THE AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS’ SURVEY 2023:
INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND CONTINUING
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian government has a history of regularly reviewing the nation’s Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs. In common with many other countries, successive Australian governments have seen ITE reform as a way of improving the quality of teaching in schools. The most recent ITE review – the Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) review – was established by Alan Tudge, the Minister for Education in the Liberal-National Coalition government (2021), and continued (in the form of an ‘Expert Panel’) by the Labor government Minister for Education Jason Clare (2022). University of Sydney Vice-Chancellor Mark Scott was appointed as Chair of the review and of the panel.

Around the world, when policymakers make their case for yet another ITE review- or expert panel - and subsequent set of reforms, they often do so based, in part, on assumed dissatisfaction with ITE by the teaching profession. This rhetorical move has become commonplace including, recently, in Australia. However, as in other jurisdictions, no reliable data has existed to substantiate the claim that Australian teachers in general have been dissatisfied with their ITE programs.

In late 2022, as part of preparations for its own independent review of the future of the teaching profession in Australia, the Faculty of Education at Monash University commissioned the respected polling organization YouGov to conduct a representative survey of Australian teachers. The survey was conducted online by YouGov between 1 and 13 November 2022, with 611 teachers across Australia. Age, gender, and location quotas were applied to the sample and quotas were also applied according to primary/ secondary school, and government/ Catholic/ independent school categories. Following the completion of the survey, the data was weighted by the above parameters to reflect the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics Census population estimates for teachers in Australia.

Contrary to assertions that Australian teachers are dissatisfied with their ITE programs, the findings of our YouGov poll show just the opposite.

Summary findings

Quality of ITE programs

- Overall, 73% of Australian teachers deemed their ITE program as good (50%) or excellent (23%). Only 22% deemed it as satisfactory (22%) and just 5% poor.
- Views on the quality of ITE varied according to where the training was received: 24% who trained in Victoria and 23% who trained in NSW rated their programs as excellent, as did 20% of those who trained in Queensland. The proportion of those who indicated that their training was good was higher in Victoria (55%) compared to Queensland (52%) and NSW (48%).
- Teachers who completed a Master of Teaching are more likely to say that their training was excellent (30%), compared to those who hold an undergraduate teaching qualification (22%) or a Graduate Diploma (20%) in this field.

Curriculum Priority Areas

- Teachers’ views of how well their ITE program prepared them to teach the Australian Curriculum’s priority areas (referring to Student Diversity, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Culture) were relatively divided, with 54% feeling prepared, and 45% saying they are unprepared.
- It should be noted that of the 54% who said they were prepared to teach the Curriculum’s priority areas, only 11% felt very prepared to do so.
- Younger teachers aged 18 –34 (68%) were more likely to say they felt prepared to teach this topic, compared to those aged 35+ (47% for both aged 35 –49 and aged 50+). Half of those aged 35+ felt unprepared (51% for both aged 35 –49 and aged 50+).
- Feelings of preparedness differed depending on where the ITE was completed. 58% of those who trained in NSW said they were prepared, compared to 51% for those who trained in Victoria, and 50% for those who trained in Queensland.
- 68% of those who were trained as teachers through a Master of Teaching felt prepared, whereas only 54% of those with an undergraduate qualification and 47% of those trained through a Graduate Diploma, say they felt prepared.
Teaching literacy and numeracy skills and preparedness to innovate in their own classrooms

- **Three-quarters (74%)** of Australian teachers said they feel prepared to teach the ongoing development of literacy and numeracy skills, and **one-in-five (21%)** felt very prepared to do so.
- Conversely, 25% felt unprepared to teach literacy and numeracy skills—with just 6% saying they are ‘not at all prepared’.
- Feelings of preparedness were higher amongst teachers working in Queensland (81%) compared to those in NSW (74%) and Victoria (73%).
- Unsurprisingly, 90% of those who say their ITE program was excellent stated that they felt prepared to teach literacy and numeracy skills—the percentage of those who felt prepared declined for those who rated their program as good (79%) or satisfactory (58%).
- **Just 69% of those who were aged 35 –49 (who were likely to be mid-career), felt prepared.** This contrasted with 78% for those aged 18 –34 (who were likely to have completed training recently), and 75% for those aged 50+ (who were likely to have more teaching experience).
- **Over four-in-five (85%)** Australian teachers agreed that they have the necessary skills to **try innovative teaching practices and/or adapt new ideas from their professional learning to their classroom** – of this, a third (31%) strongly agreed, while just 6% disagreed.

