

School Improvement in Times of Teacher Shortages

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Context

- Teacher shortages (UNESCO 2024)
- Measures: acquisition of additional staff to be quickly deployed in schools (mostly with different previous qualifications, without any pedagogical training, more or less intensive in-service training (EC 2024))
- Research focusses on characteristics and experiences of these 'new' teachers, however, more rarely on the ways schools adapt to and integrate new staff

Overview

- Teacher shortage in Austria
 - History
 - Measures
 - Current situation
 - Literature analysis
- Study: School development in times of teacher shortage
 - Research question
 - Method
 - Results
- Discussion

Teacher shortage in Austria – *history*

- Recurring phenomenon (AT: Posch, 1967; GE: Titze, 1999; Zymek & Heinemann, 2020)
- *2010ff*: Increasing media reports predicting a shortage of teachers: teachers' unions, state school board presidents and oppositional politicians
- *Ministry*: Shortage is regional (Vorarlberg and Vienna), subject-specific (mathematics and natural sciences) and temporary; there will be a 'teacher' in every classroom on the first school day

Document analysis:
Ministry websites and brochures;
parliamentary questions and debates; archive of a quality newspaper 2001–2024

Keywords: tt shortage, supply, employment (Altrichter & Soukup-Altrichter, 2024)



Teacher shortage in Austria – *history*

- *Research*: Data on the development of teacher supply is available but is not widely discussed. ‘Although the problem was recognised early on, no strategy was developed. Policy has so far been dominated mainly by ad hoc measures.’ (Lassnigg, 2022, 10; see also Bauer, 2023).
- *Court of Auditors (RH, 2025, 6)*: ‘Since 2009, the ministry has been producing demand forecasts that indicate a shortage of teaching staff from 2018/19 onwards.’ ‘However, no comprehensive and systematic measures have been taken.’ (RH, 2025a)
- *Mid-2022*: Increasing warnings of a serious shortage of teachers

Teacher shortage in Austria – *measures*

- 25 October 2022: *Ministerial ‘package of measures’* (Klasse Job – ‘the Second Republic's biggest teacher recruitment drive’), consisting of ‘three strands’:
 - Promoting a *new image of teachers*: to highlight the ‘diverse range of tasks’ and improve the image of the profession
 - *Reform of initial teacher education*: Shortening of the bachelor's phase from 8 to 6 semesters + ‘improvement of practice-oriented study content’
 - *Intensive personnel management + recruitment of new target groups*: Media campaign (€600,000; ‘new, contemporary information and communication formats’) - Improved administrative procedures + application processes (central platform [klassejob.at](https://www.klassejob.at))

Teacher shortage in Austria – *measures*

Recruiting new target groups? → Three groups of non-fully qualified teachers in Austrian schools

(1) ‘Career changers’

- = University graduates in a subject relevant to teaching (at least 180 EC; 3 years of work experience)
- Application process, ‘certified’ for a school subject
- Employment in a school + part-time training (60-120 EC) - approx. 2/3 as self-study
- ‘most important measure ... to recruit additional teachers’ (BMBWF, 2023f, 6) = new legal option to make it easier for ‘career changers’ in ‘shortage subjects’ to train as teachers

Teacher shortage in Austria – *measures*

(2) Teacher education students

- before completing their BEd degree (employed through ‘special contracts’)
- [BEd graduates are employed with standard contracts (must complete their master's degree within eight years)]

Teacher shortage in Austria – *measures*

(3) Special contracts (SovL)

- = Persons for whom no pre-qualifications are defined
- Limited to one year, annual renewal possible 'as long as no suitable teachers are available'
- Long-standing legal option
- Requirement to complete a certain number of ECTS (20 EC / 60 EC / 90 EC) at a university of education within 8 years.
- Salary reductions of 5% to 25% for special contract teachers, depending on previous education, even after completing the required courses

Table 1: Newly hired teachers (source: BMBWF, 2025)

