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GOING ROUND IN CIRCLES: INCREASING STATUS OF TEACHER OCCUPATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract: Teachers as an essential part of education system contribute crucially to its quality, moreover, the status of teaching profession indicates how the society values the education. The article provides a critical discourse analysis of the Program for Education Development 2011-2020 with regards to improvement of status of teaching profession in Kazakhstan. The study concentrates on the gaps between the planned and realized outcomes of the Program of Educational Development in Kazakhstan from the point of view of 50 teachers interviewed. The study targeted low qualification of teachers and insufficient oversight of teacher practice as central factors, which lead to low Teacher Status. Focusing on the tension between teachers and policy makers over the teacher status, which remains unchanged, the research revealed the subcourses of low qualification of teachers, identifying low payment, low academic preparation and lack of selectivity of future teachers as subcourses. The article examines the planned and realized outcomes of the initiatives such as launching three level professional training for teachers, issuing vouchers to teachers for their professional development, performance-based payment, increasing enrolment entrance barrier to Pedagogical Universities and teachers' compulsory attestation once in 5 years, which lead to going round in circles. The implications of the study are in providing new insights on the issue of status of teaching profession and determining the reasons of slow progress in status of teaching profession, which needs further exploration in the global scale.

Key words: teacher, status, Kazakhstan, program, education, educational reforms

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Introduction

Questions about the quality and relevance of educational research were not only raised by policy makers and educational practitioners, but they also came from within the educational research community itself (Biesta, 2007). According to State Program for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016–2019, the number of teaching staff in Kazakhstan exceeded half a million people. At the same time, despite the annual mass graduation of teachers from pedagogical universities, there is still a shortage of teachers at schools. There are no effective mechanisms for attracting and retaining qualified teachers in schools, in particular in rural school. Applicants with low scores of Unified National Testing mainly enter teaching professions. The education system is not efficient in retaining teachers: up to 35% of teachers leave for other careers.

The Program of Educational Development 2011-2020 (PED) was issued in 2011 to reform educational system of Kazakhstan and it was indicating new hope for better living for education community in Kazakhstan. There is one special section in PED devoted to improve teachers' status and occupational prestige. According to Hoyle (2001), teachers' prestige is defined as the "public perception of the relative position of an occupation in a hierarchy of occupations" (2001, p. 144). The objectives set in PED 2011–2020 are: to supply educational system with highly qualified teachers, to enforce teachers' state support and to increase their motivation.

The purpose of the report is to analyse current status of teachers, how the objectives of the program were achieved, how the initiatives were implemented and what impact the program made on status of teaching profession in Kazakhstan.

The findings are intended to draw attention of 4 groups, namely: policy makers, researchers, teachers and government. Policy makers would be able to improve their program; researchers might use the findings of the report for further in-depth research; teachers are the main audience who will benefit from the implementation of this policy; government is those who would be able to amend the current PED on teacher status.

This research provides the results of an independent assessment of the PED for the period from 2011 to 2019 and is targeted at whether the program implemented as it was intended or not; whether it was successful or not (the changes in status of teacher is observed or not).

Since the launch of PED in 2011, the process of implementation still has been in its early stage. Therefore, the research is conducted through analysis of the current teacher status. In order to carry out the research, the data for evaluation process were collected from the following sources:

1. Review of the section on status of teachers in PED, in particular, Program policy, procedures and allocated funding;
2. Review of the Report on the program implementation for the period of 2011-2019;
3. Interview of 50 teachers from schools 35, 56, 120, 105, 38, 98 in Almaty and from Kazakh State Pedagogical University to get feedback on program outcomes.

The following report provides an overview of PED in terms of its objectives, causes, initiatives and implementation stages addressed to increase teacher status. This is followed by a description of the policy which includes the causes contributed to the problem, a list of outcomes planned to achieve; evaluation of effectiveness along with program implementation assessment. Then unintended outcomes are listed and analysed providing a conclusion summarizing the report at the end.

