



## **A Comparative Analysis of Teachers' Feedback Methods and Classroom Practices in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic Lower Secondary School Systems**

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### **Abstract**

*The Czech Republic and Slovak Republic have a shared legacy and history. Since the end of the communist era, these two countries have witnessed several changes, including in their educational systems. To evaluate and compare the changes in the educational system of these two countries, especially in the area of feedback methods and classroom practices used by secondary school teachers, TALIS data 2018 were analysed. Evidence from this data showed that the Slovak and the Czech Republic feedback methods were generally similar and comparable to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Interestingly, feedback methods such as student survey responses related to the teacher's teaching and external results of students the teacher teaches were mainly used by the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic teachers, respectively. Additionally, a very high percentage of teachers in both countries do get along with their students. This may contribute to a positive learning environment and feedback approach involving collaboration between teachers and students. However, there is a need for further research to ascertain the impact of the feedback method involving student survey responses related to the teacher's teaching on the student's learning outcome and how this may also enhance the relationships between the teachers and students to promote a better learning environment and outcome. There is also a need for more research on the relationship between classroom practices, effective feedback, and student educational achievement.*

**Keywords:** *Visible learning; evaluation; formative assessment; comparative education; observation*

### **1. Introduction**

The increasing awareness of the need for educational reform and the creation of a national education system contributed to the rising interest in the analysis of the educational programmes of other countries [1]. The Teaching And Learning International Survey (TALIS) is an international survey focusing on teachers' working conditions, including their school learning environment. TALIS aims to provide valid and comparable data to help countries review their policies to develop a performing teaching workforce. Therefore, the TALIS data has made it possible to objectively compare and discuss the differences in teaching and educational outcomes at national and international levels or between countries [2]. Similarly, comparative education ensures the analysis and promotion of educational innovation, which helps remove educational borders [3]. However, deficiencies in adopted methodologies used in comparative education have negatively affected comparative analysis because case studies are chosen based on the outcome, where authors often focus on successful systems that differ in other ways. Consequently, the reliability of these findings is usually questionable because it is difficult to ascertain whether the worst-performing system adopts the same process [4]. To avoid this problem, the best way to objectively find the sources of successful changes is to compare similar systems based on shared history, which later differs along the way; then, the reason for these differences or variations can be investigated [4]. Thus, this study proposes a similar system to evaluate feedback methods lower secondary school teachers use, including their classroom practices in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic.

#### **1.1 Justification for the Study**

The Czech Republic and Slovak Republic are two countries that share a common legacy and history. Their educational systems were similar several years ago but have experienced several reforms during the transformation era [4]. Due to this shared history and legacy between these two countries, analysing their TALIS data will be valuable in comparing changes that may have occurred in their educational system over the years to discover possible areas of similarities or divergence.



Additionally, comparative studies focusing on feedback methods and classroom practices in Czech and Slovak Republic secondary school systems have not been fully explored.

### **1.2 Aims**

The main aim of this study is to compare teachers' feedback methods and classroom practices in the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic secondary school systems.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

### **2.1 Shared Legacy and History**

The Communist era was instrumental in the educational systems in the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. This played a vital role in designing and shaping the educational institutions in these countries. Although the initial creation of the public school system in the nineteenth century was different and happened at various times in these countries, their involvement in the same eastern block between 1945 and 1989 resulted in their mutual acceptance of the national educational system in terms of management approach, political incentives, and general organisation [4]. Consequently, by the end of the communist era, the educational system of Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic) was similarly criticised. Some of these criticisms were due to excessive unification, for example, the central imposition of curriculum and the use of common textbooks, the strong bureaucratic control, the inhumane way of dealing with pedagogical practice and the obstruction of local ideas [5,6].

Furthermore, compulsory education was similar in both countries, comprising primary and secondary tiers. Primary education lasts for 8 or 9 years, while secondary education lasts 3-5 years [4]. Additionally, all the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic schools were controlled and managed by the central authority; their funding also came from the central budgets, and they had no independence in dealing with managerial and educational roles. Another similarity is the dominance of the vocational education path over the general upper secondary education in the 1990s [4]. Nevertheless, there was a breakdown in the old economic systems in the 1990s when most state-owned companies were insolvent, leading to massive unemployment. There was also a high demand for higher education, with 10% of young people between 18-24 years enrolling in higher education [7]. General education created better opportunities for employment and higher wages. This resulted in the shift towards general schools and the rising demands for higher education, which was associated with the transitional shock in the labour market. Consequently, vocational training was considered inadequate, and the new government expanded the school's autonomy and local self-government. Czechoslovakia started to extend school autonomy at the beginning of the 1990s during the transformational process of the communist era [4]. Although the Czech population saw the educational system as good at the time, many called for reforms after the fall of communism in 1989 [6].

