
Teacher Morale in Canadian Schools: Conceptual Perspectives and Research Insights

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Abstract: This paper aims to contribute to a deepened understanding of teacher morale in Canadian schools, particularly in the context of educational effectiveness and teacher retention. Here, we contribute to the scholarly discourse on teacher morale by discussing the development of the phenomenon from a historically favorable state to the present struggles encountered by educators across the world, and provides practical insights into strategies for maintaining and boosting morale. It explores the key factors that contribute to the decrease in teacher morale, including increased responsibilities, pressures of accountability, and lack of support. It highlights the current state of teacher morale and examines the impact of specific policies. By focusing on teacher morale, this study will inform strategies that enhance job satisfaction and professional development, which are essential for fostering resilient teaching practices in Canadian schools.

Introduction

The education system is a dynamic environment that flourishes on the collective efforts of many, however the core of it are the educators (Howard et al., 2019). Teachers are vital part of education systems since they support and motivate students need to succeed, aside performing their core role of impacting knowledge (Han & Yin, 2016). They play a critical role in shaping the minds of students, guiding and facilitating the learning process. Teachers comprise the largest portion of the professional body in a school, have the most contact with students the day, and influence the overall school environment. When teachers have negative feelings about their position, they may negatively impact the students and the school and in most instances, when teachers feel positive about their position, they positively influence students and the school (Kahveci, 2023). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers are given the tools and support they need to provide students the best learning experience possible. High teacher morale makes teaching pleasant for teachers, learning more pleasant for students, and creates an environment conducive to learning. Teacher morale is associated with a teachers' pride about their job, outlook, and emotions within a workplace setting. How teachers view themselves, their roles and the level at which the organization meets their needs determine their morale (Mboweni & Taole, 2022). It is seen as a pivotal component in creating a conducive learning environment. Teacher morale does not have a broadly acknowledged definition; rather it is deemed a multidimensional concept defined by the context in which teachers find themselves (Mboweni & Taole, 2022). Morale is also viewed as an integrated phenomenon that includes the individual and the groups associated with the individual at the workplace (Alghamdi & Li, 2013).

Aims and Significance of Study

The paper will serve as a blueprint for further studies which will guide policymakers and school administrators in implementing changes that foster teacher morale and a positive school culture.

Evolution of Teacher Morale

Teachers had a generally positive attitude toward their work during the middle of the 20th century, which was a time when teaching was considered to be a respectable and honourable career. Teachers had a secure career path, and their primary responsibility was to educate students (Kahveci, 2023). They did not have to deal with the massive bureaucratic constraints that would later become prevalent in the professional world. It was believed that teachers served as moral leaders and role models for the community (Shein & Chiou, 2011). During this period, the morale of teachers was generally strong. This was hinged on the respect they received from society, the job security they enjoyed, and the intrinsic satisfaction that came with instructing youth (Sharma & Jyoti, 2009).

A few decades ago, teachers had a profound sense of purpose and devotion to the work that they did (Tatto, 1998). It was a profession marked by a collegial atmosphere, where instructors frequently collaborated with one another, and where there was a collective sense of responsibility towards the achievement of students. This setting influenced high morale because teachers had a sense of value and felt supported by both their communities and the administrations of their schools (McNeil-Horton, 2014).

However, in the latter part of the 20th century, the landscape of education experienced substantial transformations, particularly with the advent of standardized testing and accountability measures (Smith, 2014). The 1980s and 1990s marked the beginning of a shift toward an educational system that was more centralized and regulated (Channa, 2015). Policies that placed a strong emphasis on accountability and performance metrics, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), put a significant amount of pressure on educators to demonstrate that their students have achieved success through the use of standardized test scores (Dee et al., 2010).

The deterioration of teacher morale began when these practices became more established. The increased expectations placed on educators to not only teach but also to ensure that their pupils scored well on tests frequently resulted in sentiments of frustration and powerlessness on the part of the teachers (Yariv, 2011). An increasing sense of dissatisfaction with the teaching profession stemmed from teachers' feeling that their professional judgment and skills were not adequately respected (Yariv, 2011). The conception of teaching as a profession that is centered on the growth of students has been transformed into one that is controlled by statistics and accountability as a result of the emphasis placed on measurable outcomes (Gore et al., 2023).

The current state of Teacher Morale.

The observed decline in the morale of teachers is the result of a combination of factors including increased workloads, demands from bureaucratic processes, and a lack of support from management (Magalong & Torreon, 2021). According to the MetLife (2012) survey of American

teachers, it was found that teacher job satisfaction nationally fell by 23% between 2008 and 2012 which is the lowest level in 25 years. The survey also found that over half of teachers were under immense stress throughout the working week – an increase of 15% since the mid-1980s (Carroll et al., 2010). Aside from the MetLife research conducted in the United States, similar studies conducted in different countries revealed comparable findings. This global trend underscores the need for a renewed focus on supporting teachers worldwide to ensure they can continue to meet the demands of modern education (Doan et al., 2021).

