

Zarrina Bazidova

Public Foundation “Panorama”, Dushanbe, Tajikistan¹

Abstract

Since the years 2000-2001, in Tajikistan public funding for education has increased by several times. Teachers' salaries have also been raised. On the downside, however, more than 90 percent of the education budget is spent on salaries, leaving other needs under funded, while the salaries remain insufficient. The research shows that informal payments in schools are widely spread and nearly two thirds of parents make monthly payments. Among most common purposes of informal payments are school events, renovations and gifts for teachers.

The analysis of the state of the education system reveals that there is a need for parental contributions because of the deficit of state funding for the further development of the education system and increasing needs of the educational environment. Currently supplemental payments to the school may be formalized in two ways – payments on the basis of an agreement between the parents' board and school as well as payments for supplemental education services. The official policy aims at establishing tight control over parental contributions, introducing the system of the so-called public-state management of educational establishments, and introducing the model of per capita financing of schools.

In practice, control is insufficient partly because all payments are made in cash. Parents are hardly involved in the distribution of their contributions because, on the one hand, the administration would not make the use of these funds transparent and, on the other hand, parents themselves are passive. Moreover more than half of parents consider that parental payments negatively influence the quality of education.

Therefore it is necessary to design a clear mechanism for the collection, distribution and use of parental payments. Information campaigns should raise parents' awareness of their rights and opportunities in relation to payments as well as to their broader role and place in the modern public-state model of education management. A flexible approach is necessary, envisaging a number of benefits such as exempts and discounts for pupils from socially vulnerable families.

1. Introduction

Over the last few years Tajikistan has been paying special attention to the development of national education. Some concrete measures have been taken for the development of this area. In 2005-2006 academic year 253.1 million somoni of the state budget were allocated to education against 41.6 million in 2000–2001. Beginning with April 2007 secondary school teachers are getting higher salaries. However, is that enough for schools and teachers? Do schools need parents' help? We suppose yes. Schools need that help and are unable to do without it today. Trying to answer these and other vital questions on the problem of informal payments, the non-government fund “Panorama” conducted research aimed at identifying the nature and frequency of informal payments in secondary schools.

The results of the survey revealed that informal payments are widely spread. The majority of parents (63.3%) make monthly payment to school, 10.7% *make supplemental contributions once every term*,

¹ Consultants – Tatiana Bozrikova, Panorama; Shodibek Kadirov, ERSU PULSE, Soibov Abdunazar, Jamila Kholova, OSI - Tajikistan

and 19.8% *make informal payment once a year*. In cities informal payments are bigger and more widely spread than in rural schools.

2. Policy approach

Nowadays informal payments are widely spread in primary and secondary schools of Tajikistan. In educational theory informal payments stand for as follows:

- Payment for festivals and presents for teachers;
- Individual payment and gifts for good grades;
- Payment for tutoring;
- Payment to the nerds for writing course and diploma/thesis papers.

Informal payments as well as supplemental contributions are made on a voluntary or voluntary-forced basis and are meant for concrete addressees and are not always publicly condemned². In economic and pedagogical sciences these payments are also called school extortion.

This phenomenon is actually found in all systems of education in transition countries. This is connected, in the first place, with expansion of paid education and introduction of market regulation mechanisms in the system of education. As practice shows, the problem will be solved as soon as "... both consumers and providers of educational services become more active and more responsible, the quality of educational services improves, education begins to satisfy the market demands, society creates effective motives for thorough and active study of academic programs by students."³ On the other hand, it is necessary "to formalize enormous amounts of informal payments and use them for institutional needs of education, provide more transparent and fair access to education."⁴

The Law on Education of the Republic of Tajikistan (2004), article 47 "Paid services at educational institutions" allows provision of paid services at schools, as well as voluntary contributions by parents for school renovations and classroom equipment. According to this article, "a state educational institution is allowed to organize additional education for a student whose parents (or their substitutes) have agreed to pay for it on a contract basis". Further on, the same article reads: "In state institutions of general basic and general secondary education, parents (or their substitutes) are allowed to make voluntary payment for classroom and school building renovations and purchase of necessary educational equipment."

Despite the fact that the law envisages provision of supplemental paid services by schools, as well as parents' participation in school renovations and equipment supply, there's no clear functional mechanism. For instance, according to the Law on Education (article 47) payment for additional education should be transferred by parents (or their substitutes) to the educational institution bank account. In addition, money raised in voluntary payments cannot be used until the Board of parents makes a decision on the basis of an estimate and money is supposed to come through the institution cash-desk. "However, none of the schools (with the exception of five pilot schools implementing the per capita funding project) has its own bank account, subsequently has no cash-desk, nor till."⁵ Therefore, in the majority of cases, the law is violated in instances when informal voluntary payments are made by parents and when additional educational service fees are charged.

² Oberemko O. Paid higher education: promise of institutional changes
-<http://socreal.fom.ru/?link=ARTICLE&aid=34>

³ Galitsky E.B., *Levin M.I. Corruption in education system*: Newsletter. 2004. # 4 (6). M.