The end of communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989 led to the beginning of significant political, social, cultural, and economic changes to a democratic political system and market economy. The previous ideologies of the communist party, which were embedded in the constitution at the time, were revoked. These changes also significantly impacted the educational system [8]. Since the post-communist transition period, there has been a great collaboration between countries such as the Czech Republic and countries in Western Europe. For example, the European Union and The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are extensively involved in educational reform in OECD countries, including the Czech Republic [6]. Moreover, the involvement of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic in the TALIS survey of OECD countries and participating economies has created opportunities for these countries with similar communist histories to evaluate the educational systems in their countries by comparing their educational systems with themselves and with other OECD participating countries and economies.

### **2.2 Assessment and Feedback**

Assessment is an essential tool used in evaluating students' performance. It serves many purposes, such as providing information concerning students learning, their progress, the quality of teaching and the organisation's accountability to both students and teachers [9]. Additionally, assessment is vital in determining students' progressions and learning [10,11]. Assessment can also be used as a quality assurance measure to validate a qualification or certificate awarded to students [12]. Using the proper assessment criteria, teachers objectively assess their students through grades and feedback and



design their teaching to meet student's needs [13]). Formative assessment occurs when teachers and students react to students' work, making judgments on what is best for students through feedback to improve their learning experience and help them achieve a better outcome [14,15]. Feedback is an essential aspect of formative assessment because it creates the opportunity for dialogue between teachers and students. Students receive conventional feedback and engage the teachers in discussion regarding the feedback [16]. Feedback is among the most common features of successful teaching and learning [17]. Giving feedback is more than just providing helpful information that enhances the student's knowledge; it also provides essential information to the teachers [15]. Through feedback, we can self-observe our efforts and master new skills. We can monitor and improve our performance through feedback, comments and suggestions from teachers, coaches, supervisors, and colleagues [18]. Research has proven that the most effective learning involves collecting, evaluating, and acting on feedback to modify teaching practices. Furthermore, a 2009 meta-analysis showed that intensive observation and analysis, or 'microteaching', is most effective in enhancing students' outcomes with teaching practices such as formative evaluation (ranked third) and feedback ranking 10<sup>th</sup> in effects [19]. Besides, teaching improvement will be achieved through understanding theory, evidence, and various activities, including observation, demonstration, practice, and feedback [20].

### **2.3 Teachers' Classroom Practices**

There is an increase in global interest in how teaching practices and classroom events affect student learning outcomes and their psychosocial development [21]. The teacher's management strategy of the classroom environment may have a significant effect on students' behaviour. According to the meta-analysis of more than 100 studies, the quality of relationships between students and teachers is the foundation of all other aspects of classroom management. For example, evidence from a study indicated that teachers with high-quality relationships with their students had 31% fewer cases of discipline problems and violation of rules over a year compared with teachers with low-quality relationships with their students [22]. Teachers may use various instructional practices and behavioural approaches to manage their students in the classroom. For example, observation in the classroom enhances educational quality through information about current teachers and classroom practices or by measuring changes in practice over a period [23]. Similarly, one of the ways to close the knowledge gap in classrooms is by using systematic behavioural observations to keep records of teaching practices [24]. Moreover, evidence suggests that school leaders and teachers trust classroom observations more than other measures [25]. Additionally, it has been suggested that the quality of classroom practices is associated with students' learning outcomes [26-28].

## **3. Methods**

### **3.1 Procedure and Sample Size**

The analysed data were mainly from the OECD report for the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic. These countries participated in the TALIS 2018 study survey. The process used in developing and administrating the TALIS 2018 questionnaire used for this study has been described in the TALIS 2018 technical report. Regarding the sample size, for the Czech Republic, the number of teachers who participated in the study was 3 447 in 219 participating schools, with overall teacher participation of 93.8%. Similarly, 3,015 teachers from 176 participating schools in the Slovak Republic participated in the study, with overall teacher participation of 84.7%. The estimated size of the teacher population in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic are 42 348 and 24 746, respectively [29].

