

Chapter 8

Chinese Language Teachers' Perception of Social Status and Job Satisfaction

Kaycheng Soh

In 2011, Forbes published *The Ten Happiest Jobs* (Denning 2011). The article was based on a report of the General Social Survey by the National Organization for Research at the University of Chicago. Surprisingly, teachers (in general) are among the list and ranked sixth, preceded by clergy, firefighter, physical therapists, authors, and special education teachers. In the seventh to tenth place are artists, psychologists, financial services sales agents, and operating engineers. In contrast, there are the ten most hated jobs which are generally much better paying and have higher social status: director of information technology, director of sales and marketing, product manager, senior web designer, technical specialist, electronic technician, law clerk, technical support analyst, computerized numerical control machinist, and marketing managers. An explanation offered for the surprising finding is: *What's striking about the list is that these relatively high level people are imprisoned in hierarchical bureaucracies. They see little point in what they are doing. The organizations they work for don't know where they are going, and as a result, neither do these people* (Denning 2011: para. 2). In other words, pay and social status may not be the crucial factors in job satisfaction; workers need to see meanings in what they are employed to do and know where they are heading to as well as do not feel trapped in the organizational structure.

More recently, the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership* reported that teachers' job satisfaction has reached the lowest points in a quarter of the century (Richmond 2013). The survey involved 1000 K-12 school teachers forming a representative sample of the American teachers. Only 39 % of the teachers described themselves as satisfied with their jobs; this is a drop of 23 % from the 2008 survey and a drop of 5 % over the previous year. Contributing factors include curtailed school budgets, opportunities for professional development,

K. Soh (✉)

Singapore Centre for Chinese Language, Singapore, Singapore
e-mail: kaycheng.soh@sccl.sg; sohkaycheng@hotmail.com

and time for collaboration with colleagues. Moreover, half of the surveyed teachers, compared with only one-third in 1985, described that the stress levels have gone up. It is also interesting that teachers teaching schools with large proportions of students from low-income families are less likely to get a good rating for their performance. However, in contrast, most recently Crotty (2014) reported a rising job satisfaction among American teachers. The survey was conducted by the Center for American Progress. Using data from the 2011 to 2012 *Schools and Staffing Survey*, the researcher found a five-year high in overall job satisfaction and an increasing sense of autonomy in the classroom.

It is a truism that what a worker *thinks of* and *feels about* his job can impact his job performance and his desire to stay on or leave the job. This is true to many workers and educational workers (teachers) are no exception. When workers, educational or otherwise, think of their jobs, they are likely to compare these with other jobs requiring similar qualifications, in terms of whether the job has a high or low social status or whether it is valued or unvalued in the society. As for the feelings about the job, it is basically whether they are satisfied with it and are happy doing it and will continue doing it. These two aspects of job status and job satisfaction can be expected to be mutually influencing, and they together affect job performance that may affect the people their job serves. This in fact is the basic tenet of the *International Perspective on Teaching and Learning* (OECD 2014: Fig. 7.1).

Recently, Iwu, Gwija, Benedict, and Tengeh (2013: 840) summarized several studies showing the consequences of dissatisfied teachers and concluded that teacher dissatisfaction is associated with poor student pass rates and a host of psychological and physiological consequences such as fatigue, muscle tension, and weight loss. Moreover, such psychological and physical stress can cause the teacher to miss more days of work, dread going to work, or even consider giving up the job. Dissatisfied teachers may also display attitudes of cynicism, resentment, apathy, or anxiety. They may also develop low motivation and poor self-esteem. The authors argued that teacher dissatisfaction will not augur well for a nation and the associated poor pass rates of their students will have negative impact on economic development of the nation.

Iwu et al. (2013) surveyed a random sample of 279 high school teachers in Western Cape. The respondents aged between 23 % and 65 % and 70 % of them have teaching experience of between 6 and more than 21 years. There were 36 % male and 64 % female teachers in the sample. As the survey results show, factors influencing teachers motivation are, in descending order, working conditions, job security, growth opportunities, duties and responsibilities, pay/salary, interpersonal relationships, supervision/leaderships, recognition and reward, and job title. In the South African context, the authors, while surprised by the finding that pay or salary was not given higher priority by the respondents, concluded thus:

The result of this study suggests that highly motivated educators experience job satisfaction; and also perform better than their poorly motivated counterparts. In terms of motivation, the results suggest that extrinsic factors tend to exert more influence on the educators motivation than intrinsic factors.