⁴ Oberemko O. Paid higher education: promise of institutional changes -<http://socreal.fom.ru/?link=ARTICLE&aid=34>

⁵ Kodirov Sh., Amonov N. Analysis of the private tutoring market in the Republic of Tajikistan. Dushanbe 2007.

According to the law “education system employees, class teachers, educators, trustees, administration of educational institutions are forbidden to charge fees from students or their parents (or their substitutes)”. However, as practice shows teachers collect cash from students and hand it over to the director of the school, which is a violation of the Law on Education.

3. Background/context

Box 1. Socio-economic Data (The World Bank, CIA)

Socio-economic Data (The World Bank, CIA)

Currency: somoni, TJS per USD – 3.4418 (2007)

GDP (USD billions): 1996 – 1.1, 2005 – 2.3, 2006 – 2.8

GDP annual growth: 2005 – 6.7, 2006 – 7.0

GNI per capita (USD): 1995 – 200, 2000 – 180, 2006 – 390

Population below poverty line: 2007 – 60%

Public education spending (% of GDP): 1995 – 2, 2000 – 2.3, 2006 - 3.4

Expenditure per student, primary (% of GDP per capita): 2005 – 8.8

Ratio of pupils to teacher (primary level): 2006 – 22.2

Ratio of pupils to teacher (secondary level) 2006 – 16.5

Sources: The World Bank, <http://go.worldbank.org/LJW2UB0SI0>;

CIA The World Factbook (on currency and poverty line), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

3.1. Country socio-economic data

Tajikistan is known for its high birth rate in comparison with other CIS and Central Asian countries. An average family consists of 5.8 members (in urban areas – 4.5 members, in rural areas – 6.5 members).⁶

Tajikistan is the last among CIS countries in the GDP per capita ranking. According to Tajikistan Human Development Report for 2006, Tajikistan’s position in the Human Development Index ranking was 122th out of 177 countries.⁷ According to data analysis of the CIS Committee of statistics for 2005 Tajikistan has the lowest average salary – 83.58 somoni (\$26.8) while minimal monthly salary is \$17.54.⁸ Tajikistan remains the poorest country in the East European and Central Asian areas. According to official data for 2003 64% of the population lived on less than \$2.15 per day. In comparison, in Kyrgyzstan 54% (2001) and in Moldova 45% (2002) of the population were as poor as that.⁹

⁶ State statistical agency of the RT. Population of the RT according to the census of January 20-27, 2000. Dushanbe, p.190.

⁷ UNDP. Human Development Report.

⁸ Newspaper “Asia+”, 30.04.2008

⁹ Newsletter on food security and poverty in the Republic of Tajikistan. Issue 2/ 2004.State statistical agency of the Republic of Tajikistan. Dushanbe, 2004, p. 101.

Demographic growth and limited financial opportunities prevent ensuring equal access to educational services for everybody. According to the data of the Poverty study carried out in 2003, 20% of the poorer households spend about 5.5% of the family budget on education and can hardly afford buying clothes, school supplies, books and so on.¹⁰ As a result, attendance in schools has considerably reduced in all regions and on the average constitutes 88% throughout the country.

3.2. School system and management

The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan (article 41) and the Law on Education (article 6) guarantee free basic education in state educational institutions. Basic education (grades 1 through 9) is considered compulsory for everyone regardless of sex, nationality, religion and social status. General education falls under three stages (primary, general basic and general secondary). It is provided by primary schools, general basic schools and general secondary schools, gymnasiums and lyceums.

Children start going to primary school at the age of seven. They stay in primary school for 4 years and then transfer to secondary school when they are 10 years of age. According to the law citizens of Tajikistan are eligible to receive general basic education in full time educational institutions until they are 16 years of age. Students are admitted to the third stage of general education depending on their wish, capabilities and interests. Some schools require admission exams for enrolment in the third stage. Education in state general secondary schools may be both free and paid depending on the wish of the parents (or their substitutes) based on mutual agreement. Secondary school graduation exam is administered by the Ministry of Education.

In 2006-2007 academic year there were 3789 secondary schools and 1 672.8 thousand students.¹¹ The majority of educational institutions are located in rural areas, so the number of students in rural areas exceeds the number of students in urban areas by over three times.¹²

Regarding the legal status of informal payments, it should be noted that formally education must be paid for just in non-state schools. In state school (as mentioned above) parents can make voluntary contributions for supplemental education on the basis of an agreement or make informal voluntary payment for classroom and school renovation, purchase of necessary school equipment.

Over the last few years new types of school have sprung up in the republic, such as lyceums and gymnasiums, most of which are state institutions. They are also becoming paid schools and payment is made on the basis of an agreement between school administration and parents. Apart from state lyceums and gymnasiums, in 2006-2007 academic year there were 51 non-state schools, which is by 2 less than in 2005-2006 academic year.

