

# Managing the Quality of Teaching in Kyrgyzstan

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A Case Study

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Explore | Participate | Change

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# IMPRESSUM

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## FOREWORD

**N**EPC Policy Labs are biannual events based on the comparative policy analysis conducted by NEPC members on a burning policy issue. It gathers policy makers, policy analysts and practitioners and consist of learning session where the results of the comparative policy analysis are presented and a policy solution generating session where through interaction and other thinking methods participants generate policy solutions and recommendations for their national education system.

The following publication is conceived as one of the “follow up” features of the Policy Lab

that took place in Moscow in February 2017 dedicated to school governance, hosted by the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, with a focus on three countries: Azerbaijan, Kirgizstan and Russia.

This report by Aleksandr Ivanov, Director of the Foundation Education Initiatives Support, is dedicated to the analysis of the quality of teaching in Kyrgyzstan with the aim of identifying challenges in the school system and proposing reflections beyond the policy lab completion.

# CASE STUDY

## Introduction

The problems of poor quality of teaching in Kyrgyzstan schools are rooted in the system inherited from the Soviet time. To a large extent these are caused by the low degree of the resource provision, high general degree of poverty and as a consequence the drain of qualified teaching cadre who left the system of education in the first several years of the new republic establishment. As a consequence of the low status of the teaching profession, a number of young people aspiring to become school teachers has reduced and the number of higher educational institutions training for this profession has reduced accordingly. Very often, the candidates for this profession were people with a very low level of academic achievement. The teacher's job has become the last choice for the young people who had no chance to get another specialty. Besides, not more than one third of the graduates of a pedagogical institute or a faculty winded up as school teachers. Moreover, the former cohort of school teachers kept ageing and the combination of these processes had a very negative effect upon the capacity of the system of education. One should also bear in mind that the in-service training institutes responsible for professional development of teachers - the Kyrgyz Academy of Education and 2 regional institutes were failing to fulfil their mission. They could only reach 15% of the target audience entitled to in-service training once in 5 years and were failing to upgrade the curricula and programs that they were offering. The general situation became very obvious when PISA 2006 and 2009 outcomes were announced, because Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated the poorest results out of all participating countries - 56<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> position in the league table.

At the same time due to the policy of openness that the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan was pursuing since the early 90s, the country managed to implement a lot of projects funded by international donors, many of which were targeted at methodological support to teachers and in service training system reform. These interventions accounted for several thousand teachers learning new methods of teaching, the setup of several NGOs and professional associations and for networks of partner schools. The most effective actors were Soros-Kyrgyzstan foundation supporting a network of fifty pilot schools, the agency for international development USAID funding the project on introduction of 11 clusters of quality in all the territory of the country (PEAKS project) and the World Bank implementing projects in all schools of the two pilot regions. These projects have achieved high quality outcomes, yet changes in individual schools had little impact upon the situation in the country as a whole. Pilot projects were terminated as soon as the financial support was discontinued and were never mainstreamed to produce the system effect. New methodologies of teacher training, innovations in school management strategies, planning and assessment were described in reports and recommendations, but have never become the daily routine in the system of education in Kyrgyzstan.

## Pilot projects

As regards to the initiatives of international donors within the system of education, two projects aiming at systemic changes in the teacher development and the quality of education monitoring should be singled out.

The first one was to introduce a voucher system for in-service training of teachers in Issik-Kul' region in 2004-2006. An attempt was made within this pilot to transfer the RF Samara region expertise on starting market mechanisms to attract independent providers of educational services into the process of teacher training. Within a two years period 2 thousand teachers were trained and were able to choose organizations and programs of in-service training. At the end of the experiment research was made and recommendations were drafted how to mainstreams the developed policy into the entire system of Kyrgyzstan education, however the idea was not developed any further and was put on ice for an extended period.

Another meaningful intervention into the system of teaching quality assurance was an experiment of changing the system of teacher rewards in Issik-Kul' and Talass regions conducted by the Rural Education project financed by the World Bank. The model of assessing quality of teacher performance and the based on it system of financial incentives designed by Finnish experts was piloted within this experiment. The standards of teacher performance effectiveness were developed and described at five levels of competence, which could serve as a framework for teacher attestation, and the instruments supporting the model were also designed. The payment system was developed, the staff of regional and district education departments as well as leaders of methodological councils of all levels were trained, and a broad information campaign was conducted. In conclusion, 1500 teachers have volunteered to participate in the new initiative, their performance was appraised and they have got the incentives. Unfortunately this initiative also did not have any continuation and was terminated as soon as the funding was no longer available.

