



# School-level determinants of teacher collegial interaction: Evidence from lower secondary schools in England, Finland, South Korea, and the USA



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- The organizational factors associated with teacher collaboration are investigated.
- The determinants at the school level are identified in an international comparison.
- Participative climate positively affects teacher collaboration in all four countries.
- The effect of teacher appraisals, school SES, and number of teachers is not consistent across four countries.
- The findings of the study give insight to teacher professional development.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of between-school differences in participative school climate, time and money as learning supports, frequency of teacher appraisal, school SES, and number of teachers on individual teacher's collegial interaction. Nationally representative data for 8869 teachers in 551 lower secondary schools in England, Finland, South Korea, and the USA were analyzed. In all four countries, a participative school climate was positively associated with teacher collegial interaction, while support in the form of extra compensation did not have a significant effect on teacher collegial interaction. The influence of other school-level features was not consistent across countries.

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## 1. Introduction

In most countries, teacher professional development is seen as a key vehicle for educational reform (Meirink, Imants, Meijer, & Verloop, 2010; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The features that make teacher professional development effective have recently been empirically grounded (Flecknoe, 2002; Guskey, 2003). Nevertheless, a number of previous studies have reported disappointing results of teacher professional development activities, which are often characterized as being ineffective (Hanushek, 2005; OECD, 2013a; Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005). In particular, by reviewing publications in *Teaching and Teacher Education* over a ten year period (2000–2010), Avalos (2011) argues that studies of teacher

professional development have moved away from the traditional in-service teacher training model. In this respect, emphasis has been placed on the importance of a collaborative element in teacher professional development (Youngs & King, 2002). To improve outcomes, it has also been argued that teacher collegial interaction or activities (e.g., shared teaching resources, teaching jointly as a team, observing other teachers' classes, providing feedback, and discussing homework practices across subjects) should be conducted within the same school (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Knight, 2002; Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008).

Given the positive effect of teacher collegial interaction within the same school as a vehicle leading to professional development, we need to support teachers so they have greater engagement in collaborative activities within the context of their own school. First, to facilitate this collegial interaction at the level of the school, the antecedents affecting a teacher's engagement in collaborative activities with his or her colleagues must be identified. Regarding the

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factors impacting on teacher collaborative activities or professional development, previous studies have reported on the importance of teacher learning motivation (Scribner, 1999), the crucial role of job demands and job control in working conditions (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Kwakman, 2003), the importance of social and cultural support (Greenglass, Burke, & Konarski, 1997), and the need to strengthen a professional learning community (King, 2002; Snow-Gerono, 2005) or teacher leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2006). In particular, previous studies in relation to school culture or conditions have argued that the school principal plays a critical role in creating structures that promote teacher learning for professional development (Payne & Wolfson, 2000; Thoonen, Slegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011).

Overall, in the case of studies focused on school-level factors such as school principals (Beredeson & Johansson, 2000; Payne & Wolfson, 2000; Thoonen et al., 2011), climate of trust (Thoonen et al., 2011), and school physical and social environment (Jurasaite-Harbisson & Rex, 2010; Kwakman, 2003), most findings were approached and founded either from an analysis of individual teacher perceptions without closely examining between-school variances or from an inquiry limited to the qualitative aspects of school contexts. As a result, with regard to the impact of school-level factors on teacher collegial interaction leading to professional development, empirical evidence is still thin, except for the principal leadership effect. At the level of methodology, there is also a paucity of empirical research to examine if and to what extent the heterogeneity of schools affects teacher collegial interaction within a school.

Specifically, major attention as a key element to improve the educational system has not only been placed on teacher professional development in most countries around the world (Villegas-Reimers, 2003), but also on the collegial interaction of teachers regarded to be the most effective vehicle to foster professional development (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Knight, 2002). Therefore, each country carefully refers to the best practices, programs, or strategies of other countries as benchmarks to illustrate and justify the various claims as to what characterizes successful systems of teacher professional development. However, in the field of teacher professional development, there is a lack of studies exploring the common or unique characteristics of how school-level factors impact on the collegial interaction of teachers in international comparisons. Thus, identification of some school-level factors that identically or differently impact on teacher collegial interactions across countries is of significant research interest as well as being timely in terms of both theory and practice.

In this vein, the primary purpose of this study is to examine if and to what extent the heterogeneity of schools (individual school differences in participative school climate, time, and money as intentional learning support; frequency of teacher appraisals; school socioeconomic status; and number of teachers in the school) impact teacher participation in collegial interaction within the same school. This study compares data from teacher and principal responses from lower secondary schools from the four countries (England, Finland, South Korea, and USA) participating in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013. The reason these four nations were chosen for the present study is because they have been regarded as “reference societies” for other nations in terms of trying to learn from their school systems or reform ideas for student achievement. For instance, both Finland and South Korea have emerged as new reference societies, due to their high performance evidenced by PISA and TIMSS studies, while England and the US have traditionally been important reference societies in global educational discourse as they have made initiatives regarding educational theory and practice (Sellar & Lingard,

2013). Additionally, in selecting these countries, it was also considered that they are in very distinctive societal conditions with respect to their cultural and geographical aspects as well as their teacher education and training systems.<sup>1</sup>

As far as we know, this is the first attempt to investigate the factors that impact on the extent of teacher collegial interaction at the school level in an international comparison. Specifically, because teacher professional learning is not only cognitive, but also contextually situated and intrinsic to the contexts within which and with which an individual teacher interacts (Jurasaite-Harbisson & Rex, 2010), this study examines the factors at the school level in order to shed light on the key variables that are effective in promoting teacher collegiality for professional development. Moreover, by doing so, a better understanding of exactly how school variables affect teacher collegiality would provide educational policymakers and school reformers with useful policy implications regarding the design and implementation of successful professional learning or development models.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Teacher collegial interaction as a professional development activity

Since learning and participation in activities are usually integrated, teachers learn through participation in everyday activities within a given school context (Kwakman, 2003; Putnam & Borko, 2000). This type of learning is often called workplace or professional learning activity (Kwakman, 2003; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Teacher professional development is therefore seen as “the professional growth a teacher achieves” (Glatthorn, 1995, p. 11.) through a combination of participation in formal learning and informal and incidental learning (such as engaging in team teaching and professional meetings, observing other teachers' classes, or reading material related to teaching).

More specifically, there are a number of different types of professional development activities teachers engage in. These include formal activities such as conferences, institutes, and workshops, as well as informal activities such as study groups, research teams, mentoring, and electronic networking (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). However, conventional forms of teacher professional development, which consist of workshops, university programs, or short-term courses, are contextually isolated from the daily work of teachers (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The most commonly criticized aspect of conventional professional development activities is that they focus on memorizing only content knowledge and drilling teaching skills without deep understanding or contextualizing practices (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Given the limitations of traditional forms of professional development, mapping a model of teacher professional growth and learning (Borko, 2004) have been conducted to obtain a greater understanding of the efficacy of teacher professional development. There is a growing interest in understanding the nature of authentic teacher learning. As an example, Guskey and Huberman (1995) argue that teacher learning should be contextually situated because generalized knowledge is often inapplicable to their

<sup>1</sup> The OECD (2013b) classified its members' teacher education and training systems based on if their pre-service teacher training system requires a competitive examination and by the average duration of the training program. In this classification, England and the USA are included in the group that has no entrance examination and a relatively short program. In contrast, Finland and South Korea belong to the same group that has a competitive entrance examination and a relatively long program.

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