Literature Review

Public perceptions of teachers and of their place at the society vary, sometimes in a dramatic way between one country and another (Judge, 1998). *Global Teacher Status Index survey* (2018), reports that countries in which status of teaching profession is high, such as China, Taiwan, and Singapore have better student outcomes, as measured by PISA than countries in which professional status of the teacher is low, such as Brazil and Israel. There is a weak positive relationship between status of teaching profession and teacher pay. In many countries where professional status of the teacher is high, including China, Malaysia, India, and Indonesia, teacher pay nevertheless remains relatively low. Similarly, in many countries where status of teaching profession is relatively low, such as Spain and Germany, teacher pay is relatively high. Another study reveals that teachers are not paid what the public thinks they ought to be paid as a 'fair' wage. The public also systematically underestimates the actual amount of working hours that goes into doing a teaching job (Colbeck, 1998).

Few studies report positive attitude towards teaching profession from the side of different groups of stakeholders. Verhoevena et al. (2006), with their study in Belgium destroy the myth that society has no esteem for teachers. Study reports that teacher enjoys a positive image among most Flemings and can count on a high degree of esteem. Also, Everton et al., (2007), presented the findings which suggest a positive change in the public perceptions of teaching particularly amongst the younger age range. 50% of respondents deemed teaching to be an attractive career, a higher percentage than expected. Men, especially older men, were more likely than women to see teaching as an attractive career (Everton et al., 2007). Two previously mentioned studies provide benchmark of positive status of teaching profession, but the steps, which may contribute or fail to form the positive attitude, were not discussed in the articles. Furthermore, some studies discussed the positive trend in attitude towards teaching profession through the criteria of balanced gender representation in teaching profession. According to Park and Byun (2015), in countries with higher levels of professionalization, we see a reduced gender gap in students' expectation of becoming a teacher, so the better status of teaching profession, the more teachers are involved. So, there is an indicator of status promotion, but still there is a gap on how to achieve the balance and better status, especially regarding the issue why some measures were resultative or not. Most studies provide recommendations from the side of education stakeholders on what measures should be taken to improve the status of teaching profession. Findings of Oberst (2019), Meirkulova and Gelisli (2022) and Kasapoglu (2020) suggest that in many cases, teachers feel challenged to address their students' needs and their own. Teachers conclude they need more and higher quality professional development opportunities: more high-quality training, more planning, training and reflection time, more effective workshops, more personalized feedback, more coaching

opportunities, and more collaboration between themselves. So, the professional development programs for teachers were pointed by most authors, involved into research on improving status of teaching profession and this study examines the effectiveness of teachers' training in Kazakhstan.

There are plenty of studies, which examine the effectiveness of the public policies, though they are not about status of teaching profession: for example, Biesta (2007), insists that there is a real need to widen the scope of our thinking about the relation between research, policy and practice, so as to make sure that the discussion is no longer restricted to finding the most effective ways to achieve certain ends but also addresses questions about the desirability of the ends themselves. So, with the help of this study it is possible to explain some ineffective public programs with wrong planning. But traditional framework is not very capable to explain policy's consequences and regarding public policies in the educational sphere, a growing number of educational policy scholars, dissatisfied with traditional frameworks, have used critical frameworks in their analyses (Diem et al., 2014), or critical discourse analysis, which is a complex eclectic method that has potential to be a valuable tool for critical policy analysis (Thomas, 2005). For example, Schoen and Fusarelli (2008), with the help of critical discourse analysis, concluded that public education policy needs changes and unless modifications are made to the legislation, teachers and school leaders are unlikely to exhibit or promote the types of pedagogical skills, knowledge, or leadership. Moreover, critical discourse analysis is valuable in highlighting discursive shifts in policy implementation processes (Taylor, 2004), and, with its implementation, Cohen (2010) in the research uncovers how grammar patterns in news discourse teacher's identity in relation to knowledge and authority. The author demonstrates how the paper's discourse frames teacher identity in terms of Accountability and Caring and discusses how, in the context of larger economic and social policy debates, accountability gains authority over caring to shape education policy, providing us with the benchmark on how to identify discourses in educational policies.