## Systemic reforms

The non-financial incentives are very important as stimuli for teachers' work, however the salaries and their volume dynamics remain the lead factor as regards to the choice of teaching profession and retention of qualified teachers. From 1993 to 2011 the Unified Tariff Scale was used in Kyrgyzstan to pay for teacher's labor. The actual amount of payment depended on education, qualification category and work experience. The main drawback of this system was that the starting level of the qualification was remunerated so poorly, that the subsequent levels were also subsidized lower than the level of survival. The budget capacity was so poor that the system could not considerably increase the salary level, and no matter how often the salary was increased, this had very little impact on the teachers' well-being. In such circumstances in order to retain their teaching staff, school and regional (city) administrations had to artificially increase the salaries level by way of awarding the highest qualification categories to the majority of teachers. Therefore 60% of the teachers had this highest qualification degree and the status of this very prestigious qualification was greatly

devalued. Gradually the qualification requirements became outdated and disconnected from the changing reality, so the teacher assessment procedures were no longer valid and did not stimulate professional growth.

In 2011, the Unified Tariff Scale was abandoned and a new payment system based on the hourly workload of a teacher was introduced. The qualification category was no longer relevant for a teacher's income and the actual workload and education became the only relevant factors impacting the size of remuneration. The introduction of formula-based per capita funding has made it possible to introduce, beside the guaranteed part of the salary, a set of modest incentives which were to be distributed by the school itself and served to motivate teachers to work better. As the consequence of introduction of this new system, the state just within a two years period managed to increase the average salary in the school sector from 45,7% of the average in the national economy in 2010 to 70,2% in 2012. In 2012 the average salary in a school sector was 155,3% from the survival level salary of the working-age population of the country<sup>1</sup>. These changes were particularly beneficial for primary school teachers and young specialists who were the most discriminated by the previous payment scheme and as a consequence there was an inflow of young specialists into schools. At the same time the change began to negatively affect teachers with a longer term of service and the highest qualification category, whose financial status became lower by comparison. The very possibility of a successful teaching career became questionable and the motivation for good performance has diminished.

In 2016, with the support of the Asia Development Bank the working team set up by the Ministry of Education together with experts from US Columbia University developed a program «The New Teacher» which was later approved by the decree of the Government. Mid-term (till 2020) and long-term (till 2030) goals and objectives were set in this program. Within the framework of this program professional qualification standards of a teacher were set and new procedures as well as necessary instruments for a new format of teacher attestation (such as the manuals for teachers and departments of education, lesson observation sheets, interview guides, self-appraisal instruments, tests) have been developed. The new system envisages four levels of qualification: the basic mandatory level of teacher qualification, the second, the first and the higher category. The legislative acts enabling the launch of the new system were also developed<sup>2-3</sup>. The attestation mechanism was piloted in 2016 in 30 innovative schools selected by the Ministry, and as the result of the pilot the working group could finalize the procedures and improve the instruments.

The piloting of the new procedures was instrumental not just for improvement of the procedure, but it also has demonstrated the high level of stress that schools conducting the attestation were experiencing. Moreover, it has revealed the low capacity of the local administrations in mastering new patterns of work. As a consequence, in the spring of 2017, a political decision was made to announce a moratorium on teacher attestation till 2020. The goal was to prepare schools and local administrative bodies for the new attestation procedure and to organize in-service training of all teachers and school principals before the new mechanism was launched. The decision also had financial reasons to be taken, because the add-ons for the qualification levels were a significant burden for the state budget and at least two more years were needed to accumulate the required funds. One could also suspect that the state authorities were hesitant to make reforms with unpredictable consequences just before the presidential elections.

However, these delays in the launch of the mechanism of teacher assessment do not signify the termination of the Program of Support and Professional Development of Teaching Cadre “The New Teacher” and other governmental initiatives in teacher professionalism development. The political decision was made to introduce the voucher mechanism for in-service training of teachers which was developed and piloted in the middle of 2000s in Issik-Kul’ region. This decision in fact constitutes de-monopolization of the system and development of the market of services in the area of teacher professional development. Once this mechanism is launched, the universities and NGOs as well as private providers will become equal partners at this market, their services, therefore, will become more accessible and the quality of the programs offered to teachers will improve. In the end of November, 2017, the working group designing the voucher mechanism has finished its work and as of September, 2018 the voucher mechanism will start functioning.

The restructuring of the Kyrgyz Academy of Education which is no longer having the in-service training institute of educational workers within the scope of their responsibility and are no longer in charge of training and re-training of teachers, demonstrates the commitment of the government to the reform agenda. Currently there is a discussion on the role and place of the institute within the changing system.

## (Endnotes)

- 1 Данные национального статистического комитета КР (The data of the National Statistics committee of the KR)
- 2 Постановление Правительства КР об Утверждении Положения о порядке проведения аттестации учителей образовательных организаций КР от 16 августа 2016 года № 439 (The decree of the Government of KR on the endorsement of the provisions for the attestation of teachers of educational institutions 16.0816 №439)
- 3 Постановление Правительства КР «О надбавках за квалификационную категорию учителям общеобразовательных организаций» от 5 октября 2017 года № 648 (вступает в силу с 1 января 2020 года)(The decree of the KR government “On increments for the qualification category of education staff” 5.10.17№648. To be enacted as of 1.01.20)