Most relevant to the present study are two recent publications pertaining to teachers' perception of the social status of the teaching profession in the society and their job satisfaction. The first is *Global Teacher Status Index* (Dolton and Marcenaro-Gutierrez 2013) and, the second, *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning* (OECD 2014). Relevant information are highlighted hereafter. These were relevant to the present study in both conceptualization and instrumentation:

GTSI 2013 *Global Teacher Status Index* (GTSI; Dolton and Marcenaro-Gutierrez 2013) asserts that how the teachers are respected by the society has an impact on how effectively they teach and hence how effectively children learn; thus:

We find that there are major differences across countries in the way teachers are perceived by the public.... This affects the kind of job they do in teaching our children, and ultimately how effective they are in getting the best from their pupils in terms of their learning. (Dolton and Marcenaro-Gutierrez 2013: 8)

The GTSI 2013 is meant to complement international comparative studies of student achievement such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) by providing information about teachers. It argues that various aspects of the teachers' professional lives are much less understood. The index seeks to understand the teachers with regard to the aspects such as how teachers are respected in relation to other professions, whether parents would encourage their children to be teachers, what people think teachers ought to be paid, and others.

A total of 21 countries participated in the survey, including 17 Western countries and four Asian countries (China, Korea, Japan, and Singapore). The countries were chosen for their most favorable and least favorable performance in PISA and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and that they have attributed the most policy credence to the PISA score. The sample of countries was to include at least one country for the major continent or culture. Web-based survey was conducted and 1000 representative respondents in each country were included. The respondents were between the ages of 16 and 70. Considerations were given to gender, educational level, location, and ethnicity.

To measure teacher status, respondents were asked to rank 14 occupations in order of how they were respected. The occupations were primary school teacher, secondary school teacher, head teacher, doctor, nurse, librarian, local government manager, social worker, website designer, police officer, engineer, lawyer, accountant, and management consultant. These were chosen as graduate (or graduate-type) jobs and were also chosen carefully with respect to how similar or dissimilar the work might be to teaching.

Where teacher status is concerned, the study found the following:

1. There is no international consensus on what constitutes a comparative profession for teaching.

2. The average respect ranking for a teacher across the 21 countries was 7th out of 14 professions, indicating a midway respect ranking for the profession.
3. Two-thirds of countries judged the social status of teachers to be most similar to social workers.

There is a very wide variation in the esteem accorded to the teachers in the participated countries. For example, while 50 % of parents in China would encourage the children to become teachers, only 8 % would do so in Israel. Parents in China, South Korea, Turkey, and Egypt were most likely to encourage their children to become teachers. These countries also showed a higher level of belief that pupils respect their teachers. On the other hand, in most European countries, respondents thought that pupils disrespect teachers.

In terms of teacher's pay, in most countries, the perception accords with reality. However, teachers earned more than people thought they did in Israel, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and the USA. On the other hand, the starting pay for teachers in Brazil, Finland, New Zealand, Spain, and the UK is 20 % lower than perception.

In GTSI 2013, Singapore scored 46.3 for Teacher Status Index and ranked eighth, preceded by China (100.0), Greece (73.7), Turkey (68.0), Korea (62.0), New Zealand (54.0), and Egypt (49.3). The mean for the 21 participating countries is 37.0 (SD=24.6). Thus, Singaporean teachers received slightly more than international average in social status or respect for professions.

In terms of pay, Singaporean teachers have the highest annual salary of USD 45,755 when the international mean is USD 30,772 (SD=10,048). In the context of the present study, it is relevant to point out that the annual salary of teachers in China is USD 17,730, the second lowest among the countries, preceding only Egypt (USD 10,604). This could be explained, partly at least, as being due to the countries' GDP/capita for which Singapore has USD 61,1803 when the international mean is USD 29,996 and China USD 9,233; in other words, the affordability of the country. It is interesting that the correlation between GDP/capita and teacher salary is a significant high positive $r=0.84$ ($p<0.05$, two-tailed). It may be suspected that Singapore is able to pay her teachers so much because of the pint-size of the country with a population of only 5.3 million. However, Finland which has a population of 5.4 million and a GDP/capita of USD 34,660 pays her teachers USD 28,780, only slightly more than one-sixth of Singapore. In fact, the correlations between population size and teacher salary is a nonsignificant low negative of $r=-0.25$ ($p>0.05$, two-tailed). These go to indicate that salary is not a critical factor of social status as far a social status is concerned.

TALIS 2013 *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning* (TALIS; OECD 2014) gives teachers and school leaders a voice to speak about their experience and focuses on themes that can influence teaching effectiveness. The survey began in 2008 and has a very broad coverage of conditions in schools, including initial training, professional development, and climates and facilities of classrooms and schools. Most relevant to the present study is the teachers' satisfaction with and feelings about their job. A total of 34 countries took part in the survey in 2013, most being European countries and only four Eastern countries (i.e.,

Korea, Malaysia, Japan, and Singapore). Participated in the survey were 4130 teachers from 166 Singaporean schools.

TALIS 2013 (OECD 2014: 183) posits in Figure 7.1, *Framework for the Analysis of Teachers' Self-efficacy and Job Satisfaction*, that teachers' self-efficacy (including classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement) and their job satisfaction (including satisfaction with the profession and with current work environment) are mutually influencing and that these two aspects influence student outcome and teacher retention. In other words, how teachers see themselves as being efficient on the job will lead to satisfaction with the job and vice versa. Moreover, their perceptions and feelings in these two aspects will have an impact on how well they teach (as reflected in how well their student learn) and also on whether they will remain as teachers. This implies that teachers need be made to feel competent and appreciated as well as comfortable with the schools they are teaching in.