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Teachers' Feedback Methods**

Results from the TALIS 2018 survey demonstrated that in the Slovak Republic, 3% of the teachers who participated reported never receiving feedback in their schools compared to 1% of teachers in the Czech Republic. These are higher than the OECD average of 10%. Furthermore, the feedback methods mostly used in the Slovak Republic include observation of the teacher's classroom teaching, school-based results, classroom-based results, and the external results of students. This is similar to the methods used in the Czech Republic; however, student survey responses to the teacher's teaching were only used in the Czech Republic. Thus, TALIS 2018 data shows similarities between feedback methods used in the Czech Republic, Slovakia Republic and other OECD countries. Nevertheless, feedback methods such as the external results of students the teacher teaches used in





the Slovak Republic and student survey responses to the teacher's teaching used in the Czech Republic are not commonly used in other OECD countries (Table 1). In addition, in the Slovak Republic, 84% of teachers who received feedback in the 12 months before the TALIS 2018 survey acknowledged that it had positively impacted their teaching practices; this is significantly higher than the OECD average of 71%. On the other hand, in the Czech Republic, 73% of teachers reported that feedback positively impacted them. Moreover, 62% of teachers in the Slovak Republic have received feedback at a certain point through at least four different forms of feedback; this is higher than in the Czech Republic and the OECD average of 52% [30].

**Table 1. Feedback methods used by teachers in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic**

Participating countries	Never received feedback (%)	Positive impact of feedback (%)	The feedback method mostly used
Czech Republic	1	73	Observation of teacher's classroom teaching, school-based results, classroom-based results, external results of students, and student survey responses related to the teacher's teaching
Slovak Republic	3	84	Observation of teachers' classroom teaching, school-based results, classroom-based results, and external results of students the teacher teaches.
OECD average	10	71	Classroom observation, students' school-based results, and classroom-based results

#### 4.2 Teachers' Classroom Practices

Classroom management approaches that mainly result in school connectedness are those that encourage student autonomy and empowerment among students [31]. Teachers use several instructional approaches to manage their classrooms and students' behaviour. TALIS 2018 data showed that 63% and 39 % of teachers in Slovak and Czech Republic reported pacifying or calming down their students who were disturbing the class. These are below the OECD average of 65%. At the same time, 94% and 96% of teachers in the Slovak Republic and Czech Republic agree that teachers and students get along. Also, in the Slovak Republic, 85% of teachers assess their student's progress by observing and providing immediate feedback; this is higher than the 78% reported in the Czech Republic and the OECD average of 79%. Furthermore, 55% and 32% of teachers allowed their students to evaluate their progress in Slovak and Czech Republic, respectively. The percentage point in the case of the Czech Republic is below the OECD average of 41% (Table 2). An essential attribute of effective classroom practice is the ability of teachers to support each other in adopting and implementing new ideas. This was captured in the TALIS 2018 survey, which shows that 83% of teachers in the Slovak Republic supported each other in the implementation of new ideas in the classroom, which is higher than that of the teachers in the Czech Republic (77%) and the OECD average of 78% [32].

**Table 2. Teachers' classroom practices**

Participating countries	Calming down students disturbing the class (%)	Teachers and students getting along (%)	Acts of intimidation or bullying among students (%)	Teachers' assessment of student progress by observation and immediate feedback (%)	Teachers who allowed students to evaluate their progress (%)	Teachers support to each other in implementing new ideas (%)
Czech Republic	39	96	3	78	32	77
Slovak Republic	63	94	9	85	55	83
OECD average	65	N/A	14	79	41	78

Governments have become increasingly interested in international comparisons of educational systems. This is inspired by the effort to establish policies that will facilitate individuals' social and economic potentials, provide incentives for greater schooling efficiency and help mobilise resources to meet rising demands [33]. The best way to objectively make this comparison and find the sources of