Continuing professional development (CPD): Australian teachers’ experiences

- **Just 35%** of Australian teachers say that most professional development opportunities help make them a better teacher.
- While 68% of Australian teachers say they have at least regular opportunities for CPD, **29% reported limited opportunities and 3% said they were non-existent**.
- **Teachers in Victoria and Queensland are more likely to say that they have ‘plentiful’ professional development opportunities (respectively 20% and 19%),** compared to NSW teachers (14%).
- For teachers with access to professional development opportunities, **four-in-five (79%)** say these were provided by their schools.

Conclusion

The findings of this survey present a relatively positive picture of Australian teachers’ views of their ITE. The findings demonstrate Australian teachers’ high levels of satisfaction with their ITE programs, with the highest level being among those teachers who qualified with a Master of Teaching. There are some interesting geographic and demographic differences worthy of examination, particularly the variances among graduates across various states. Whilst it is pleasing to see such a high proportion of Australian teachers feeling well prepared to teach the ongoing development of literacy and numeracy skills, it was somewhat concerning to see such a high proportion of teachers who said they felt under-prepared to teach the Australian curriculum’s priority areas.

Nonetheless, such high levels of satisfaction among Australia’s teachers about their teacher education is something that Australia’s government and ITE providers should be proud of. It could be reasonably assumed that the succession of reforms which have responded to the many reviews of ITE in Australia may well have contributed to the high levels of satisfaction reported. It is also acknowledged that there is always room for improvement and further innovation by ITE providers. However, on the evidence of our representative survey of Australian teachers, policymakers cannot claim that dissatisfaction with ITE programs is the general view of the country’s teaching profession.

At the same time, our survey has revealed that just 35% of Australian teachers say that most of their professional development opportunities help make them a better teacher. And while 68% reported at least regular opportunities for CPD, 29% reported limited opportunities and 3% none. Given that school systems rely on their populations of existing teachers rather than just a pipeline of new ones to staff their schools – and given the international evidence that teachers can keep on getting better over the course of their careers – we suggest that much greater attention and a higher priority needs to be given to providing regular, effective continuing professional development for our country’s teachers. For policymakers, this will require a shift in focus – from the credentialing of the individual teacher through ITE programs, to collective, system-wide continuing professional development that is a regular part of teachers’ workload.
PART 1 - REPORT

BACKGROUND

The Australian government has a history of regularly reviewing the universities’ Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs. As in many other countries, successive governments have seen the process of ITE reform as a way of improving the quality of teaching in schools (Ellis, Gatti & Mansell, 2024; Furlong, Cochran-Smith & Brennan, 2009). However, even those who have been involved in this work (there have been many since 1979), humorously refer to a history of ‘101 damnations’ of ITE by Australian government-sponsored reviews (Louden, 2008). The reviews have been of varying quality in terms of their rigor and depth of engagement with the issues.

The most recent ITE review – the Quality Initial Teacher Education [QITE] review – was established by the Liberal-National government in 2021 and continued (as an ‘expert panel’) by the Labor government elected in 2022, with the University of Sydney Vice-Chancellor Mark Scott as Chair of both review and panel (Australian Government, 2023). Scott had previously been a high-level public servant in the New South Wales Department of Education and Managing Director of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

In late 2022, as part of preparations for its own independent inquiry into the future of the teaching profession in Australia, the Faculty of Education at Monash University commissioned respected polling organization YouGov to conduct a representative sample survey of Australian teachers to investigate their perceptions of their ITE and continuing professional development (CPD). The survey was conducted online by YouGov between 1 and 13 November 2022, with 611 teachers across Australia. Age, gender and location quotas were applied to the sample and quotas were also applied according to primary/ secondary school, and government/ Catholic/ independent school categories. Following the completion of the survey, the data was weighted by the above parameters to reflect the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics Census population estimates for teachers in Australia.