3.3. Financial situation.

In 2006, 336.1 million somoni was allocated to education from the state budget. In 2007, allocations to education increased by 51%, which made 506.3 million somoni in total.¹³ However, the budget of education increased from 15.9% of the state budget in 2000 to 19.4 % in 2005 (not including external investment). At the same time it is important to note that the amounts are still less than those in 1991 when education budget constituted 8.9% of the GDP and the share of education in public expenditures

¹⁰ Poverty reduction monitoring survey carried out by the State Statistics Committee and Asian Development Bank in 2003. Published in Dushanbe, 2005.

¹¹ Data from collected papers: "Education in the Republic of Tajikistan". Dushanbe. 2007.p.13-14.

¹² Data is taken from collected papers: Vazorati Maorifi JT. "Machmuai omori cohai maorifi Jumhurii Tojikiston baroi soli tahsili 2006-2007". Dushanbe. 2007.p.34

¹³ Data from collected papers: Vazorati Maorifi JT. "Machmuai omori cohai maorifi Jumhurii Tojikiston baroi soli tahsili 2006-2007". Dushanbe. 2007.p.83.

was 23.6%.¹⁴ The ratio of state expenditure per student to the share of the GDP per capita reveals actual expenditures on education. In order to provide access to quality education the ratio should be 20-25%, while in 2003 the ratio constituted just 8.1%.

Teachers' salary. Despite the fact that today “92% of the education budget is spent for employees' salaries”,¹⁵ teachers' salaries remain low and do not meet teachers' needs. Beginning with April 2007 the teachers' salaries were increased by 15% and constituted (standard workload):

- “Highest category” – 135 somoni or \$39.2;
- “1st category” – 120 somoni or \$34.8;
- “2nd category” - 110 somoni or \$31.9;
- “Ordinary teacher” - 100 somoni or \$29.

Teachers are awarded certain categories based on the results of the attestation carried out by the Attestation board. In real life the problem of teachers' salaries increase is solved through additional payments. We differentiate two types of payments:

- *First* – payments made on the basis of an agreement between the parents' or trustees' boards and the school. In this case a joint meeting is held and the decision is recorded in the minutes of the meeting, which serve as the grounds for collecting the money. The payments of this type are formalized when collected. Their use, however, is usually not known to parents.
- *Second* – payments for supplemental educational services. This type of payments has become widespread since September 2007. With the aim of formalizing the relationship between providers and recipients of supplemental educational services the Minister of Education issued an order of 25 April 2007 (No. 365). The order lists supplemental paid educational services and describes the conditions for providing those. In accordance with the order, schools are now concluding agreements with parents for providing supplemental paid educational services.

It is important to point out that since the beginning of the survey some changes have taken place in the state policy on the study problem. Over the last two years special efforts have been made aimed at formalizing the non-budget funds including parental contributions. The policy is aimed at:

- Establishing tight control of parental contributions to secondary schools;
- Introducing and developing the system of public-state management of educational establishments;
- Introducing the models of per capita financing.

The above mentioned approaches of the educational policy operate in close interaction.

Approach 1: Tight control of parental contributions in secondary schools

The basic document legalizing the use of parental payments is the Law on Education (2004). According to Article 47 of the law all payments must be transferred to the educational institution's bank account and the parents must get a receipt.

Though the order of the Minister of Education (25 April 2007, No. 365) lists supplemental paid educational services and describes conditions for providing those, in real life parents in most cases do not receive any document certifying that they have contributed some funds to the school.

¹⁴ State statistical agency of RT. Education in the Republic of Tajikistan. Collected papers. Dushanbe, 2006, p.5.

¹⁵ Presentation of Project implementation unit on education coordinator S. Khojaeva in Parliament of RT – “Parliament members have had a sincere talk”. Newspaper “Asia+”. 28February, 2008.

We would like to draw attention also to a certain risk underlying this principle of the order. In practice it may mean including more and more subjects in the list of supplemental paid educational services, thus transforming free education into paid education, and then the government will no longer feel like increasing teachers' salaries as they will be increasing through the provision of supplemental paid services.

Supplemental parental contributions are controlled by educational management institutions as well as law enforcement and anti-corruption agencies.

Approach 2: Introduction and development of the system of public-state management in educational establishments

Introduction and development of the system of public-state management in educational establishments are aimed at combining state and public principles in the interests of individuals, society and authorities. The main objectives of the process will be:

- Execution of legal rights of teachers, students and their parents to participation in managing the educational establishment;
- Democratization of the state system of educational management;
- Meeting the needs and interests of the stakeholders of the educational process;
- Development of mechanisms ensuring solution of conflicts and disagreements among all stakeholders.

Introduction and development of the system of public-state management in educational establishments are supported by the Law on Education. Article 27 states: "Educational system is managed on the basis of public-state principles in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, current law, other normative legal acts of the Republic of Tajikistan and charters of educational establishments." Article 36 "Self-governance of state educational establishments" of the same law describes the functions of self-governing bodies of state educational establishments.