Description of the Policy

Since Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, many educational reforms have been implemented. However, the society still faces a lack of teachers, drop in enrolment to institutions, which train teaching staff, inadequate payment and low qualification of teachers. As a result, these indicators cause low status of teachers. Hence, one section of PED 2011-2020 was originally designed to address low teacher status.

Teacher training was a significant part of the proposed measures of PED 2011-2020, and two organizations were appointed to be responsible for professional development courses: ORLEU centre and the centre of pedagogical innovations of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, both monitored by government agency. The first one was traditional in-service training school of the national scale, the second, the centre of pedagogical innovations of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools was established to produce and share the expertise in order to disseminate the best teaching practices from elite Nazarbayev Intellectual schools to ordinary schools.

Causes of the Problem

In the semi structured interview of 50 participants from different schools, 87 percent of respondents identified low qualification of teachers as the core cause of low teacher status. Keuren (2011), asserts that “low qualification originates from an absence of teacher candidate selectivity, poor pre-service training, and a problematic pay structure with low salary levels”. It seems that the problem and its cause move round in a vicious cycle: the low status of teacher is caused by low teachers’ qualification, and in its turn low qualification causes low status of teaching profession. For example, referring to Keuren (2011), many candidates select teaching not because it is their ‘passion” or their “calling” but simply because they lack occupational alternatives.

The problem of low status is caused by low qualification, which is, in turn, caused by three sub causes: poor academic preparation, poor selectivity process and low payment. The schematic representation of the program includes seven main initiatives addressed to three sub causes.

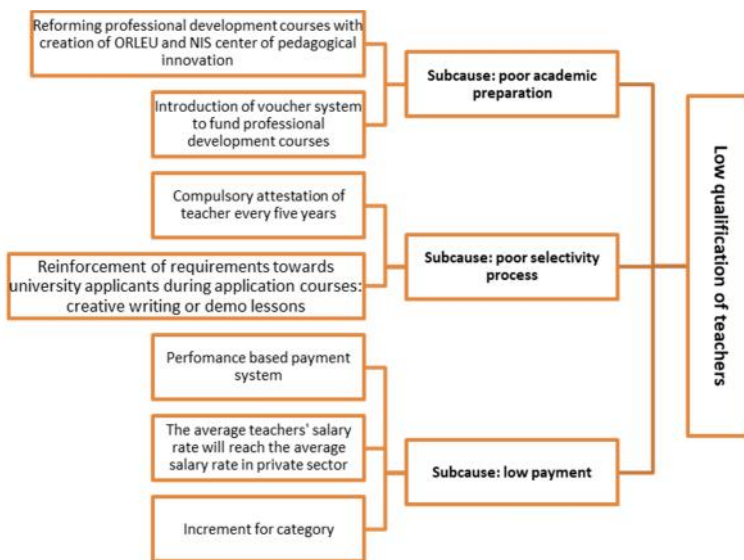


Fig. 1. The schematic representation of subcauses and initiatives which lead to

Low academic preparation stems out of too theoretical content of university curriculum, dated resources and methodology which contributes to the problem of low qualification. Poor selectivity process is caused by low entrance barrier for students entering teaching programs compared to more competitive high-demand professions such as lawyers and engineers. Low payment is another factor contributing to the low status of teaching profession because such a low salary makes teaching profession unattractive.

Expected Outcomes

According to the “Teacher status” section of PED, by 2020 it is expected that:

- Status of teaching profession will increase;
- 70% of teachers will attend professional development courses;
- Teaching qualification requirements will be enhanced;
- Average teachers’ salary will reach average salary in economics sector.