Through the survey, we were interested to find out:

- What do teachers in Australia think about the quality of their own ITE?
- What are teachers’ experiences of CPD? Who provides it for them and what is its perceived quality?
- How well-prepared do Australian teachers feel with regards to teaching the Australian curriculum priority areas and supporting the ongoing development of their students’ literacy and numeracy skills?

Anecdotal and news reports as well as comments on social media and some political pronouncements have provided a particular perspective about how some people in the media, the wider community and the teaching profession in Australia feel about ITE and teacher development more generally. However, this survey is the first based on a representative sample of over 600 teachers across states in Australia. It complements a previous survey of the views of teachers in England (Ellis, 2022).
METHODOLOGY

- Fieldwork for this study was conducted online by YouGov between 1 – 13 November 2022.
- The sample includes 611 teachers in Australia. Teachers from all states were interviewed as part of this project. It should be noted that a sample of this size is fit for purpose. The gains possible from increasing the sample size to, for example, 1,000 teachers are not large enough to justify the additional effort to recruit participants to a survey of this kind (Whitehead, 1993).
- Age, gender, and location quotas were applied to the sample. Quotas were also applied according to primary/secondary school, and government/catholic/independent school categories.
- Following the completion of interviewing, the data was weighted by the above parameters to reflect the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics Census population estimates for teachers in Australia based on teacher counts within each of the Greater Capital City Statistical Areas.
- Although data was collected across all states and territories, our reference points and examples in this report refer only to Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, the states with the largest populations of teachers. Data from the weighted samples from Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory, and the Australian Capital Territory were significantly smaller and therefore any generalizations could be presented with much less confidence.

HOW DID THESE TEACHERS QUALIFY TO TEACH?

Three-in-five (60%) Australian teachers received their training through an undergraduate route such as the Bachelor of Education degree. One-in-five (21%) teachers received their training through a Graduate Diploma in Education and 14% received their training through a Master in Teaching (postgraduate program). There were some interesting gender differences apparent: most female teachers (65%) completed an undergraduate ITE degree compared to 46% of male teachers. The number of males who completed a Graduate Diploma or Master of Teaching were 27% and 20% respectively. Due to the reforms to ITE entry qualifications in Australia which saw a national shift from a Graduate Diploma of Education to a Master of Teaching (as required by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership in 2016), there were notable differences according to age. A third (33%) of teachers over 50 years of age were trained via the Graduate Diploma route compared to 13% of teachers under 34 and 19% of teachers aged between 35 and 39.

Primary school teachers were more likely to be trained via an undergraduate route than secondary teachers (respectively 74% and 48%). Additionally, those in different sectors showed clear differences with government school teachers being more likely to have trained through an undergraduate route compared to those working in Catholic/Independent schools (respectively 63% and 54%).

Almost a third of teachers completed their ITE program in New South Wales. Figure 1 shows the breakdown across states and territories. (In addition, 0.42% of responses were categorized as ‘Other’ – not attributable to any of the state/territory, overseas or incomplete categories). Unsurprisingly, respondents tended to have completed their ITE program in the state in which they resided; 88% of NSW teachers were trained in the state and the same applies for 89% of Victorian teachers and 81% of teachers in Queensland. Overseas training is higher among teachers working in the Catholic/Independent schools compared to government schools (respectively 7% and 3%) and among teachers working in secondary schools compared to primary schools (respectively 5% and 2%).
In relation to when they completed their ITE program, 22% did so in the last five years; 19% did between 6 and 10 years ago; 33% between 11 and 20 years ago; and 27% did so more than 20 years ago.

WHAT DO TEACHERS IN AUSTRALIA THINK OF THE QUALITY OF THEIR ITE PROGRAMS?

Overall, 73% of Australian teachers view their ITE programs as either good (50%) or excellent (23%). Just 5% said it was poor. Figure 2 provides the overall distribution of responses. However, teachers’ views of the quality of ITE varies according to where they completed their training. 24% of teachers who completed ITE in Victoria rated their training as excellent compared to 23% in NSW and 20% in Queensland. The proportion of teachers rating their ITE as good is also higher in Victoria (55%) compared to Queensland (52%) and NSW (48%). Overall, ITE in Victoria was more positively rated by teachers than teachers who completed their training in other states and territories.