In *TALIS 2013*, teacher's job satisfaction was measured with 10 items with a mixture of seven positive and three negative wordings pertaining to teachers' self-evaluation of performance, decision to become teachers, happiness in the workplace, regret with being a teacher, and desire to change job or workplace, etc. Table 8.1 is an extract from the TALIS 2013 showing teachers' job satisfaction in the international scene and of Singapore.

Overall, it is gratifying that Singapore (scored 67) is slightly above the world average (61) in teachers' job satisfaction. However, as overall may hide important details, it is necessary to look at how Singaporean teachers did in TALIS 2013 when compared with international averages at the item level.

As shown in Table 8.1, using a 5 % difference as a guide, there are nontrivial differences between Singapore and the international averages. On the positive side, Singaporean teachers are clearly happy with their job. This is indicated by their responses to Item 1 (Advantages of being teachers), Item 2 (Would again choose to teach), and most impressively Item 8 (Teaching valued in the society). However, on

Table 8.1 Teachers' job satisfaction: International and Singapore

	International	Singapore
The advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages	77.1	83.6
If I could decide again, I would still choose to work as a teacher	77.6	82.1
I would like to change to another school if that were possible	21.2	35.1
I regret that I decided to become a teacher	9.5	10.7
I enjoy working at this school	89.7	85.9
I wonder whether it would have been better to choose another profession	31.6	45.9
I would recommend my school as a good place to work	84.0	73.2
I think that the teaching profession is valued in society	30.9	67.6
I am satisfied with my performance in this school	92.6	87.1
All in all, I am satisfied with my job	91.2	88.4

Source: OECD (2014), Table 7.2, pp. 407–408

the negative side, more Singaporean teachers would like to change school (Item 3) and wonder they would be better off in another profession (Item 6). In sum, while the majority of Singaporean teachers found teaching a satisfying job, there are a sizable proportion of them not as happy as their peers in their present schools.

With the above background, the present study seeks answer to the following questions:

1. How do Chinese Language teachers see their social status against the selected professions as well as against teachers of other subjects in the school? And what do they believe are the factors affecting their social status?
2. How satisfied are the Chinese Language teachers with their job? And what do they think contributes to job satisfaction or the lack of it?

Method

Measures

Social Status To measure the Chinese Language teachers' perceptions of their own social status, they were requested to identify the profession which has a social status comparable to teaching in general. The professions against which the teaching profession is to be compared are medical doctor, policeman, lawyer, engineer, manager, accountant, librarian, management consultant, nurse, social worker, and webpage designer. The choice of these professions follows closely those included in the GTSI (Dolton and Marcenaro-Gutierrez 2013).

However, as the Chinese Language teachers' function in the school where there are teachers of other subjects, it is interesting to find out how the Chinese language teachers see themselves vis-à-vis their colleagues. Therefore, they were requested to indicate the subject teachers who have a comparable social status.

Job Satisfaction To measure the Chinese Language teachers' satisfaction with their job, they were requested to respond to set of nine statements depicting positive or negative feelings about things happening on the job. The list follows closely the one in TALIS 2013 though not exactly.

To assist in interpreting the results, other questions relevant to the above two main concerns were also asked. These include factors related to social status, salary, encouragement for own child to become a teacher, and thought of leaving the profession.

Respondents

A total of 311 Chinese Language teachers participated in this survey, with 177 from primary schools and 134 from secondary schools. Using the *Sample Size Calculator* (The Survey System 2012), a sample of this size for an estimated population of 3000

Chinese Language teachers has a confidence interval of 5.26 %, slightly greater than the conventional 5.00 %, for confidence level of 95 %. However, a word of caution is that the compositions of the two groups of teachers may not be consistent with those in the populations of primary and secondary Chinese Language teachers.

Analysis

The data were organized and then presented as the percentages, means (standard deviations) as appropriate. Comparisons between the response patterns of the primary and secondary teachers were done by calculating the correlations where applicable.

Results

There is a female preponderance in both groups, slightly more so in the primary group. Teachers in both groups have extensive years of teaching. The primary group tends to be less experienced, with 50 % having taught for five or less years, whereas the corresponding figure for the secondary group is 36 %. In terms of qualification, both groups have 80 % holding a university degree, but while primary group has 9 % non-graduates and 11 % postgraduates, secondary group has no non-graduates and 21 % postgraduates (Table 8.2).