	2022/23				2023/24				2024/25			
	% in APS	% in AHS/ BMHS	total	total %	% in APS	% in AHS/ BMHS	total	total %	% in APS	% in AHS/ BMHS	total	total %
(a) TEd graduates	59,51	40,49	3497	55,80%	61,37	38,63	3948	50,50%	71,34	28,66	3360	50,93%
(b) 'Career changers'	38,48	61,52	343	5,50%	41,81	58,19	653	8,40%	45,76	54,24	684	10,37%
(c) TEd students	75,80	24,20	1446	23,10%	77,45	22,55	1472	18,80%	78,45	21,55	1420	21,52%
(d) other 'special contracts'	79,18	20,82	980	15,60%	74,86	25,14	1774	22,30%	75,64	24,36	1133	17,17%
total	65,19	34,81	6266	100%	66,06	33,94	7817	100%	70,96	29,04	6597	100%
<i>total (b) - (d) (= not fully qualified teachers)</i>	<i>72,37</i>	<i>27,63</i>	<i>2769</i>	<i>44,20%</i>	<i>70,30</i>	<i>28,93</i>	<i>3899</i>	<i>49,50%</i>	<i>70,56</i>	<i>29,44</i>	<i>3237</i>	<i>49,07%</i>
thereof: reactivated retired teachers									0,9	1,1	62	0,9%

Teacher shortage in Austria – *current situation*

- Just under half of all newly hired teachers in the past two school years were not fully qualified teachers.
- While the proportion of non-fully qualified teachers rose by 5% in the 2023/24 school year compared to the previous year, the proportion remained roughly the same last year
- Largest group of teachers who are not fully qualified: LA students without a degree, other special contracts (23/24)
- The overall proportion of ‘career changers’ (b) among newly hired staff is increasing, which could be a result of the Ministry's efforts to attract ‘new target groups’.
- Academic (Gymnasium-type) secondary schools (AHS/BMHS) receive a higher proportion of career changers with a degree in the subject (b) and fully qualified teachers (a; except 24/25), while primary schools and practice-oriented secondary schools/middle schools (APS) receive more staff without a degree (c, d) .

Teacher shortage in Austria – *Literature review*

Thematic foci (methodological strategies):

- Analysis of education policy:
 - Schnider & Braunsteiner (2024); Altrichter & Soukup-Altrichter (2024; document analysis); Court of Auditors (2025; statistical data)
 - Career changer programmes: Flick-Holtsch, Forster-Heinzer & Frey (2024)
- Teacher training students who entered the profession early:
 - ‘Assessments of their own professionalisation process’ (Bacher et al., 2024; qualitative survey; similar results are reported in Rechnungshof, 2025)
 - Stress, effects on motivation, satisfaction and health (Helm & Hagenauer, 2024; quantitative survey; Helm, Hagenauer, Altrichter & Soukup-Altrichter, 2025; quantitative survey; Hagenauer & Helm, 2025; quantitative survey)
- Career changers:
 - Differences in demographic characteristics, profession-related beliefs and self-efficacy beliefs (Groß Ophoff et al., 2024; Gamsjäger, Himmelsbach, Weber, Groß Ophoff & Frey, 2025)

Teacher shortage in Austria – *Literature review*

Thematic foci (methodological strategies):

- Perceptions and motives of *reactivated retired teachers* (Resch, 2025; qualitative interviews)
- *Parents' perceptions* on the use of non-fully qualified teachers (Dorfer, Aistleitner, Helm, Demski & Paseka, 2025; quantitative online survey)

→ Previous research has focused on *qualification programmes and newly hired teachers*,

→ but there have been no analyses from the *perspective of schools* that have to cope with teacher shortages and non-fully qualified staff

- ‘strive to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of teacher shortage in the local school context’ (Seeliger & Håkansson Lindqvist, 2023, 10)
- Research desiderata: medium- and long-term consequences for the teaching staff themselves, the school team, school quality and the profession (Sandmeier & Herzog, 2024)
- Recent projects in Germany and Switzerland (Baar, 2025; Jutzi et al., 2025)

Research questions

- How is the work of school leaders changing in times of teacher shortages?
- What impact do teacher shortages and the employment of not-fully qualified teachers have on the further development of a school?