Fig 1: In which state or territory did you complete your ITE program (%)?

Teachers’ views also varied according to their ITE route. Teachers who completed a Master of Teaching were more likely to say that their training was excellent (30%) than those who followed an undergraduate route (22%) or Graduate Diploma (20%). Teachers were also more likely to say their ITE was excellent if they were older with 29% of those aged 50+ saying it was excellent compared to 21% of teachers aged under 34 and 20% of those aged between 35 and 49. Similarly, senior teachers – consisting of Principal/Headteacher; Deputy/Vice-Principal or Deputy Headteacher; other senior teacher (e.g. head of learning area) - were more likely to say their ITE program was excellent than non-senior teachers (27% and 22% respectively). Figure 3 gives the breakdown of teachers’ views according to gender, age, phase, experience and seniority.
PREPAREDNESS TO TEACH THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM’S PRIORITY AREAS

When asked whether their ITE program prepared them to teach the Australian Curriculum’s priority areas, teachers were relatively divided in their views, with 54% saying they did feel prepared to deal with Student Diversity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures and 45% saying they felt unprepared. It should be noted that of the 54% who felt prepared, only 11% felt very prepared to do so. Younger teachers (aged 34 and under) were more likely to say they felt prepared to teach the Curriculum’s priority areas (68%) whereas of teachers 35 and older, only 47% felt prepared (with no differences between those aged 35 – 49 and those aged over 50).

Of teachers completing their ITE via a Master in Teaching, 68% felt prepared compared to 54% via an undergraduate route and 47% through the Graduate Diploma. There were also interesting differences according to state or territory with 58% of those completing their ITE in NSW feeling prepared compared to 51% for those completing in Victoria and 50% for those training in Queensland.

PREPAREDNESS TO TEACH ONGOING LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS

Three-quarters (74%) of Australian teachers say they feel prepared to teach the ongoing development of literacy and numeracy skills, of which one-in-five (21%) are very prepared to do so. Conversely, 25% feel unprepared to teach literacy and numeracy skills –with just 6% saying they are ‘not at all prepared’. There was little variation between entry route/qualification (77% for Graduate Diploma holders, 75% for Master of Teaching, and 73% for those trained via an undergraduate route). However, more teachers completing their ITE in Queensland felt prepared to teach these important ongoing skills (81%) compared to those trained in NSW (74%) and Victoria (73%).

Unsurprisingly, 90% of those who say their ITE program is excellent feel prepared to teach ongoing literacy and numeracy skills –the percentage of those who feel prepared declines for those who rate their program as good (79%) or satisfactory (58%). Interestingly, just 69% of those who are aged 35 –49 (who are likely to be mid-career) feel prepared. This contrasted by 78% for those aged 34 and under (who are likely to have completed their ITE recently) and 75% for those aged 50+ (who are likely to have more teaching experience).

PREPAREDNESS TO INNOVATE IN THEIR OWN CLASSROOM

Over four-in-five (85%) Australian teachers agree that they have acquired the necessary skills to try innovative teaching practices and/or adapt new ideas from their professional learning to their classroom – of this, a third (31%) strongly agree with this sentiment. Just 6% disagree. Across the states, teachers in Queensland are the most likely to agree that they have the necessary skills to adapt new ideas in their classrooms (90%), followed by those in Victoria (87%), whereas agreement is lower in NSW at 79%. Additionally, NSW teachers are twice as likely to disagree with this (10%) than teachers in Victoria (4%) and Queensland (5%).

