. This is further evidenced by low Emirati enrollment in university education degree programs at all levels; in Dubai, in 2012 only 2% of Emirati students in higher education institutions were studying education, of which most were female (KHDA, 2012, p. 14–15). A strong supply of national and expatriate teachers is critical as UAE-wide demand for teachers is due to increase in the near future (Dickinson, 2015).

Teacher salaries and employment terms and conditions are set by the Ministries of Education and Labor. The compensation offered to expatriate teachers is different from national teachers salary scales, creating what has been called a "two-tiered workforce in the public education sector" (Ridge, 2014, p. 90). According to Ministry of Education (MOE) salary scales, national teachers receive, on average, double the monthly salary of expatriate teachers (on average AED 14,000 versus AED 7,000) and a package that includes allowances for housing and children, as well as a pension (Ridge, 2010). Nonetheless, for many Emiratis, these salaries are lower than those received by nationals in other professions, and as such "low salaries and low status continued to deter men from entering teaching" (Swan, 2016). In fact, the pension Emirati teachers receive is the lowest in the country, and a Federal National Council (FNC) report found Emiratis did not wish to become teachers "because of poor incentives, low wages and an insufficient retirement plan" (Salem, 2014a; 2014b). A 2012 teacher pay raise, mandated by a presidential directive, had also reportedly not been received by some Ministry of Education teachers in Ras Al Khaimah, increasing dissatisfaction (Nowais, 2016). Consequently, current teacher compensation packages are not incentivising Emirati nationals to have a career in education, and may also be causing divisions among teachers in the workforce.

Literature on teacher retention highlights the importance of output-based incentive structures, such as clear and realistic career ladders, opportunity for promotion, professional development, and compensation (Clarke, 2012). Recently in the UAE, professional development for teacher and school

leaders has been a priority, with excellent teaching, student-centered pedagogy, and personalized learning being national and federal strategic objectives (MOE, 2010; Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2009). Both the MOE and the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) have implemented professional development programs, and plan to roll out further training (Buckner, Chedda, & Kindreich, 2016; Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013). Practitioners—expatriate and Emirati alike—generally have good access to training. However, promotion opportunities are better for Emirati teachers, who can be promoted to school principal, than for expatriate teachers who can typically only be promoted to Head of Department (Ridge, 2010). Policies again stand in stark comparison to Emirati perceptions of promotion, where research found female teachers believed significant “barriers to career progression” existed (Styen, Adam, & Walker, 2007), and Emirati male Bachelor of Education (BE_{Ed.}) students also reported to believe few promotion opportunities existed in teaching (Dickson & Roux, 2012).

Recommendations

Examine Teachers' Professional Motivations

This study finds that although Emirati teaching salaries are significantly higher than those of expatriate teachers' (Ridge, 2014), teaching is still seen as providing nationals lower overall salaries than other careers (Swan, 2016). This salary gap appears to be one factor driving Emirati teachers' self-perceived low status, and consequent lower professional satisfaction. Rather than moving to immediately increase salaries—since studies have found this has mixed results on satisfaction and retention (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Cooper & Alvarado, 2006)—an in-depth review of teachers' motivations for becoming teachers and their incentives for continuing in the profession is needed.

Review and Compare Teacher Compensation and Benefits

Analyze the comparative value of salary, pension, professional development, benefits and allowances at various levels of seniority. These should be compared to equivalent compensation in other public sector jobs, to expatriate and private sector packages, compared over time. It may be better to promote the existing benefits afforded teachers, such as the existing scholarship initiatives provided to Emirati teachers, including opportunities to study abroad (Ridge, 2010) than to increase base salaries. Compensation packages can also be made more attractive by offering larger pensions, which has been a source of contention among national

teachers in the past (Salem, 2014a), and has supported retention in other countries (Clarke, 2012). Since teacher recruitment and retention policies are most effective when they exist within a cohesive policy framework (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006), the review should also look to align compensation with the new teacher standards and teacher-licensing scheme.

Create Personalized Professional Development and Mentoring Opportunities for Teachers

Both this study and the wider research has shown that professional development, mentoring, and coaching can increase job satisfaction (OECD, 2014b; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). Therefore, we recommend the Ministry consider using more mentoring and professional development plans systematically to reward and incentivize teachers.

Develop Prestigious Further Education Programs for Teachers

TALIS 2013 data shows teacher satisfaction is greater where practitioners engage in more professional development (OECD, 2016), and this study confirmed that Abu Dhabi teachers who have greater opportunities for collaboration are more satisfied professionally. In-service teacher education can thus be used as a tool for increasing teacher satisfaction in the medium-term, and supporting retention in the longer-term.

This paper recommends providing teachers with options for formal, further education by partnering with highly reputed local universities to offer post-graduate degrees and diplomas. Moreover, current or future national professional development programs could be tied to earning credits towards certification. Such advanced teacher education models found in the high performing systems of Finland, Singapore, South Korea and Sweden, allow teachers to pursue a master's degree while teaching on a full time or part time basis (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Sahlberg, 2010). As an incentive, fees can be subsidized, and additional certification linked to career specialization and promotion in line with the new UAE teaching standards.

Increase Status of Teaching Among School Students

We recommend supplementing the fast-track scheme above with additional awareness raising around the benefits of teaching in secondary schools, through career guidance. Both the Ministry and ADEC have

sought to strengthen career information and advice for students, through a new career guidance curriculum and improved career guidance system ((WAM, 2016a; Hanif & Pennington, 2016). If those providing career advice can speak knowledgeably and favorably about teaching, more students may seek to explore this career.

Research in the UAE found students on BEd. courses were motivated by the feeling of contributing to important social change (Sharif, Hossan, & McMinn, 2014), and thus this should be central to discussions around teaching as a career. It is advised that UAE universities with BEd. programs—such as Ajam University, Sharjah Women's College, Higher Colleges of Technology, and Zayed University—provide up-to-date information and materials to schools. Additionally, greater collaboration on recruitment strategies between universities and the Ministry would be beneficial.

Increase Status of Teaching Among the Wider Public

Studies have shown that motivation to teach, and satisfaction in teaching, is influenced by various factors (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Nonetheless, there is evidence that public perceptions of teaching profession status affect teacher recruitment and retention—both within and beyond the UAE (Sharif, Hossan, & McMinn, 2014; Dickson & Roux, 2013;

Weiqi, 2007; Hall & Langton, 2006). Survey data in this study confirm that although teaching is viewed generally as a good profession in the UAE, it suffers from perceptions of low status among sections of society, including Emirati nationals. Dickson and Le Roux (2012) also found that male Emirati BEd. students faced "prejudice, stereotyping, or negative reactions... from friends, family, colleagues and people they did not know well" (p. 6). These responses contributed to students being deterred from the profession.

To ensure the overall health of the future teacher workforce, it is imperative that negative perceptions are addressed, and the UAE public both value and support teachers in their work. High-profile and prestigious recognition of the value of teachers can improve public perception of their status; establishing the Innovative Teacher Award, awarded in 2017 (Wam, 2016b), as an annual prize is recommended. Additionally, teaching should be promoted as integral to securing the UAE's future, to encourage the UAE public to view teaching with higher regard. Lessons can be learned from a different industry; the national military and police employ "exciting media recruitment campaigns" (Dickson & Le Roux, 2012, p. 8), which have helped give these careers significant cultural capital. Applying similar marketing strategies to education may contribute to improving public perceptions of teacher status as well as stimulating recruitment.

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