In Canada, the responsibility for education is within a federal system of shared powers since Canada's Constitution Act of 1867 makes that provision, and the legislature may exclusively make Laws concerning education. In the 13 jurisdictions (10 provinces and three territories), the responsibility to organize, deliver, and assess education at elementary, secondary, and tertiary (including technical and vocational) levels lay with departments or ministries of education (Jones, 2012). As a result, there is no federal department of education and no integrated national system of education. Viewed as a nation, one notes the significant differences in curriculum, assessment, governance, and accountability policies among the jurisdictions that express the geography, history, language, culture, and corresponding specialised needs of the populations served.

This division of responsibilities creates a diverse landscape across Canada where educational experiences can vary significantly from one province to another. While some provinces may prioritize technology integration in classrooms, others might focus on enhancing arts education or addressing mental health issues among students. However, this decentralization can also lead to disparities in educational quality and resources available to schools, which affect teachers' experiences and job satisfaction.

Factors affecting Teacher Morale

Teacher morale is critical for a thriving education system, directly influencing teaching effectiveness and student success. In Canadian schools, various factors contribute to the overall morale of educators, shaping their motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment to the profession. Research indicates that teachers experience high levels of stress, which can affect their ability to create a positive learning environment (Mahesh, 2024; Nwoko et al., 2023). A significant challenge is teacher attrition, with reports showing a 22–33% dropout rate among new teachers in Ontario between 1993 and 1999, highlighting concerns about retention and motivation (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

One key factor affecting morale is workload and class sizes. Teachers face increasing responsibilities, managing diverse classrooms that include students with special needs and English language learners. Large class sizes make personalized instruction difficult, leading to stress and decreased job satisfaction (Laitsch et al., 2021). In provinces like Ontario and British Columbia, funding cuts have exacerbated this issue, resulting in increased administrative tasks and limited student support (Laitsch et al., 2021).

Inadequate funding and resources also pose challenges, with budget constraints limiting access to essential teaching materials and support staff. Teachers in underfunded schools often use personal funds to provide supplies, adding financial strain (Taylor, 2001). Moreover, the shortage of support professionals like counselors and librarians increases teachers' workload and contributes to burnout (Spady, 1973).

Frequent curriculum changes and professional development further impact morale by requiring teachers to continuously adapt without sufficient training and resources. While reforms such as STEM integration and Indigenous perspectives are valuable, inadequate professional development leaves teachers feeling unprepared and overwhelmed (Nevenglosky, 2018). Studies show that professional development sessions are often too brief or disconnected from practical classroom needs, leading to frustration (Darling-Hammond, 2017)..

Administrative support is another critical factor. Teachers often feel that school leaders fail to provide adequate communication, advocacy, and action to address challenges such as workload and classroom management (Turan & Bektas, 2013). The lack of meaningful engagement between teachers and administrators creates feelings of isolation and disempowerment, further diminishing morale (Agyapong et al., 2022). Effective leadership requires not only listening to teachers but actively addressing their concerns by securing resources and ensuring manageable workloads (Portey, 2021).

Assessment and measurement of Teacher Morale

Understanding the factors influencing teacher morale requires evaluating both individual determinants and broader organizational elements. Research suggests that leadership and workplace relationships have a greater impact on teachers' psychological outcomes than classroom-specific challenges like student misbehavior (Agyapong et al., 2022). However, there are limited tools available to assess teacher attitudes toward organizational factors typically addressed in development programs.

Measuring teacher morale is a critical aspect of educational research, as it reflects educators' attitudes toward their working environment. Various instruments have been developed, some designed for general occupational use and others tailored specifically for the teaching profession (Rempel & Bentley, 1964). Modern scales for assessing teacher morale rely on self-reported judgments, where teachers express their feelings about workplace-related factors. These responses are then weighted and quantified to produce a morale index score (Richter & Richter, 2024).

Tools for Measuring Teacher Morale

- The Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO)

The Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO), developed by Bentley and Rempel in 1970, is a standardized tool designed to assess teacher morale across multiple dimensions. It includes 100 items evaluating ten key factors, such as teacher-principal relationships, job satisfaction, peer interactions, professional development, and school facilities. Using a four-point Likert scale,

respondents rate their level of agreement, providing a detailed morale score alongside scores for each factor (Blackbourn & Wilkes, 1985).

- Teacher Morale Survey

A teacher morale survey is a structured questionnaire that gathers feedback on job satisfaction, workplace conditions, and overall well-being, focusing on belongingness, identification, and rationality. This survey ensures reliability through factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha testing. It covers various topics, including compensation, administrative relationships, resource availability, workload, school climate, and student behavior. The survey results help identify strengths and challenges within a school or district, guiding improvement efforts (Coughlan, 1970).

- Teacher Morale Index

The Teacher Morale Index, developed by the EdWeek Research Center, measures teachers' perceptions of their job satisfaction over time. It includes three survey questions assessing morale compared to the past year, the present, and expectations for the future. Responses use a three-point scale (-100 for worse, 0 for the same, and +100 for better), generating an index score between -100 and +100. This index is useful for tracking morale trends across demographics such as subject area and experience (Coughlan, 1970).