Experience appears to influence responses. Teachers who completed their training more than a decade ago are more likely to say they have the skills needed to innovate their classrooms (89% for those trained 11 – 20 years ago, and 86% for those trained 20+ years ago), compared to those who trained more recently (81% for those trained within the last 5 years, and 83% for those trained 6 – 10 years ago). In fact, 41% of those who completed their ITE 20+ years ago strongly agree that they have the skills to bring new practices and ideas to their classrooms, contrasted by 23% of those who trained within the last 5 years with the same view. This finding indicates the importance of considering classroom experience and teacher development when considering teachers’ capabilities to innovate. Indeed, access to professional
development opportunities also seem to affect respondents' agreement levels about their skills to innovate. 93% of those with 'plentiful' continuing professional development opportunities agree that they have such skills to innovate in their classrooms; this applies to 87% of those with regular opportunities and 81% of those with limited opportunities.

Seven-in-ten (72%) of teachers agree that they have the support of their school leadership to implement and adapt innovative teaching practices in their classrooms. Agreement about having the support of school leadership tends to be slightly higher for those working in Catholic/Independent schools (74% compared to 70% for government schools) and those working in primary schools (75% compared to 67% for Secondary schools).

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) – AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES

Fifty percent of Australian teachers say that they have regular opportunities for continuing professional development, with one-in-five (18%) saying that these opportunities are ‘plentiful’ for them. Teachers in Victoria and Queensland are more likely to say that they have ‘plentiful’ professional development opportunities (respectively 20% and 19%), compared to NSW teachers (14%). Conversely, overall, three-in-ten (29%) Australian teachers say that their ability to access professional development opportunities is limited. This is more pronounced for those aged 35+ (36% for aged 35 – 49 and 31% for those aged 50+, compared to 21% for those aged 34 and under). 3% say that professional development opportunities are ‘non-existent’. This is higher amongst teachers in Catholic/Independent schools (6%) compared to teachers in Government schools (1%). See Figure 4 for the breakdown of Australian teachers’ views on the availability of professional development.

Views about professional development opportunities also vary by respondents’ role in school and their seniority. This appears to be a significant factor. Whilst a quarter (26%) of senior teachers in leadership roles claim to have ‘plentiful’ development opportunities, this is contrasted by 16% of non-senior-level teachers who say the same. At the same time, 32% of non-senior-level teachers say these opportunities are ‘limited’, whereas 19% of senior-level teachers say this is the case.

WHO PROVIDES PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS?

For teachers with access to professional development opportunities, four in five (79%) say these were provided by their schools. This is followed by state/territory Departments of Education (40%), and teacher regulatory bodies (27%). Teachers working in primary schools are more likely to say their schools provide such opportunities (84%) than those working in secondary schools (75%). The same applies to teachers working in government schools (81%) compared to Catholic/Independent schools (75%). Figure 5 shows what Australian teachers say the sources of the professional development opportunities offered to them are.

Across states and territories, 42% of teachers in Queensland say their state Department of Education provides professional development opportunities – whereas 34% of teachers in Victoria say the same. The source of professional development opportunities differs by school type. Whilst government school teachers say the top 2 sources of development opportunities would be their school (80%) and state/territory Department of Education (53%), for Catholic/Independent school teachers, the top 2 sources would be their school (75%) and the Catholic education system (46%). Furthermore, secondary school teachers are twice as likely than primary school teachers to say they were provided development opportunities by state curriculum authorities (respectively 28% and 14%) and subject/phase teaching associations (respectively 28% and 11%).
Australian teachers access professional development opportunities (%):

- My school: 79%
- State/Territory Department of Education: 40%
- Teacher regulatory bodies: 27%
- State curriculum authorities: 20%
- Subject/phase teaching associations: 19%
- Catholic education system: 18%
- Other school networks: 14%
- Independent school networks: 11%
- Other: 4%

Fig. 5. Where do Australian teachers access professional development opportunities (%)?

According to Australian teachers, how effective is the professional development they are offered?

Just 35% of Australian teachers say that most professional development opportunities help to make them a better teacher. Those who say most development opportunities enhance their teaching tend to be women (37%, 27% for men) and are younger (39% for teachers aged 34 and under compared to 32% for aged 50+). Primary school teachers are also more likely to say that most development opportunities make them better at teaching (38%) compared to 29% for Secondary school teachers. Figure 6 provides the distribution of responses representing Australian teachers’ views of the effectiveness of the professional development they are offered.