All these projected outcomes will reach a goal of higher teacher status. Teachers will get a state support and their work will be stimulated. Moreover, it will improve the quality of educational process and change the perception of teacher prestige from unattractive to respectful.

Assessment of Effectiveness and Program Implementation Assessment

Five initiatives addressed to solve the causes of low teacher status in terms of effectiveness and implementations are analysed in this section. Policy effectiveness and implementation are presented in the form of cycle defining causes, initiatives, intended and unintended outcomes.

Initiative to Launch Three Level Courses

Figure 2 describes the initiative to launch three level courses to pin down “poor academic preparation” which is a subcause of low qualification of teachers, which is, in its turn, is a cause of low teacher status.

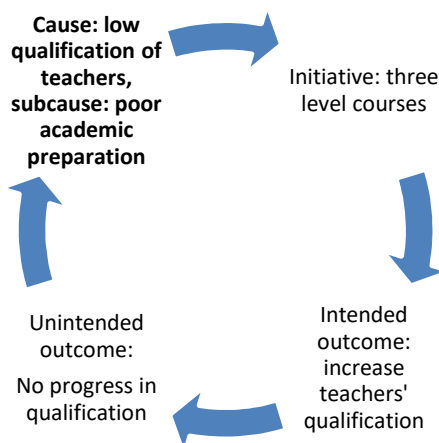


Fig. 2. Assessment of effectiveness of 3 level courses initiative

This is the initiative to eliminate the cause of poor training by conducting teacher development program in the form of three level courses for professional development designed by Cambridge University.

Initially, three level courses were designed to improve teachers' qualification. The program of these courses was developed by Cambridge University to help Kazakhstani teachers to be ready for life-long professional development, providing them support in learning innovative methods that will ensure the effectiveness of methodical work, necessary knowledge and practical training for the educational process (*"The Program of Teacher Qualification Development", 2011-2020*).

On the whole, this initiative was successful because more than three thousand of Kazakhstani teachers enhanced their methodology through active learning, ICT usage. Teachers got familiar with 7 modules according to Cambridge University. For example, as the agency reported, in 2012 that 286 trainers and 3043 teachers have passed 3 level courses.

Assessment of implementation of 3 level courses initiative

According to teachers, who took part in the interview, poor outcome of the program is observed due to the fact that program loses its effectiveness in the terminal stage of implementation when teachers are back to school. Instead of using all new approaches in their classes teachers continue preserving conventional teaching style due to some facts. First, there are no available resources and facilities in school to plan lessons according to the program of three level courses. Second, there is strong power of keeping old traditions within schools such as rote learning, lecturing, teacher-centered learning. For many school teachers it is merely convenient to keep the same track so there is resistance to new reforms from school staff. Third, teachers themselves are not eager to devote more time to work planning lessons using 3 level course elements. Again, it is more convenient for them to use established lesson plan written decades ago.

Unintended outcomes of 3 level courses initiative

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Initiative to Launch Voucher-modular System

Figure 3 describes the initiative to launch voucher-modular system to pin out "poor academic preparation" as a subcause and low qualification of teachers as a cause of low teacher status.

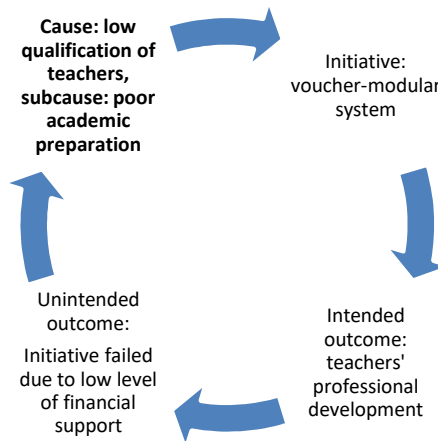


Fig. 3. Assessment of effectiveness of voucher-modular system

Another initiative proposed by program is giving vouchers to teachers for their professional development. Introducing voucher system was initiated to raise competitiveness among professional development institutions which provide trainings for teachers. These institutions were intended to compensate poor academic preparation which teachers gained during their university years to increase teachers' qualification. After taking a voucher, teachers were supposed to choose among variety of professional development institutions to improve their qualification. As a result, institutions in their turn were supposed to compete with each other to attract teachers and funding by developing effective and relevant programs. The expected outcome of this initiative was to increase competition between professional development institutions but it was not effective due to the fact that there was no sufficient financing at implementation stage.