The Law on Non-government Organizations of the Republic of Tajikistan adopted in 2007 enables parents to set up associations, get registered and open their own bank accounts. In real life not many parents and school directors take the initiative of setting up such self-governing bodies.

Approach 3: Introducing the model of per capita financing

The two documents envisaging gradual transitions of schools to the system of per capita financing are the Resolution of the Government of RT and Regulations on per capita financing of education. However, as practice shows, schools do not have full autonomy, and school administration does not have the skills of forming, distributing and using financial resources.

3.4. Other local contextual factors

Other contextual factors include high migration rate. The high level and specifics of labor migration fundamentally impact all spheres of social life including the system of education of Tajikistan. The aftermath of the civil war leads to the economy decline, unemployment, mass migration, lack of social guarantees, crime increase, divorce and growth in the number of vulnerable population.

Given the shortage of jobs, the majority of male population has to leave the country in search of a living. "Data vary from 500 thousand to one million of Tajikistan's citizens migrating to Russia to earn money"¹⁶ – state representatives of the International Organization for Migration in Tajikistan. Labor

¹⁶ <http://www.regnum.ru/news/638421.html>

migration involves both urban and rural population. There is a growth in the variety of labor migrants in terms of age and education. The number of working age (25-30) labor migrants with higher and secondary education has grown. Labor migration is mainly targeting Russia (96.9%) as well as countries of Central Asia (3.1%). The majority of immigrants work and live illegally and as a result become victims of forced labor and human traffic. Tajikistan is the third of the CIS countries (after the Ukraine and Moldova) by the export of labor force to Russia.¹⁷

Problems of children's education are solved with the money sent by labor immigrants. The money transferred through postal orders by Tajik labor emigrants constitutes over 10% of GDP of the republic, which is \$28 million.¹⁸ By some other sources, inflow of funds from labor emigrants in 2007 constituted \$1.66 billion which is over 50% of GDP for the current year.¹⁹

Despite the short term obviously positive results of labor migration, one can already see its negative effects, which are going to become worse in the long term future (economic consequences for labor market development, loss of qualified labor force, growth of gender problems, etc.). It is becoming common practice for young men fresh from school to go off in search of a living instead of continuing their education.

4. Research findings

4.1. What is the real private cost of informal payments for public schooling?

Informal parental payments vary from 20 diram to 10 somoni per month. The cost of informal payments clearly depends on the location of the school. In urban schools monthly payments are much higher than in rural schools. The average monthly rate of informal payment for all respondents is **4.6 somoni (\$ 1.3)** per student, which is 46 somoni per year. Considering that in 2006-2007 academic year there were 1672.8 thousand students in full time educational establishments, one can assume that the total cost of informal payments contributed to public schooling of RT last year constituted 76 948 800 somoni (over \$ 21 million).

Average monthly income of respondents' households constitutes 318.2 somoni on the average. Parents pay about 225.3 somoni (on the average) a year for education of one child. On the surface it is not a lot but, considering how many school children there are in each family, one can see that the total amount of parental payments to school will account for a considerable share in the family budget.

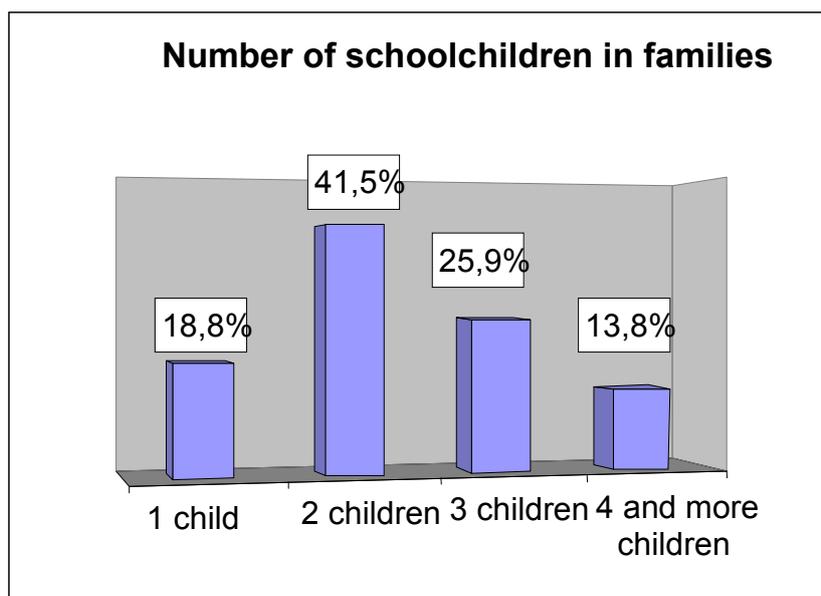
Among the families involved in the survey 18.8% have one child of school age, others have two – (41.5%), three (25.9%), four and more (13.8%) children attending public schools (see Graph 1).

