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## Note

## Are male teachers headed for extinction? The 50-year decline of male teachers in Australia

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## ABSTRACT

Whilst an international shortage of male teachers has received much research attention, to date, no study has tracked the trajectory of male teachers in any country. Drawing on annual workplace data, we calculated the proportion of male teachers in Australia from 1965 to 2016. We separate the data for Government and non-Government (Independent and Catholic) schools, and for primary and secondary schools. Findings indicate a strong decline in male representation in the Government sector. A similar rate of decline is observed in both primary and secondary schools. Of significance to educators, policy makers, and the public - no current Australian workforce diversity policies aim to redress this decline. This strong decline is not matched in the Catholic sector, however.

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## 1. Introduction

A shortage of men in the teaching workforce has raised international concern (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005; 2011), generating research interest in numerous countries, including: Germany, England, New Zealand, Ireland, the Netherlands, Finland, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Cyprus, Scotland, and the United States (e.g. Basten, 1997; Brownhill, 2014; Cushman, 2008; Drudy, 2008; Geerdink, Bergen, & Dekkers, 2011; Lahelma, 2000; Martino & Kehler, 2006; Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004; Moosa & Bhana, 2017; Rentzou, 2016; Ridell & Tett, 2010; Stroud, Smith, Ealy, & Hurst, 2000). Notably, literature concerning a perceived need for more male school teachers has been clouded by 'recuperative masculinity politics' (i.e. reasserting masculine dominance to counteract the 'feminisation' of schools) (Lingard, 2003; Martino & Kehler, 2006) and a 'competing victim syndrome' (i.e. contesting which gender is currently disadvantaged by the education system) (Mills, 2003). Nevertheless, a resurfacing supposition within this discourse over the past 20 years is that the teaching workforce should reflect the diversity of the student population and broader community (Cushman, 2007; Farquhar, 1998; Foster & Newman, 2005; Froese-Germain, 2006; Martin, 2002). Several factors may limit male representation however, including the low salary and status of the teaching profession (Cushman, 2005; P. 2007; Pollitt & Oldfield, 2017), and

negative perceptions of men who choose to teach young children (Bhana & Moosa, 2016; Cushman, 2005; 2012; Foster & Newman, 2005; Mistry & Sood, 2015). Whilst the shortage of male teachers is typically researched by drawing on the perspectives of teachers, principals and students, to date no study has examined the trajectory of the teaching workforce's gender composition. It is therefore, not known if a decline in male teachers is likely to plateau, continue, increase or reverse without intervention. The present study addresses this omission; drawing on 50 years of national census data in Australia to provide an empirical examination of what the gender diversity of the teaching workforce might look like in Australia's future.

While longitudinal data on the representation of men in the teaching profession is scarcely reported in scholarly literature, data available from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics suggests a global decline in the proportion of male school teachers (UNESCO, 2016; 2011). Particular attention has been given to primary schools, where men currently constitute 19% of the workforce internationally (OECD, 2016). Recent OECD data reported in Table 1 shows that the proportion of male primary school teachers is close to or above 40% in some countries (China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey), yet less than 5% in others (Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Russia, and Slovenia). In all countries except Norway, the proportion of male teachers in high schools, where it is typically possible to earn a higher salary (OECD, 2016), is greater than the proportion of male teachers in primary schools.

In isolation, these statistics may not be cause for alarm in all countries: particularly when the ratio of male to female teachers is

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**Table 1**

Percentage of male teaching staff in public and private schools in 2016, organised by country and level of education.