Teachers' Social Status

Status in Society Respondents were asked to pitch social status of the teaching profession as they perceived against eleven other commonly known professions. As can be seen in Table 8.3, for the primary teachers, the three professions perceived to

Table 8.2 The respondents

		Primary (N=177)	Secondary (N=134)	Combined (N=311)
Gender	Male	8.5	12.7	10.3
	Female	91.5	87.3	89.7
Experience	Less than 3 years	24.9	14.2	20.3
	3–5 years	24.9	21.6	23.5
	6–8 years	16.4	20.1	18.0
	9–11 years	11.3	13.4	12.2
	12 or more years	22.6	30.6	26.0
Qualification	Non-graduate	8.5	0.0	4.8
	Bachelor's degree	80.8	79.1	80.1
	Postgraduate	10.7	20.9	15.1

Table 8.3 Chinese language teachers' perception of social status

	Primary	Secondary	Combined
Medical doctor	4.0	3.7	3.9
Policeman	8.5	9.0	8.7
Lawyer	0.0	0.0	0.0
Engineer	12.5	12.7	12.6
Manager	4.0	4.5	4.2
Accountant	2.3	1.5	2.0
Librarian	2.3	3.0	2.6
Management consultant	5.1	3.7	4.5
Nurse	13.1	10.4	11.9
Social worker	48.3	51.5	49.7
Webpage designer	0.0	0.0	0.0

be on par with teaching are social worker (48 %), engineer (13 %), and nurse (13 %). For the secondary teachers, the three comparable professions are also social worker (52 %), engineer (13 %), and nurse (10 %). Although the percentages vary somewhat, the three professions are the same for the two groups. In fact, the correlation between the two patterns of response is $r=0.997$ ($p<0.05$, df 9, two-tailed), indicating practically a perfect correlation, and the two groups could well be considered as having no difference at all in their perception of social status of teachers.

The respondents were realistic to pitch teacher against social worker, engineer, and nurse. This is consistent with other studies. It is interesting that 4 % of both primary and secondary teachers considered the teaching profession as on par with medical profession and manager but none with the legal profession. There are also 9 % of both pegged teachers against policemen.

Factors Influencing Status Respondents were asked to indicate which of the listed six factors influence their social status. As shown in Table 8.4, 41 % of the primary teachers chose professional nature, followed by 17 % choosing influence on the society's development, and then 11 % choosing influence in students' characters and 10 % choosing salary. However, there are 13 % indicating that the status was influenced by none of the listed factors. A similar pattern of response was observed for the secondary teachers, except that salary was chosen as the second most influencing factor. The patterns of response between the two groups are highly correlated ($r=0.942$, $p<0.05$, df 5, two-tailed).

The finding that teacher's pay was considered by 10 % of primary teachers and 18 % of secondary teachers as a not so important influencing factor is consistent with findings of other studies. The emphasis on the professional nature of teacher's work as the influencing factor is indicative of the professionalism of the respondents. Of course, the fact that Singaporean teachers are well paid compared with teachers in many other countries might have reduced the importance placed on salary. However, influences on student' characters and the society's development received 12 % and 16 %, respectively; this shows that the teachers see meanings of

Table 8.4 Factors influencing teachers' social status

	Primary	Secondary	Combined
Teacher's salary	10.2	17.9	13.5
Influence on student's future	7.9	9.7	8.7
Influence on students' characters	10.7	12.7	11.6
Influence on the society's development	16.9	14.2	15.7
Influence on world ranking	0.0	0.7	0.3
Professional nature of teacher's work	41.2	32.1	37.3
None of the above	13.0	12.7	12.9

teaching beyond the immediate and extrinsic reward. It is also interesting that influence on world ranking was not considered at all; this suggests that either the teachers were not aware of the international achievement surveys (e.g., PISA, TIMSS) or these were not of relevance to them, although they are to the administrators and policy makers.

The respondents were also asked, *If none of the above, what?* There were 40 written responses, most of which named the recognition, understanding, and respect of the parents, the society, and the nation as the influencing factor of teachers' social status. Below are some such responses:

- *Parents' evaluation of teachers.*
- *The affirmation of teachers by the society (government, community, parents, sponsors, school).*
- *The community's understanding of the teachers' actual work.*
- *The nation's attitude toward teachers.*

Status Within School Respondents were asked how they perceived their status in the school context comparing with teachers of other subjects. Table 8.5 shows that 33 % of the primary Chinese Language teachers perceived their status being on par with English Language teachers, and another 33 % considered themselves comparable to teachers of Social Studies. However, only 13 % of the secondary Chinese Language teachers perceived themselves being on par with English language teachers, but 44 % compared themselves with teachers of Social Studies. Moreover, there were 20 % Chinese Language teachers who pitched themselves against teachers of Art, Music, and Physical Education and another 20 % against Teachers of Technical Education and Food and Consumer Education. The correlation between the patterns of the primary and secondary Chinese Language teachers is only a moderate $r=0.592$ ($p>0.05$, $df\ 4$, two-tailed) indicating that the two groups perceived differently.