¹⁷ Tajikistan: Problems of labor migration and possible approaches to policy formation.(Analytical paper).Dushanbe,2004 p.17

¹⁸ Tajikistan has asked Russia to accept 800 thousand of its workers. <http://www.tvzvezda.ru/?id=182226>

¹⁹ Newspaper "Asia+", 02.04.2008

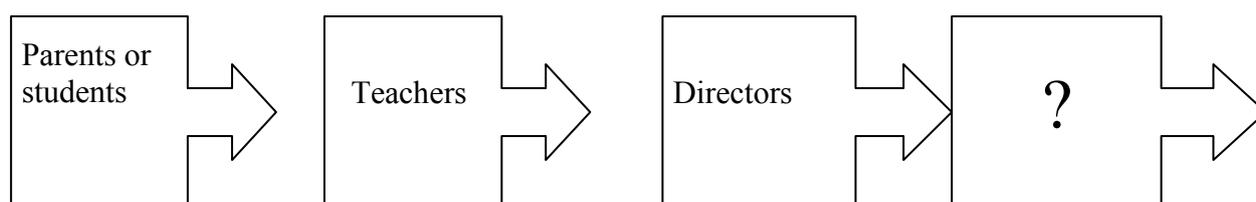
Graph 1. Number of schoolchildren in families



In the course of the survey we identified a tentative scheme for informal payment movement. It was determined that parents or students hand payment over to teachers, mainly class teachers, while those hand it over to the director of the school (see Graph 2). Unfortunately, we couldn't follow the chain further than that as 91.0% directors of schools reject giving a share of the general parental voluntary payment to other education officials (in local hukumats, city and regional departments of education, etc.)

However, in informal conversation teachers talked of passing a share of the school informal payments to regional and city departments of education. The payments are passed as holiday gifts, assistance in refurbishing certain establishments, contributions to regional events, etc.

Graph 2. How are informal payments passed on?



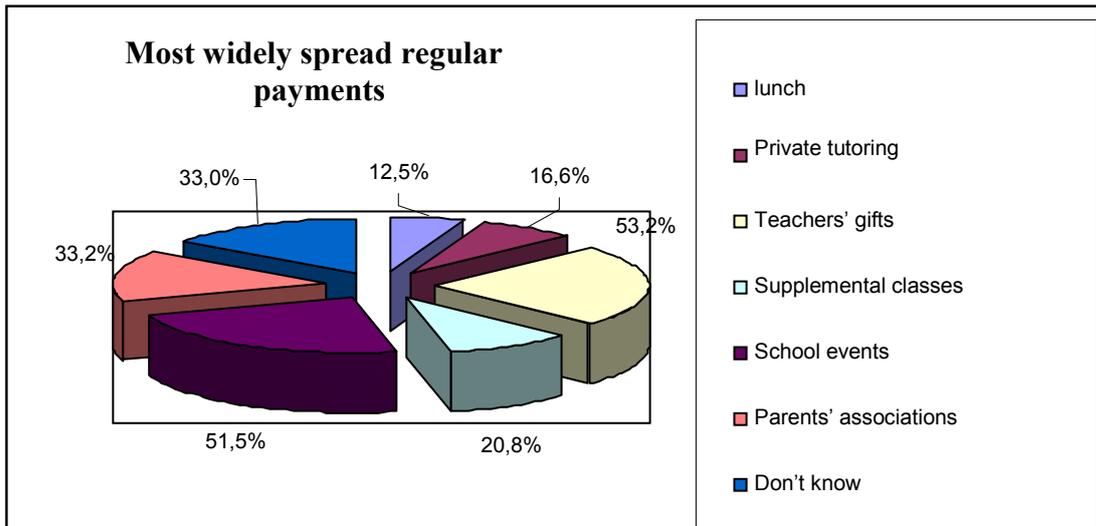
Sometimes payments are collected by heads of parents' associations. This mainly happens in primary school and then the payment is passed in the following order: parents – head of parents' association – teacher – director. From conversations with parents it was discovered that in most cases parents' associations exist on paper only, are very inactive thus providing favorable grounds for improper use of parental contributions.

4.2. What is the character and extent of informal payments made in schools?

The survey proved that there are different types of informal payments made in schools in Tajikistan but they all could be divided into two groups: regular and one time payments. Among regular payments the most widely spread are payments for:

- Lunch,
- Private tutoring,
- Teachers' gifts,
- Supplemental classes (in a group),
- School events,
- Parents' associations,
- Don't know.