changes is to compare similar systems based on shared history and legacy [4]. Against this backdrop, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic were compared in this study. The Czech and Slovak Republic's primary lower secondary systems are mainly single-structured, referred to as basic education. Both countries use a two-level curriculum structure at state and school levels. The state level represents a national framework document that defines the conception of education, its objectives and necessary content, and general conditions for its implementation. The school-level document provides a framework for implementing education in specific schools. It is defined by schools in conjunction with the national framework document [34]. However, after their split in 1993, the Czech Republic and Slovakia started to deal with their educational system, such as curriculum reforms. For example, a study showed that the Slovak Republic's learning outcomes, especially in geography and mathematics, were more extensive and more than six times higher than the Czech Republic's outcomes [34]. Furthermore, the Czech national framework document is brief with the assumption that school-level documents will be longer and more detailed based on individual schools. In contrast, the national framework document of the Slovak educational system has a high number of obligatory learning outcomes with no intention to be expanded by individual schools. Nevertheless, in both countries, the association between the number of learning outcomes assigned to a particular subject and the time allocated to the subject were generally weak [34]. Additionally, the Slovak Republic has three levels of the centralised system: national, regional and local. The central authorities provide the framework for education, regional authorities manage high schools directly, while elementary and other institutions are managed and developed by local governments [35]. In contrast, there are two levels of the decentralised education system in the Czech Republic: municipal and regional. The regional level is considered to have higher authority and is responsible for administrative functions with significant autonomy. On the other hand, the municipal level is responsible for ensuring regular attendance conditions [36]. Regarding the structure of education systems, the age at which compulsory education in Slovak and Czech Republic begins is 6 years. However, the age for the ending of mandatory education is 15 years in the Czech Republic, while it is 16 years in the Slovak Republic [37]. Despite the availability of several studies on the Czech and Slovak Republic educational systems, fewer studies have compared the Czech and Slovak Republic's lower secondary school systems. More importantly, the comparative analysis of feedback methods and classroom practices by secondary school teachers in the Czech and Slovak Republic is yet to be sufficiently explored.

Skilled teachers understand the importance of inviting their students to comment on the feedback they provide, to ask if they heard and understood the feedback, to know if they actioned it, and to evaluate themselves and whether their feedback was practical. This will allow them to modify or readjust how and when to give feedback to ensure it is heard, understood, and actionable [18]. Effective teaching involves more than a flow of information from teacher to student. Instead, it should involve a two-way process between students and teachers. Moreover, some of the most potent exchanges or communication occur when students provide feedback to their teachers concerning the impact of their teaching [17,18]. Overall, the results from the analysed TALIS data showed some similarities between the teachers' feedback methods and classroom practices in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic. However, there were a few areas of divergence. For example, the TALIS data showed that student survey responses to the teachers' teaching feedback method were used by teachers in the Czech Republic. This is an interesting discovery because feedback to the teacher about what students can and cannot do is more powerful than feedback to the students. It encourages a different way of interacting with and respecting students. Through this type of feedback and monitoring, teachers will be aware of the success or failure of their teaching and will be provided with a method to evaluate the efficacy of different influences the teachers use [17]. Similarly, effective instruction cannot occur without proper feedback from students to teachers on the effectiveness of the instruction. Therefore, the student-teacher relationship is vital to adequate feedback [38]. However, there is a concern about students' competency in judgment of the teaching of their teachers and course quality [39]. The TALIS data also showed that many Slovak and Czech Republic teachers get along with their students. This probably indicates a good classroom relationship between the teachers and students, which may be attributed to these teachers' classroom practices. The classroom climate plays a vital role in the quality or amount of feedback given to the students or received by the teachers from the students. For example, a classroom environment where students' errors are welcomed enhances their learning [17]. There is also a relationship between feedback and the learning environment. Evidence shows that teachers' reflection on student feedback can positively change students' perceptions of the learning environment [40,41]. Thus, there is a need to give the students more power to provide feedback about their teacher's teaching to foster a better learning environment, potentially leading to better student outcomes.



## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Slovak and Czech Republic have experienced a tremendous educational transformation since the end of the communist era. Evidence from TALIS data showed that the feedback methods used by teachers in these two countries were comparable to those of other OECD countries. Nevertheless, a crucial observation from this study is the insufficient use of student survey responses to the teacher's teaching as feedback methods among OECD countries despite the significance of this type of feedback to the student's learning, teachers' development and classroom environment. Therefore, policymakers, secondary school leaders, and teachers should embrace and apply this feedback method. It may help improve the classroom climate, build trust, and strengthen relationships between teachers and students, leading to better learning outcomes. However, there is still a need for more evidence-based research to ascertain the actual impact of this feedback approach on the students' learning outcomes and teachers' professional development.

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