The different patterns of response of the primary and secondary respondents indicate the different school contexts. While 33 % of primary Chinese Language teachers considered themselves being on par with the English Language teachers, only 13 % of secondary Chinese Language teachers felt likewise. This could well be an indirect reflection of the relative emphasis placed on the two languages at the two levels: Chinese Language is one of the four equally weighted subjects in the Primary School Leaving Examination, but it is only one of the many subjects at the

Table 8.5 Chinese language teachers' perception of social status within the school

	Primary	Secondary	Combined
English language	32.8	13.4	24.4
Mathematics	3.4	0.0	1.9
Science	13.0	2.2	8.3
Social studies (geography, history)	32.8	44.0	37.6
Art, music, physical education	11.3	20.1	15.1
Technical, food, and consumer education	6.8	20.1	12.5

Table 8.6 Factors influencing Chinese language teachers' social status

	Primary	Secondary	Combined
Teacher's salary	0.0	0.0	0.0
Influence on student's future	20.9	35.1	27.0
Influence on student's character	11.9	11.2	11.6
Influence on the society's development	5.6	7.5	6.4
Influence on world ranking	17.5	10.4	14.4
Professional nature of teacher's work	24.9	21.6	23.5
None of the above	19.2	14.2	17.0

GCE O-Level Examination, albeit compulsory. It seems that to the secondary Chinese Language teachers, the subject is more similar in nature and hence importance to non-science subjects, as very few compared it with science and mathematics.

Factors Influencing Within-School Status Respondents were asked to indicate which of the listed six factors influence their social status. As shown in Table 8.6, 25 % of the primary teachers chose professional nature, followed by 21 % choosing influence on the students' future. Another 18 % considered influence on world ranking as the factor and 12 % chose influence on students' characters. However, there were 19 % who considered none of the listed factors.

As for the secondary Chinese Language teachers, 35 % chose influence in the students' future as the factor. This is followed by 22 % who considered professional nature as the factor. Besides, 11 % chose influence on students' characters and 10 % chose influence in world ranking. However, 14 % considered the listed factors as not influencing. The correlation between the response patterns of the primary and secondary respondents is a high $r=0.785$ ($p < 0.05$, $df 5$, two-tailed), indicating similarity in perceptions to a large extent.

It is interesting that, for the two groups combined, influence on student's future attracted the most responses, followed closely by professional nature of teacher's work. This reflects the respondents' concern for future orientation more than immediate effect of teaching. It is gratifying that the teachers are aware of their impact on their students in the long run.

Table 8.7 Encouragement for own children to become teachers

	Primary		Secondary		Combined	
	Son	Daughter	Son	Daughter	Son	Daughter
Definitely will do	4.0	7.3	2.2	1.5	3.2	4.8
May do	44.1	59.3	30.6	55.2	38.3	57.5
May not do	40.1	24.9	36.6	27.6	38.6	26.1
Definitely will not do	11.9	8.5	30.6	15.7	20.0	11.6

To the question *If none of the above, what?* 58 respondents made written responses. Most of the responses mentioned mainly the valuation of the mother tongue language by the school leaders and, somewhat lesser, the parents. Typical responses are these:

- *The school leader values the Mother Tongue Language.*
- *The parents' and students' attitude towards the Mother Tongue Language.*

Encouragement for Children to Become Teachers When asked whether they would encourage their children to become teachers, only a small proportion of the respondents were positive (Table 8.7). Generally, the primary teachers were more positive than were the secondary teachers. Also, both groups of teachers were more positive for the daughter than the son. Moreover, the correlations of response patterns are stronger for the daughter ($r=0.968$, $p<0.05$, $df\ 2$, two-tailed) than for the son ($r=0.740$, $p>0.05$, $df\ 2$, two-tailed). In other words, the primary and secondary teachers agreed more when the daughter is involved, whereas their view regarding the son is less similar.

The difference in response patterns concerning sons and daughters of the two groups of respondents may well indicate the aspirations parents have for their children of different gender. It is a fact that males have more career choices than females even in Singapore. Moreover, traditionally, teaching has been considered a job more suitable for females than for males, especially at the primary school level. Thus, the observed difference does not come as a surprise.

Asking parents whether they would encourage their children to opt for a job is an indirect way of finding out whether the parents value the job. In this sense, the response patterns indicate the slightly more positive attitude the respondents have for teaching.

Respondents were asked for the reasons they would or would not encourage their children to become teachers. For this, there were 149 written responses.

For sons, positive responses are illustrated as follows:

- *Teaching is a stable job and it gives a sense of achievement.*
- *Help students to become useful and contributing members of the nation and society.*
- *If he is interested, I have no objection.*
- *Hope he will pass on the values and knowledge he has learned.*
- *Teaching is a respectable job, and males have more opportunities of promotion.*

Examples of neutral responses include these:

- *Depends on his interest and strengths.*
- *Have to consider his aspiration, character, and ability.*
- *Have to see if he is interesting in teaching.*
- *He should make his choice; I am neither supporting nor objecting.*
- *I will respect his choice.*

Negative responses are illustrated thus:

- *Teaching means hard work.*
- *It is difficult to look after children.*
- *He will have more opportunities to develop in the private sector.*
- *Teaching is not suitable for males.*
- *Very tiring and not valued in the society.*
- *Limited scope for development.*

For daughters, positive responses include these:

- *The work environment is relatively simple job and the working hours are regular.*
- *Girls are more patient and teaching is a stable job without having to work overtime.*
- *It is a meaningful job.*
- *The school is a protected work environment.*
- *It is a stable job, allowing the work and look after the family at the same time.*

Here are some neutral responses:

- *If she wishes, I have no objection. She has to qualities to become a teachers – caring, articulate, like to share knowledge and experience.*
- *I will respect her interest.*
- *Depends on whether she likes it.*
- *As long as she like it.*
- *She has the right to choose.*

Illustrative negative responses:

- *Teaching is a hard work.*
- *May not have time for the family.*
- *Too tiring; parents and students are unlike those in the past.*
- *Long working hours and difficult students.*
- *Heavy workload, student disrespect, and having to look after family: too tiring.*

Salary As Table 8.8 shows, when as asked for their views of their salary, 33 % primary teachers and 24 % secondary teachers considered their salaries to be just right. At the same time, 67 % of primary teachers and 74 % of secondary teachers considered their salaries being either *a little too low* or *much too low*. The primary teachers suggested an increase of 16 %, whereas the secondary teachers suggested an increase of 19 %. As shown by the standard deviations, the suggested increase is much greater among the secondary teachers. The patterns of response have a high correlation of $r=0.951$ ($p<0.05$, df 3, two-tailed).

Table 8.8 Teacher's salary

	Primary	Secondary	Combined
Much too high	0.6	0.7	0.6
A little too high	0.0	0.7	0.3
Just right	32.8	23.9	29.0
A little too low	34.5	41.8	37.6
Much too low	32.2	32.8	32.5
Suggested increase			
Mean	15.6 %	18.6 %	16.9 %
SD	9.7 %	15.9 %	12.7 %

Table 8.9 Thoughts of leaving the teaching profession

	Primary	Secondary	Combined
Many times	13.6	20.9	16.7
Once or twice	57.6	53.7	55.9
Never	28.8	25.4	27.3

Although Singaporean teachers are the highest-paid in the world, there is still a sizeable proportion of the respondents suggesting an increase in the teacher salary. This should not be taken to mean the Chinese Language teachers were unjustified or unrealistic, as they most like compared their salary with those of other professions in Singapore requiring comparable qualification than with teachers of other counties.

Thought of Leaving When asked whether they have ever thought of leaving the teaching profession, 29 % of primary teachers and 25 % of secondary teachers never have thought of this (Table 8.9). At the same time, 58 % primary teachers and 54 % secondary teachers have thought of leaving once or twice. Moreover, 14 % primary teachers and 21 % secondary teachers have thought of leaving many times. The patterns of responses correlate with $r=0.876$ ($p>0.05$, df 1, two-tailed), indicating a high degree of similarity.

If the percentages of responding *Once or twice* and *Never* were combined and interpreted as indicating staying or not really will leave teaching, then 83 % of the teachers are stable on the job. Some of the 17 % who have thought of leaving many times may ultimately leave if they find more attractive alternatives which they believe will be more satisfying than teaching. Although some turnover is natural and to be expected, this may upset the system as teacher turnover is disruptive to the schools and the students. It will be useful to find out from such teachers as to the reasons for them to consider seriously to leave teaching.

To the open-ended questions on the thought of leaving teaching, the respondents made 166 written responses. Below are some of the typical responses:

- *Long hour, great pressure, and heavy workload.*
- *Although the students are different every year, but the work is routine and monotonous.*

Table 8.10 Job satisfaction

	Primary	Secondary	Combined
Very satisfied	5.1	3.7	4.5
Satisfied	83.1	73.9	79.1
Unsatisfied	11.3	20.9	15.4
Very unsatisfied	0.6	1.5	1.0

- *Have to consider the salary and prospect.*
- *Having to handle too many things unrelated to teaching.*
- *Social status is low; unrespect locally.*

Job Satisfaction Respondents were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with the job. As Table 8.10 shows, 85 % of primary and 77 % of secondary teachers felt *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their job. There are, however, 12 % primary teachers and 22 % secondary teachers who indicated either *unsatisfied* or *very unsatisfied*. The response patterns correlate with $r=0.988$ ($p<0.05$, df 2, two-tailed), indicating highly similar feelings about the teaching job.

That 84 % of the respondents were either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* is reassuring. As alluded to earlier and shown by relevant studies, satisfied teachers are physiologically and psychologically healthier and will bring about better student performance. This also ensures a stable teaching force which is an advantage to the schools both administratively and professionally in that schools will be in a better position to plan for medium- or long-term improvement on the Chinese Language curriculum and instruction.