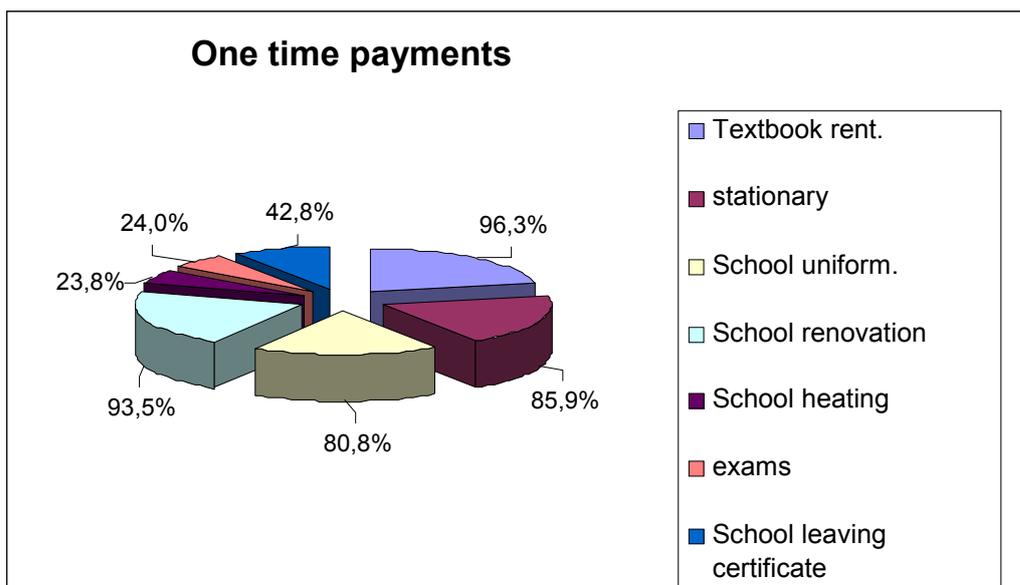
Graph 3. Most widely spread regular payments



Among one time payments the most widely spread are payments for:

- Textbook rent,
- Stationary,
- School uniform,
- School/classroom renovation,
- School heating (provision and maintenance),
- Exams,
- School leaving certificate.

Graph 4. One time payments



Payments for lunch (12.5%), stationary (85.9%) and school uniform (80.8%) are usually made outside school. That is why we consider them as personal expenditures made by students' parents.

According to the survey 96.3% parents pay textbook rental. Despite the fact that these payments are official, they are painful for parents because they make up a considerable amount. Besides, not every parent gets a receipt for paying the rental, which causes doubts about proper use of these payments.

Before 2007-08 academic year most of these payments were regarded informal. On 25 April 2006 an order of the Ministry of Education (No. 365) was issued requiring establishment of an accounting department in every school as a prerequisite of introducing supplemental paid educational services. Every educational establishment is eligible to provide supplemental paid educational services pricing them independently with consideration of the technical and material resources, minimal salary, utility tariffs, inflation rate and cost of methodological and technical equipment. Educational establishments may provide supplemental paid services if such are envisaged in the school Charter. Paid services may be provided only if there is a bilateral agreement between school administration and parents.

Paid educational services are those that are not connected with the main activities of the educational establishment. According to the above mentioned order, the following educational services are attributed to paid services:

- Supplemental study of separate subjects;
- Classes for students with poor grades;
- Preparation courses for enrolling at special and higher educational establishments;
- Foreign language classes;
- Preparation for enrolling at primary school;
- Extended-day groups;
- Computer courses.

The following normative-legal documents need to be available for organizing and introducing supplemental paid educational services:

- Resolution of parents' meeting;
- Resolution of the staff meeting;
- Agreement between parents and administration of the educational establishment;
- Estimate of costs of supplemental services;

- Accounting department;
- Charter of the educational establishment on a special bank account;
- General ledger and other documents required by legislation for accounting procedures.

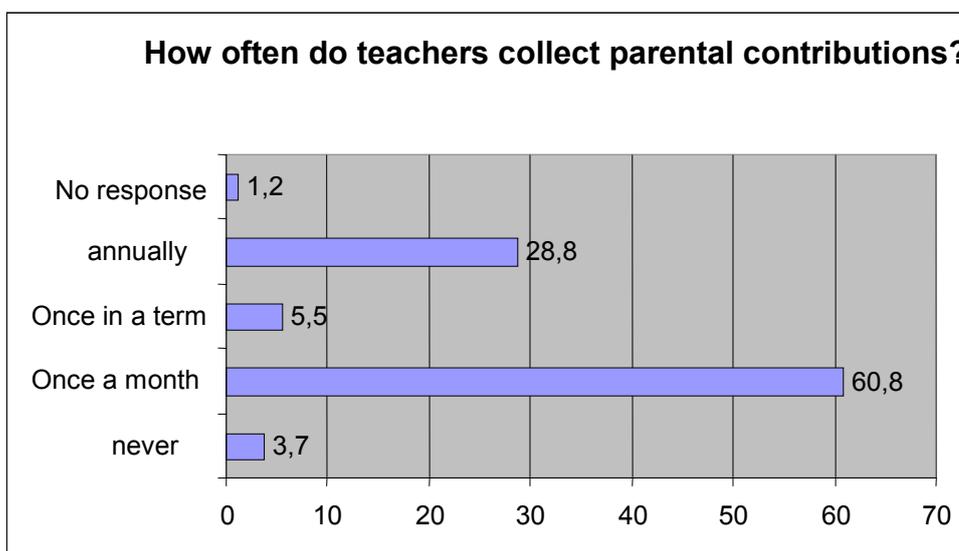
Following the order of the MOE on supplemental paid services, school administrations began signing agreements with parents and in such a way parental contributions assumed some formal character. However, even now, while making informal payments, parents do not get any receipts for their contributions to schools. Apart from that, we observed other violations of the MOE order. In spite of all that, the order is of great importance for school administration as it is the only document legalizing informal payments.