- The School Culture Survey (SCS)

Developed by Gruenert and Valentine in 1998, the School Culture Survey (SCS) assesses the values, beliefs, and behaviors shaping a school's culture. Although not exclusively focused on teacher morale, it provides insight into factors influencing job satisfaction. The 35-item survey evaluates six dimensions: Collaborative Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, Collegial Support, and Learning Partnership. Using a five-point Likert scale, respondents rate statements to reflect their school's cultural environment (Miller, 2018).

Impact of Teacher Morale on Teaching Quality and Students

High teacher morale enhances teaching effectiveness, fostering motivation, creativity, and student engagement (Kapur, 2018). Teachers with high morale invest time and effort into lesson planning, creating a supportive learning environment that promotes critical thinking, collaboration, and academic achievement (Mart, 2013). A positive classroom environment, influenced by high teacher morale, strengthens teacher-student relationships and encourages active participation. Conversely, low morale results in disengagement and ineffective teaching strategies (Eslit, 2023).

Teacher morale significantly impacts student achievement. Educators with high morale ensure comprehension by providing additional resources and individualized support (Mangin, 2021). They actively monitor student progress, celebrate achievements, and promote critical thinking (Franklin & Harrington, 2019). Schools that support teacher well-being see improvements in standardized test scores and student performance (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Also, morale

influences professional culture, fostering collaboration among educators and enhancing instructional quality (Baylor & Ritchie, 2002; Bayar & Karaduman, 2021). Teachers in supportive environments engage in professional development, refining teaching methodologies and improving students (Khan & Ahmed, 2015).

Teacher morale directly affects students' social-emotional development. Motivated teachers create emotionally supportive classrooms, fostering resilience, empathy, and communication skills (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). High morale reduces behavioral issues, as teachers implement effective classroom management strategies, reinforcing positive student behavior (Han & Yin, 2016). Strong teacher-student relationships, driven by high morale, create a welcoming atmosphere where students feel supported and valued (Poling et al., 2022). However, low morale leads to disengagement, negatively impacting student motivation and learning experiences (Willis & Varner, 2010).

Lastly, teacher morale enhances student motivation among students. Passionate educators inspire students through engaging teaching methods, fostering curiosity and active learning (Johnson, 2017). Low morale results in uninspired instruction, diminishing student interest and academic performance (Han & Yin, 2016). The correlation between teacher well-being and student success highlights the necessity of supportive school environments for both teachers and students.

Factors that enhance teacher morale

- Recognition and Appreciation

Recognizing teachers' contributions is essential for maintaining high morale. Schools can implement programs that acknowledge individual and team achievements (Lim, 2021). Recognition can range from verbal praise during meetings to formal awards celebrating outstanding performance (Andrews, 2011). Celebrating personal and professional milestones fosters a sense of belonging within the institution. Also, awards based on student success, innovative teaching, or community engagement reinforce teachers' dedication and motivation (Hoopes, 2001).

- Professional Development Opportunities

Providing teachers with opportunities for professional growth significantly enhances morale. Schools should offer workshops, seminars, and financial support for further education (Kim et al., 2019). Mentoring and peer-learning programs allow educators to share knowledge and experiences, fostering professional growth. When teachers see their skills developing, they become more motivated and committed to their work (Hayman et al., 2022).

- Promoting Work-Life Balance

Teaching is demanding, involving high levels of responsibility, emotional labor, and time commitment. Without proper work-life balance, teachers risk stress and burnout (Mérida-López et al., 2017). Encouraging self-care, maintaining reasonable working hours, and providing access to mental health resources are crucial (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014). Establishing clear boundaries for non-teaching tasks, such as lesson planning and grading, prevents excessive

workloads(Austin-Egole et al., 2020). Schools should also offer counseling services and stress management programs to support teachers' well-being (Tomé et al., 2021).

- Encouraging Autonomy

Granting teachers autonomy in their classrooms enhances job satisfaction and overall morale (Rives, 2019). When teachers have the freedom to tailor their instructional methods, they can innovate and engage students more effectively (Athanases, 1993). Autonomy fosters a sense of ownership, making teachers more dedicated to their work. Schools that prioritize teacher autonomy create dynamic learning environments that benefit both educators and students (Stefanou et al., 2004).

Conclusion

Teacher morale is essential for effective education in Canadian schools, directly impacting teaching quality and student success. However, increasing workloads, low compensation, curriculum changes, and inadequate support have led to declining morale and rising attrition rates. Addressing these challenges is crucial for retaining motivated and effective teachers. Key solutions include recognizing teachers' contributions, providing professional development, ensuring work-life balance, and granting autonomy in teaching methods. Recognition programs boost motivation, while continuous learning opportunities enhance job satisfaction. Enforcing reasonable work hours and offering mental health support reduces burnout. Autonomy empowers teachers to innovate and engage students effectively.

To improve morale, Canadian schools must implement fair assessments, involve teachers in curriculum decisions, and create a supportive work environment. Investing in teacher well-being is vital for ensuring a strong and effective education system.

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