When asked for the sources of job satisfaction, 130 written responses were made. Typical responses are quoted below:

- *I like Chinese Language.*
- *Teach the students well so that they are good not only in school work but also grow in their lives. This gives me a tremendous sense of achievement.*
- *Although students generally do not like Chinese Language, but there are still some who will put in their efforts; this is my reward.*
- *Students are lovable and the work is meaningful.*
- *The salary is reasonably attractive and teaching is full of fun, although I have to do a lot of administrative chores.*
- *Students are appreciative.*
- *Feel competent. Moreover, Chinese Language inculcates cultural values which are lacking in other subjects. Wish to make a contribution.*
- *Still find time to be with the family; not bad!*
- *Occasionally get affirmation from school leaders, colleagues, parents, and students.*
- *Teaching Chinese Language is a challenge.*
- *Have good rapport with my students, this gives me a sense of achievement.*

Table 8.11a Aspects of job satisfaction (primary)

	Primary			
	SD	D	A	SA
The advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages	1.1	17.5	77.4	4.0
If I could decide again, I would still choose to work as a teacher	1.1	22.6	53.1	37.4
I would like to changes to another school if that were possible	3.4	53.1	38.4	5.1
I regret that I decided to become a teacher	16.4	76.3	6.8	0.6
I enjoy working at this school	2.3	16.9	72.3	8.5
This school is a good place to work in	2.8	20.9	68.9	7.3
I thank that the teaching profession is valued in the society	2.3	29.9	63.3	4.5
I am satisfied with my performance in this school	1.1	12.4	81.4	5.1
All in all, I am satisfied with my job	0.6	9.6	84.7	5.1

Note: *SD* strongly disagree, *D* disagree, *A* agree, *SA* strongly agree

Aspects of Job Satisfaction Table 8.11a shows for the primary teachers their responses to the various aspects of job satisfaction. As shown therein, 75 % or more of them *agreed* or *strongly agree* with six of the seven positively worded statements, indicating that they found the advantages of being a teacher, would choose to become teachers again, enjoyed their present schools, found the school a good place to work in, were satisfied with own performance, and were generally satisfied with the job. Only 7 % regretted that they chose to become teachers. However, only 68 % believed that the teaching profession was valued in the society. On the negative side, 44 % would like to change to another school and 7 % regretted to have chosen teaching.

As Table 8.11b shows, the response pattern of the secondary teachers is highly similar to that of the primary teachers. However, the percentages of positive responses of the secondary teachers are generally somewhat lower than those of the primary teachers. It is worthy of note that while 91 % of primary teachers would choose to teach again, only 64 % of secondary teachers would do so, with a difference of 26 %. There other differences varying from 5 % (School a good place to work in) to 10 % (Advantage of being a teacher). On the negative side, 46 % would like to change school and 13 % regretted to have chosen to teach.

In fact, the correlation is a near perfect one of $r=0.989$ ($p<0.05$, df 8, two-tailed) for the *agree* response of the two groups of teachers. When the primary and secondary groups were combined (Table 8.11c), three-quarters or more of the Chinese Language teachers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with six of the seven positively worded statements, indicating that they were satisfied with being teachers generally, and only two-thirds (67 %) believe that the society valued the teaching profession. However, in spite of such resounding positive response, there were 45 % who would like to change school, suggesting that there were some problems with the schools they were currently working in. It is gratifying that only 10 % indicated a regret for choosing teaching.

Table 8.11b Aspects of job satisfaction (secondary)

	Secondary			
	SD	D	A	SA
The advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages	2.2	26.1	67.2	4.5
If I could decide again, I would still choose to work as a teacher	2.2	33.6	58.2	6.0
I would like to changes to another school if that were possible	2.2	51.5	41.0	5.2
I regret that I decided to become a teacher	6.7	80.6	12.7	0.0
I enjoy working at this school	1.5	25.4	70.1	3.0
This school is a good place to work in	2.2	26.1	68.7	3.0
I thank that the teaching profession is valued in the society	2.2	32.8	61.2	3.7
I am satisfied with my performance in this school	0.7	22.4	75.4	1.5
All in all, I am satisfied with my job	0.0	19.4	79.1	1.5

Note: *SD* strongly disagree, *D* disagree, *A* agree, *SA* strongly agree

Table 8.11c Aspects of job satisfaction (combined)

	Combined			
	SD	D	A	SA
The advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages	1.6	21.2	73.0	4.2
If I could decide again, I would still choose to work as a teacher	1.6	27.3	55.3	23.9
I would like to changes to another school if that were possible	2.9	52.4	39.5	5.1
I regret that I decided to become a teacher	12.2	78.2	9.3	0.3
I enjoy working at this school	2.0	20.6	71.4	6.1
This school is a good place to work in	2.5	23.1	68.8	5.4
I thank that the teaching profession is valued in the society	2.3	31.1	62.4	4.2
I am satisfied with my performance in this school	0.9	16.7	78.8	3.5
All in all, I am satisfied with my job	0.3	13.8	82.3	3.5

Note: *SD* strongly disagree, *D* disagree, *A* agree, *SA* strongly agree

Although the general tone is positive, there are pockets of respondents who are not happy in their current schools and wish to change job place. Regrettably, this study did not ask for the reasons for such dissatisfaction.

