

Chapter 3


Global Teacher Shortages: An In-Depth Examination, Ramifications, and Collaborative Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Teacher shortages are a current global crisis. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2022), “Worldwide, 69 million teachers are needed to reach universal basic education by 2030” (para. 1). This chapter focuses on the teacher shortage by presenting statistics on the shortage both at an international and local level, the negative ramifications for teacher shortages as it pertains to students, and the history of teacher shortages. Furthermore, this chapter offers solutions to the teacher shortage by focusing on three key stakeholders – educational advocates and policymakers, higher education institutions, and PK-12 organizations. To overcome the teacher shortage, it is going to require a collaborative effort from all stakeholders.

TEACHER SHORTAGES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

I was a teacher for eight years. This is my first year not teaching... This is my first year not having a winter break, and how do I feel? I feel great. I just worked 7 days straight including Christmas Eve, and I feel fine. When I was a teacher, it was like I was just surviving every moment, and by the time I got to Christmas break I was so exhausted that I was literally sick. So, yeah, it feels pretty good to not be a teacher at this time. I finally left teaching because I ran out of reasons to stay.... I left because I realized the conditions in education are getting worse, with no signs that they will get better any time soon. (Perkins, 2022)

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This quotation from a former teacher's TikTok video made national news. Her video professed working at Costco was far superior to teaching, with many commenters congratulating her on leaving the profession. Her story is not an isolated one. According to the Director-General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as of October 2022, "Worldwide, 69 million teachers are needed to reach universal basic education by 2030" (para. 1). UNESCO estimates the need at 24.4 million teachers in primary and 44.4 million teachers in secondary education.

The number of teachers needed globally is alarming. Europe, Germany, Portugal, France, Italy, and Sweden are struggling, with France currently at 4,000 teaching vacancies and Germany and Portugal expected to be short 25,000 teachers by 2025 and 30,000 by 2030, respectively (Powell, 2022). These numbers pale in comparison to Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia who have the greatest need (UNESCO, 2022b). In Southern Asia 1.7 million teachers are needed in primary and 5.3 million in secondary school – 7 million in total (UNESCO, 2022b). The number of teachers required results in a need to grow the pool of candidates at a rate of 50% or more in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Vargas-Tamez, 2022). In Sub-Saharan Africa, 16.5 million teachers are needed – 5.4 million in primary and 11.1 million in secondary (UNESCO, 2022b). This results in Africa experiencing the most overcrowded classrooms in the world: Madagascar 240:1, San Tome and Principe both at 114:1, Chad 89:1, Central African Republic 76:1, and Guinea 63:1 (UNESCO, 2022b). Other countries across the globe face overburdened student teacher ratios, such as Solomon Islands 101:1 and Laos 43:1 (Lang'at Jr., 2019). Canada, British Columbia, and Ontario recently faced major shortages (Molyneux, 2021), along with United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia (Longmuir, 2023). Estonia, China, Great Britain, Malaysia, and the Netherlands are just a few more countries struggling with teacher shortages (Vargas-Tamez, 2022). These shortages are an "unprecedented" challenge according to the Australian Government (Longmuir, 2023).

The United States (U.S.) is not immune to teacher shortages either. Teacher shortages made headlines in every single state in 2021 (Sherratt, 2022) with more than three-quarters of the U.S. experiencing shortages as of 2023 (Jones II, 2023). Between February 2020 and May 2022, at least 300,000 public-school teachers left the profession (Dill, 2022b) with current statistics revealing 55% of teachers are considering leaving the profession earlier than expected (Walker, 2022a). According to King et al. (2023), 1.7% of the teacher workforce in the U.S. is vacant – that is 36,500 jobs. Fourteen states have more than 1,000 vacancies and 16 states reported having a 2% or higher vacancy rate (King et al., 2023). Due to shortages, more than 160,000 teachers in the U.S. are underqualified – that is 5% of the teacher workforce (King et al., 2023). The Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2022) found most of the vacancies in the U.S. were in the West, urban, and rural areas, and impacted students of color more than white students.

As an example of what the U.S. is facing, in Arizona, 25.9% of teacher vacancies were unfilled one month into school year 2023 (Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association [ASPAA], 2022). In September 2023, ASPAA revealed that Arizona, for the eighth consecutive year, has more than 25% teacher vacancies with 53.2% of the vacancies filled by teachers who do not meet the state's standard certification requirements (ASPAA, 2023). More importantly, there are 47,835 teachers in Arizona with an alternative or full teaching certificate who are not currently teaching (P. Tighe, personal communication, April 17, 2023). These numbers are even more alarming for low-income and high need students. Specifically, 7% of vacancies in Arizona are in counties where more than 10% of students are language learners, 99% of vacancies are in counties where more than 50% of students experience poverty, 87% of vacancies are in counties with more than 50% students of color, and 43% of vacancies are in counties where the graduation rate is less than 80% (P. Tighe, personal communication, April 19, 2023). These

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