Country <sup>a</sup>	Primary school % Male	Primary school ranking by % Male	High school <sup>b</sup> % Male	High school ranking by % Male
Austria	8.56	33	27.98	27
Belgium	18.29	20	36.78	15
Brazil	10.36	31	30.62	24
Chile	19.03	19	31.76	22
China	39.02	3	48.09	4
Colombia	22.50	13	46.00	8
Costa Rica	20.42	17	42.63	11
Czech Republic	7.17	35	23.06	31
Denmark	30.86	7	35.72	16
Estonia	8.45	34	17.89	38
Finland	20.51	16	27.58	28
France	16.87	22	35.44	17
Germany	13.23	28	33.91	20
Greece	29.83	8	34.00	19
Hungary	3.05	39	22.40	33
Indonesia	37.91	4	45.94	9
Ireland	13.09	29	29.00	25
Israel	14.71	25	21.06	36
Italy	4.12	37	22.12	35
Japan	35.21	5	57.56	1
Korea	21.42	15	30.79	23
Latvia	7.17	36	15.73	41
Lithuania	2.91	40	17.64	39
Luxembourg	25.50	9	41.52	12
Mexico	32.37	6	47.59	5
Netherlands	14.07	27	48.67	3
New Zealand	16.16	23	34.35	18
Norway <sup>c</sup>	25.21	10	25.21	30
Poland	14.66	26	26.25	29
Portugal	20.16	18	28.42	26
Russian Federation	1.19	41	17.14	40
Saudi Arabia	48.39	1	50.46	2
Slovak Republic	10.00	32	22.20	34
Slovenia	3.06	38	20.53	37
South Africa	21.54	14	44.00	10
Spain	24.01	11	40.83	14
Sweden	22.83	12	22.88	32
Switzerland	18.01	21	46.12	7
Turkey	41.83	2	46.83	6
United Kingdom	15.88	24	41.15	13
United States	12.84	30	33.24	21
International <i>M</i>	18.84		33.44	
<i>SD</i>	11.20		10.82	

Note. Data source: "Table D5.3: Gender distribution of teachers (2014)," Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016. <sup>a</sup> There was incomplete or missing data for Argentina, Australia, Canada, Iceland, and India. These countries are therefore excluded. <sup>b</sup> Indicates teachers in the 'lower secondary' grades and may not be representative of all high school teachers. <sup>c</sup> Results for Norway may be erroneous: these percentages are identical to twelve decimal places.

closer to parity. In addition, cultural, historical and systemic explanations for differences between countries must be considered. For example, the accessibility of schooling and tertiary education for girls and women and the requirement of mandatory military service for young men may each impact career trajectories. Nonetheless, attempts in several countries have been made, with limited success, to increase the number of male teachers. These include advertising campaigns and a Men's Club in England, special training for men in New Zealand, and quota systems in both Sweden and Scotland (see Cushman, 2007).

Notably, the data available from the OECD and UNESCO Institute for Statistics is not separated by education providers (e.g. Government or Independent), includes periods of missing data for numerous countries, and data reporting the proportion of male teachers in some countries, including Australia, is not available. Additionally, to date, no study has used available census data to track the trajectory of male teachers in any country. Determining this trajectory is critically important for policy makers and school leaders interested in enhancing the gender diversity of the teaching profession.

### 1.1. The need for male (and female) teachers

While calls for more male teachers to improve the academic outcomes of boys or to act as role models may be misplaced (see Ashley, 2003; Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Cho, 2012; Holmlund & Sund, 2008; Winters, Haight, Swaim, & Pickering, 2013), there remains important social and psychological reasons for schools to include both male and female teachers (Farquhar, 1998; McGrath & Sinclair, 2013). Schools have long been sites where children's gendered identities are developed, negotiated, and confirmed (Francis & Skelton, 2001), and lessons about gender typically manifest as part of a hidden curriculum in which teachers' own gender may play an important role (Basow, 2004). Whilst a de-gendered approach to teaching has become more common (e.g. addressing a class as 'children' as opposed to 'boys and girls') (Vickers, 2007), gender schema theory suggests that young students will most likely distinguish between male and female teachers and peers based on physical appearance, and will in turn use that gender knowledge to make generalisations about others (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). A potential implication therefore is that limited observations and interactions with men who are caring, nurtur-

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