Conclusion

Teachers' perception of the social status of the teaching profession and their feeling of job satisfaction are two separated yet related aspects of the teachers' professional life. The present study focuses specifically on these aspects of the Chinese Language teachers in Singaporean primary and secondary schools. The main findings are summarized below:

1. Half of the primary and secondary Chinese Language teachers perceived their social status as being on par with social worker, although engineer and nurse were considered by slightly more than one-tenth each. On the whole, the response patterns of the two groups are highly similar. Professional nature of teacher's work was considered as the most influencing factor on teacher's social status and was endorsed by slightly more than one-third of the Chinese Language teachers, slightly more by those in the primary school than those in the secondary school. Teacher's salary, influence on student's future, and influence on the society's development were each endorsed by between one-tenth and one-fifth of the teachers. The response patterns of the two groups are highly similar.
2. Within the school context, one-third of primary Chinese Language teachers compared themselves with English Language teachers and the other one-third with Social Studies teachers. Slightly more than four-tenths of secondary Chinese Language teachers compared themselves with Social Studies teachers and only slightly more than one-tenth with English Language teachers, but four-tenths with non-science teachers. The response patterns of the two groups of teachers were rather different. Professional nature of teachers' work was considered by one-quarter of primary school Chinese Language teachers and slightly more than one-fifth of secondary Chinese Language teachers. At the same time, one-fifth of those in the primary group considered influence on student's life but slightly more than one-third of those in the secondary groups considered influence on student's future as an important factor. World ranking was considered a factor influencing teacher's status within the school context by more primary Chinese Language teachers than those in secondary schools, but influence on student's character was considered an important factor equally by the two groups of teachers. Where influencing factors are concerned, the response patterns of the two groups of teachers were moderately similar.
3. The attitude toward teaching as inferred from whether the Chinese Language would encourage their children to become teachers is somewhat ambiguous, albeit slanting more toward the positive side. This is especially for the daughters, with slightly more than four-tenths for the son and almost two-thirds for the daughter. The response patterns of the two groups were highly similar where the daughter is concerned, but there is only a moderate degree of similarity where the son is involved.
4. Three-tenths of the Chinese Language teachers considered the teacher's salary were just right but the rest felt that it was a little too low or too low. This is in spite of the fact that teachers in Singapore have the highest pay internationally. The response patterns of the primary and secondary groups were highly similar.
5. While slightly more than one-quarter of the Chinese Language teachers have never thought of leaving the teaching professions, the rest have had this thought once or twice or more. The reasons for thinking of leaving include heavy workload, long hours, great pressure, monotony, duties unrelated to teaching, and social status.
6. Four-fifths of the Chinese Language teachers acknowledged that they were satisfied with the job and even one-twentieth felt very satisfied. Intrinsic interest in

Chinese language and culture, helping student grow in school work and life, appreciative students, sense of efficacy, and affirmation by school leaders and others are given as some of the reasons for job satisfaction.

7. Slightly more than seven-tenths of the Chinese Language teachers saw the advantages of being a teacher and enjoyed working in their present schools and almost eight-tenths were satisfied with their own performance. However, seemingly contradictory, four-tenths would like to change schools, although only one-tenth regretted that they chose teaching.

Weaving the above findings together, the general picture of the Chinese Language teachers is that a large majority of them are satisfied with their job and they have a realistic perception of their social status vis-à-vis other professions requiring similar qualifications. Interestingly, most of the findings are consistent with what international surveys like the GTSI and the SALIS have reported recently. Unique to the present study is that it involved a specific group of teachers, those teaching Chinese Language in Singapore, and not teachers in general.

In view of the outstanding performance of Singaporean students, both primary and secondary ones, in the international achievement comparisons (such as the PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS), the findings of the present study once again confirm the common belief that satisfied workers are more efficacious and productive.

Acknowledgments Thanks are due to Mr. Lim Yeepin and Miss Shi Lin for their valuable assistance in gathering and organizing the survey data. The cooperation of the Chinese language teachers in completing the survey questionnaire is much appreciated.

References

- Crotty, J. M. (2014, January 30). *Report find rising job satisfaction and autonomy among teachers*. Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jamesmarshallcrotty/2014/01/30/common-core-shocker-study-finds-rising-job-satisfaction-and-autonomy-among-teachers/>
- Denning, S. (2011, December 9). *The ten happiest jobs*. Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2011/09/12/the-ten-happiest-jobs/>
- Dolton, P., & Marcenaro-Gutierrez, O. (2013). *Global teacher status index 2013*. London: Varkey GEMS Foundation.
- Iwu, C. G., Gwija, S. A., Benedict, H. O., & Tengeh, R. K. (2013). Teacher job satisfaction and learner performance in South Africa. *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies*, 5(12), 838–850.
- OECD. (2014). *TALIS 2013 results: An international perspective on teaching and learning*. TALIS, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>
- Richmond, E. (2013, February 21). *Teacher job satisfaction hits 25-year low*. The Atlantic. <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/02/teacher-job-satisfaction-hits-25-year-low/273383/>