Research design

- 15 qualitative guided interviews with school leaders
- Content analysis according to Mayring.
- This presentation: Results for secondary schools.
- [5 primary schools, 1 special school] 7 secondary Mittelschulen /Polytechnical Schools, 1 upper secondary Technical college) in an Austrian federal state affected by teacher shortages.

Sample: Schools

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>N of staff</i>	<i>N of not fully-qualified staff</i>	<i>% of not fully-qualified staff</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Unfilled teaching hours</i>
MSE	Sec MS	17	5	29,4%	city	no (since Dec.)
MSB	Sec MS + PTS	33	9	27,3%	city	
MSW	Sec MS	47	10	21,3%	city	1-2 FTE
MSM	Sec MS	50	8	16,0%	country	5FTE(M,Sp,Rel)
MSL	Sec MS + PTS	40	4	10,0%	country	some (Sports)
MSS	Sec MS + PTS	50	5	10,0%	country	no
PTS	Sec PTS	13	3	23,1%	city	no
HTL	Upper Sec BMHS	200			city	

Note: Bipartite secondary system: Mittelschulen (10-14y) + Polytechnical Schools (15y) vs. Academic AHS (10-18y) + upper secondary vocational schools (BMHS; 14-19y)

(1) How is the work of school leaders changing in times of teacher shortages?

In times of teacher shortages, the school leaders in our study report more and more demanding tasks in the following areas:

- (1) Recruitment/acquisition of teachers
- (2) Increased organisational and administrative tasks: organising teaching coverage and other school tasks in the face of staff shortage
- (3) Support and qualification for new teaching staff

Recruitment: which staff are preferred by school leaders?

- **Type A:** *prefers students who have already acquired basic teaching skills and are completing their studies alongside their work.*
 - challenging to coordinate two timetables (teacher training college and school)
'They [students] have what career changers don't have. And that is precisely this pedagogical depth, and in a place like this, didactics and pedagogy are almost more important than subject-specific depth.' (MSW, 175–186)
- **Type B:** *Career changers underestimate the tasks and requirements for teachers*
 - especially in the area of classroom management
"Everyone believes that. You go in there and then everyone is quiet and it just goes on like that. Well, it doesn't work like that. And the lack of didactics is a problem. When I go into the classrooms, I see a lot of things I don't want to see, (...) a type of teaching that we've had before, where we fall far behind again, with a lot of frontal teaching.
 - receive too little support (up to 8 years before completing their training (HLG))

Recruitment: which staff are preferred by school leaders?

- ***TYPE C: Career changers yes, but***
- Career changers do good work and are easy to deploy, but clearly need guidance during the induction phase (in the first year), e.g. in dealing with children and classroom management (MSL, 77–82).

‘In my opinion, the number of career changers should not be too high, otherwise it really becomes a burden for a school.’ (MSW, 344 – 345)

Recruitment: which staff are preferred by school leaders?

- **TYPE D:** *Career changers bring something new to the school and are an asset (MSS, MSB):*
- because they bring life experience and skills from their previous professional experience that are not usually provided by teacher training in general education:

"For example, I now have a career changer... there's a container outside for a cycling project, we've started a bike workshop (...) and as soon as the weather allows, my colleague (...) will be busy building a self-sufficient building with a wind turbine on top, solar panels, water treatment, external cladding and so on." (MSB, 484 – 492)

→ 'a good mix' (of old, young, career changers – traditionally qualified, etc.) (MSS)

Support and qualification for new teaching staff

- Mentoring (induction phase) (MSW, MSE, HTL, MSB)
‘Intensive mentoring for one year, and in some cases beyond.’ (MSW, 286)
- Handouts with school rules, regular events, competitions, important events over the course of the four years (MSL, 374–378), or entire lesson plans (MSS)
- Class visits by the school leader, department heads and workshop management (HTL) ‘so that they can observe and be supported.’ (HTL, 283)
- Regular conversations with the school leader (MSS):
- Intensive support by the school leader in the case of educational challenges (MSB)
- Collegial support (PTS, MSS)

So for me, the whole teaching staff is always a support measure, that's how it works.” (MSS, 367)

feedback: *‘And then there's always the team, so you have everything.’ (MSB, 515 – 517)*