Fig. 6. Australian teachers views of the effectiveness of the professional development they are offered (%)
Overall, most teachers (55%) say that only some of the opportunities help them become a better teacher. In turn, and more positively, fewer than one-in-ten (7%) say professional development opportunities have no positive or negative impact on their teaching. Finally, only 3% of teachers say professional development opportunities put them off teaching. There is an interesting difference in the responses from senior and non-senior teachers: 11% of senior-level teachers say that professional development opportunities don’t affect their teaching, almost double the proportion of non-senior-level teachers who say the same (6%).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this survey present a relatively positive picture about Australian teachers’ views of their initial teacher education; they clearly demonstrate Australian teachers’ high levels of satisfaction with their ITE programs, with the highest level being among those teachers who qualified with a Master of Teaching. There are some interesting geographic and demographic differences worthy of examination, particularly the variances among graduates across states. Whilst it is pleasing to see such a high proportion of Australian teachers feeling well prepared to teach the ongoing development of literacy and numeracy skills, it was somewhat concerning to see such a high proportion of teachers who said they felt under-prepared to teach the Australian curriculum’s priority areas. However, it is notable that 85% of teachers feel that they are prepared to be innovative in their classrooms.

Such high levels of satisfaction among Australia’s teachers about their teacher education is something that Australia’s government, the state and territory governments, and ITE providers themselves should be proud of. It could be reasonably assumed that the succession of reforms which have responded to the many reviews of ITE in Australia may well have contributed to the high levels of satisfaction reported. It is also acknowledged that there is always room for improvement and further innovation by ITE providers (for which the teaching profession appears to be prepared). No provider we are aware of believes their programs don’t need to be continually improved. However, on the basis of the evidence of our representative survey of Australian teachers, policymakers can no longer claim that dissatisfaction with ITE programs is the general view of the country’s teaching profession.

At the same time, our survey has revealed that just 35% of Australian teachers say that most of their professional development opportunities help make them a better teacher. Indeed, only 68% said that they had regular (50%) or plentiful (18%) CPD opportunities anyway. Given that school systems rely on their populations of existing teachers rather than just a pipeline of new ones to staff their schools – and given the international evidence that teachers can keep on getting better over the course of their careers (e.g. Kraft & Papay, 2014) – we suggest that much greater attention and a higher priority needs to be given to providing regular, effective continuing professional development for Australia’s teachers. Our current teacher workforce should be supported by ongoing quality continuing professional development that more closely responds to their needs. They must also be given time to immerse themselves in this professional development so that it becomes a regular part of their work rather than becoming an additional strain on their already demanding workload. For policymakers, this emphasis on continuing professional development will require a profound shift in focus away from ITE towards collective, system-wide CPD – but it is a shift that is likely to have enduring impact.

The findings of this survey – and the outcomes of a variety of activities undertaken by the Faculty of Education at Monash University over the last three years – are currently informing the terms of reference for an independent inquiry into the future of the teaching profession that will be announced shortly. An independent panel of external members, chaired by an eminent Australian educationist, will undertake a range of evidence-gathering activities and deliver its final report in June 2024.
REFERENCES


PART 2 - FIGURES

Fig. 1: In which state or territory did you complete your ITE program? (%)

Fig. 2. Australian teachers’ views of the quality of their ITE programs (%)

Fig. 3. Australian teachers’ views of the quality of their ITE programs according to gender, age, phase, experience and seniority
Fig. 4. Australian teachers’ views on opportunities available to them for CPD (%)

Who provides professional development opportunities to you?

- My school: 79%
- State/Territory Department of Education: 40%
- Teacher regulatory bodies: 27%
- State curriculum authorities: 20%
- Subject/phase teaching associations: 19%
- Catholic education system: 18%
- Other school networks: 14%
- Independent school networks: 11%
- Other: 4%

Fig. 5. Where do Australian teachers access professional development opportunities? (%)

Overall, I would say professional development opportunities...

- The opportunities don’t affect me or my teaching positively or negatively: 7%
- The opportunities put me off teaching: 3%
- Only some of the opportunities help make me a better teacher: 55%
- Most of the opportunities help make me a better teacher: 35%

Fig. 6. Australian teachers views of the effectiveness of the professional development they are offered (%)
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