Such types of informal payments as payments for teachers' gifts, school/classroom renovation, exams, on the one hand, are made for general use and, on the other hand, by making such payments parents are hoping for more attention to their children, better teaching on the part of the teacher, and are simply doing it to "prevent teachers' escape from the school because of a low salary" (FGD No.4, a student's mother). What concerns payments for school improvement, not all parents can afford such payments and it is with these payments that there is the least transparency in using them.

The survey showed that **63.3%** parents make supplemental contributions to schools on a monthly basis, 19.8% parents do it once a year, and 10.7 % parents – once a term. Therefore in total 93.8% respondents are making parental contributions to schools.

In the majority of cases payments are collected by teachers in cash. The analysis of the surveyed teachers' answers to the question "How often do the teachers in your school collect parental contributions?" shows that 95.1% teachers are involved in collecting parental contributions, and only 4.9% never do it.

Graph 5. How often do teachers collect parental contributions?



4.3. What are the root causes of informal payments?

There's no disparity of the opinions of teachers, directors, and parents with regards to the main causes of informal payments. However, different types of respondents prioritize different root causes (see Table 1)

Table 1. What do you think is the main cause of informal payments? (%)

	Main causes	parents	teachers	directors
1	Very poor financing of the schools	15.9	15.6	22.0
2	Willingness to provide quality education	27.7	25.2	16.0
3	Renovation and school improvement	20.3	28.6	32.0
4	Low teachers' salaries	13.3	13.2	14.0
5	Classroom needs	9.3	2.9	1.0
6	High rental of textbooks	-	0.1	1.0
7	No supplemental payments	-	3.3	5.0
8	Don't know	6.1	3.9	-
9	Other	3.5	6.8	9.0
10	No answer	1.2	0.4	-
11	Teachers are used to extorting money without making any effort	2.7	-	-

Thus, for the majority of parents the main reason for making informal payments is their aspiration to provide good quality education for their children (27.7%). For teachers and directors the main cause is school renovation and improvement. Only 16.0% of school directors think that one of the main causes is “the parents’ desire to provide their children with good quality education”. Possibly, they do not want to openly admit the fact that teachers’ official salaries are supplemented from parental contributions.

Focus group discussions revealed different opinions of the role of informal payments. Some parents consider that these payments will help to draw more of the teacher’s attention to their children. Some parents, on the contrary, think that informal payments are very harmful.

According to the results of the research 81.6% of the parents do not agree that “teachers often force the parents to pay additionally for the needs of the school”. The parents also deny any pressure on the part of directors. About 86% parents do not agree with the statement that “directors of schools often force teachers to ask the parents to pay additionally for the needs of school”. The parents that participated in the focus group discussions have the same opinion. However, when asked by the moderator: “Would you agree to have your child free from making payments?”, many parents answered negatively explaining that they do not want their children to be different from other students.

Box 2. Quote from a focus-group discussion

«All parents of my child’s class pay and, if I don’t pay, everybody will look askew at my child. There would be many questions – why, who is he?» (FGD No.1, Davron)

Based on such statements made by the parents in focus group discussions as well as in private talks we tend to think that there still exists some pressure on the part of the teachers and administration. This pressure is not exerted in a rude and demanding manner, it has the form of a request to help the school (voluntarily - forced).

The research showed that the frequency of informal payments depends on the kind of those. One-time payments are made at the beginning and at the end of the year (rental of textbooks, class and school renovations), and recurring payments are made on a monthly basis (supplemental payments, group classes, etc). Furthermore, it turned out that only 2.4% of families are exempt from payments, others – 97.6 % regularly make supplemental contributions.

Parents understand that for the purpose of giving quality education to their children they have to motivate the teacher, i.e. to pay additionally to his low salary. And 65.8% of parents agree that most of the teachers do not have enough salary to satisfy their basic needs. The participants of the focus group discussions expressed the same opinion.

Box 3. Quotes from focus-group discussions

«If the Government could pay teachers \$500 to have them stay in their profession, they will never take money from parents.» (FGD No.4, Irina)

«The phenomenon of informal payments will go on. It is the Government that should take measures to eradicate the problem of informal payments; parents will not be able to solve it. I don't mean just the financial aspect of the problem but also the legislative basis of the problem. Isn't our education free of charge according to the Constitution?» (FGD 01, Dustmamad)

However, all categories of respondents put this problem in the third or fourth places. The main reasons are ranked in the following order:

1. Very poor financing of schools.
2. Willingness of parents to give children good, quality education.
3. Renovation and school improvement.