Support and qualification for new teaching staff

- Teams
 - team teaching
 - deliberately assembled year teams or team teaching
- Subject leaders
 - joint lesson planning
 - weekly learning packages
- In-school professional development (IPD)
 - Mutual learning
 - ‘internal teacher leisure activities’:

‘And (...) what do teachers do when they meet? They talk about school again anyway, but you just have more time to talk to each other,’ reports the head teacher. (MSL, 396 – 403)

Support and qualification for new teaching staff

2 mindsets :

(A) Goal: smooth running of everyday school work:

- disciplinary problems → a second teacher is assigned
- team teaching does not work → class is divided into two groups (PTS)

(B) Goal: staff development and quality assurance

- train new colleagues to meet the school's own standards
- use time before the retirement of experienced staff to pass on knowledge to young teachers and career changers (MSB, 676 – 696)

(2) Impact of teacher shortage on schools

- Increased workload, experience of stress:
 - High teaching workload, additional tasks and overtime work means that there is little time left for other activities.
 - *You notice (...) that you're slowly running out of steam. (MSW, 488–489)*
- 'Despite all this'
 - extracurricular activities continue (MSM, 583–589)
- School development: integration of 'newcomers'
 - methodological and didactic setbacks: *"that the quality of teaching will naturally suffer (MSB 676–696)*
 - training new colleagues (MSB, MSW, MSS)
- School development through career changers
 - accounts of practical work experience as career orientation (MSE).
 - E.g. newly established bicycle workshop with autonomous energy generation
 - *'And of course, this also has an effect on the teaching staff, because they see that a lot of momentum is being generated there.'* (MSB, 717 – 744)
- Maintaining established standards
 - know-how and/or practical experience of educational innovations (e.g. performance assessment, inclusion, etc.)
 - *Maintaining the standards developed over the last nine years is an important concern and requires systematic training (MSW 506 – 508).*

Discussion

- Many of the developments and experiences observed cannot be attributed solely to the 'impact of teacher shortage', but also to at least *two parallel and interacting developments*, namely
 - The '*school autonomy package*' in 2017 has led to school leaders playing a more active role in filling positions.
 - The *wave of retirements* among the baby boomer generation is leading to major upheavals in some teaching staffs
- The focus of education policy: coping with the current emergency situation vs. developing teacher qualifications
 - '*No class without a supervising adult person*' vs. an increasing number of classes being taught by people without full teaching qualifications
 - *Qualification measures* for career changers and teachers on 'special contracts' + entitlement to permanent employment create a parallel structure to existing teacher training courses

Discussion

- Deprofessionalisation?

"But you can definitely see the difference compared to staff who have simply learned how to do it." (MSW, 275)

"It's true that all trained teachers then say, well, if everyone can do it as well (as is often said in public discussions), then what did we do our training for?" (MSE, p. 17)

- the lack of formal training must be seen in relation to other qualities:
 - partial compensation
 - new impulses
 - more life experience: helpful in dealing with (difficult) adolescents (MSS)
- personality and practical and interpersonal skills are more important than professional training anyway.
- Tradition of out-of-field teaching in middle schools
- In-school professional development

Discussion

In times of shortage: *next step in the 'corporisation of schools'?*

- More *tasks/responsibility in personnel recruitment*, especially in times of shortage
- Schools taking on *responsibility for qualifying personnel*
 - Potential: better alignment of teaching personnel with the school's focus areas and sharpening of the school's educational profile
 - Fragmentation of qualifications (training of career changers and special contracts is not coordinated with the teacher education system)
- *Changed self-image* of the school as a company:
 - Schools have to compete with other schools for staff
 - applicants have various expectations, schools have to flexibly take them into account

'It was easier when allocation was made by the education authority.' (MSW, 91 – 3)

Limitations and next steps

- So far, only the perspective of secondary school head teachers has been taken into account; the *perspectives of teachers, pupils, school partners and school supervisors* should also be sought
- Sampling: search for schools via the Univ of Teacher Education Institute for Further Education and School Development, potential *bias towards development-oriented schools*
- Next steps: integrate secondary and primary data

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