4.4. What is the influence of informal payments on the general quality of primary and secondary education?

Regarding the influence of informal payments the participants of focus groups and experts split into three groups.

The first group consists of rural parents and most of the experts. They consider that informal payments do not influence the quality of education and completely disagree that there is an essential difference between the elite and non - elite students.

The second group represents mainly urban parents who consider that the informal payments have negative influence on the quality of education, prevent access to education of some children from non-elite and large families.

The third group of respondents is not so numerous. Its representatives consider that informal payments have both positive and negative value. Among their advantages there are new financial opportunities, possibility to retain qualified teachers, motivate teachers in their work. As a result, teachers try to teach well. Among the disadvantages is the fact that students are involved in making payments, they themselves give money to teachers and administration. This affects students' attitude to education, they come to realize that everything can be bought and sold. Education becomes a part of money relations and students directly participate in this process. The answers of parents and teachers to these questions are reflected in table 2.

Table 2. The influence of informal payments on the quality of education

A student cannot get quality education if his parents don't make additional payments	Agree
Parents	24.7
Teachers	26.9

Directors	22.0
Teachers spend more time on teaching the students whose parents make informal payments	
Parents	29.3
Teachers	11.9
Directors	5.0

Thus we come to the conclusion that there are parents who consider the system of informal payments a threat to the quality of education for their children. Moreover the parents' opinion of this issue depends on the level of income. Parents with low income consider that there is a threat for their children while parents with higher income are not concerned about the issue.

5. Conclusions and policy recommendations.

The survey data enable us to make the following conclusions:

- There is a need for parental contributions because of the deficit of state funding for further development of the education system and increasing needs of the educational environment. However, these payments are predominantly informal, and, as a result, they hinder access to quality education. In this situation it is extremely important to change the character of these payments and change them from informal into formal.
- In urban schools, in comparison with rural schools, informal payments are larger in scope and cost and are more frequent.
- Most common are payments for renovation and school improvements, for the gifts to teachers, for examinations, payments to parents' associations, additional payment for getting a good grade, and also payments made by parents for something they are not aware of.
- The overwhelming majority of parents (63.3%) make additional payments on a monthly basis. Overall parents paid on the average **4.6 somoni (\$1.3)** per month for one child in 2006-07 academic year.
- The main person to collect the payments is a teacher\class teacher. All payments in schools are made in cash. Beginning with 2007-2008 academic year in many schools these payments are registered as payments for supplemental educational services.
- Half of the surveyed parents (50.3%) are sure that school cannot exist without parental contributions today. They agree that additional payments are important sources of income for schools and a source for supporting the school staff, maintaining its material and technical resources, providing necessary conditions for children's education.
- According to the findings of the survey, parents are hardly involved in the distribution of their contributions because, on the one hand, administration doesn't want to make the procedure of using these payments transparent and, on the other hand, parents themselves are very passive and parents' associations exist just on paper. One of the ways of making the procedure of using these payments in education transparent and open is to activate the work of parents' associations and have them perform real rather than formal work.
- While admitting the importance of parental contributions for creating the learning environment in schools, 58% of parents consider that parental payments negatively influence the educational process and the quality of education.

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the following **recommendations** could be suggested:

- For increasing transparency of informal payments in schools, it is necessary to design a clear mechanism of the formation, utilization and distribution of these payments (signing contracts between administration and parents, public discussion of expense estimates and expense reports at parents' meetings, there is also an option to attach expense reports to students' diaries or put them

on school websites, or notice boards, or discuss them at mahalla meetings, etc.) All these steps will stimulate parents' involvement (implementing parties: Ministry of Education, district departments of education, school administration).

- Conducting information campaigns directed at raising parents' awareness of their rights and opportunities regarding these payments, their role and place in the modern public-state model of education management (implementing parties: school administration, town and district departments of education, corresponding units of the Ministry of Education, international and local NGOs, mass media).
- Conducting general parents' meetings for regular reports on the use and distribution of payments (implementing parties: school administration and parents' associations).
- Designing flexible models of the system of voluntary parental contributions in every school, envisaging a number of benefits such as: exempts from payments, discounts, alternative support to school, and so forth (implementing parties: school administration with parents' associations, class teachers).
- Creating trust groups under parents' associations (trust phones, forums on websites, etc.) enabling parents to solve their problems with contributions to schools (implementing parties: school administration, teachers, parents' associations).

Expected results

- Ensured transparency and effective use of parental payments.
- Schools will have autonomy in managing their non-budget financial resources.
- Schools will be able to increase the staff salary and improve their technical and material resources at the expense of parental contributions and other non-budget payments. Moreover the teaching staff motivation will increase.
- There is a chance that the amount of parental contributions will increase with the introduction of a more transparent accounting system in schools.
- School administration will have more responsibility in forming and managing parental contributions.
- There will be better cooperation between school and community (mutual understanding between parents and teachers, rise in the level of parents' involvement).
- Public control over quality education will rise.
- The scope of various forms of social support to children from poor families ensuring access to quality education service will expand.