Assessment of implementation of voucher-modular system

Although the idea of this initiative was worthwhile, it failed at its implementation stage. According to forty teachers out of fifty, the funds to implement this initiative were not allocated at all. Consequently, competition did not take place and the quality of teacher development did not improve.

Unintended outcomes of voucher-modular system

Voucher-modular system was designed to improve teacher qualification and was mentioned in PED as one of the effective ways to increase teacher qualification. Due to the fact that financing for voucher-modular system implementation was not allocated by Government, professional development institutions were supposed to hold workshops on their own. As a result of their inaction, teachers did not have a chance to get a voucher for choosing professional development institutions and increase their qualification. Therefore, poor academic preparation for teachers was not compensated by professional development institutions and teachers' qualification remained unchanged.

Initiative to Increase the Entrance Barrier to Pedagogical University

Figure 4 describes the initiative to increase the entrance barrier to Pedagogical university to pin down "poor selectivity process" as a subcause of low qualification of teachers, which is one of the causes of low teacher status.

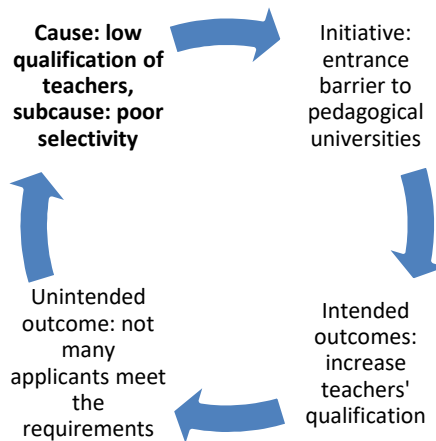


Fig. 4. Assessment of effectiveness of increasing enrolment entrance barrier to the Institutions, which train teaching staff

Originally Unified National Testing (UNT) was launched to select the most suitable applicants for a certain major to get a state grant. Since it is more competitive to get grant for such majors as engineering, economics, and law, school-leavers with lower UNT score apply for teaching profession due to the low entrance barrier which makes it easier to get educational grant. Such tendency turns this noble profession into second rated profession. To resolve this issue, the initiative to increase enrolment entrance barrier to pedagogical professions was proposed.

Assessment of implementation of increasing enrolment entrance barrier to Pedagogical Institutions

This initiative was first announced in PED in 2011 and according to the interview results, the barriers are increased: UNT entrance score increased by 10 percent and applicants pass the pedagogical test as a part of entrance procedure.

Unintended outcomes of increasing enrolment entrance barrier to Pedagogical Institutions

The expected outcome of this initiative was to attract not desperate applicants with no choice but those who chose this profession by calling. Enforcement of entrance barriers leads to the situation when fewer students will enrol pedagogical major. It might result in ungraded groups with fewer students at each cohort. There might be some circumstances leading to deterioration of learning process. For example, according to the interview results, to “optimize” the process in terms of funds, space and time, university will merge 8 students majoring in Physics with 5 students majoring in Biology. Such optimization will negatively influence teaching process and outcomes. Quality of academic preparation due to selectivity process enforcement will remain unchanged.

Initiative to Launch Teachers' Compulsory Attestation Once in 5 Years

Figure 5 describes the initiative to launch teachers' compulsory attestation once in 5 years to pin down "poor selectivity process" as a subcause of low qualification of teachers, which is one of the causes of low teacher status.

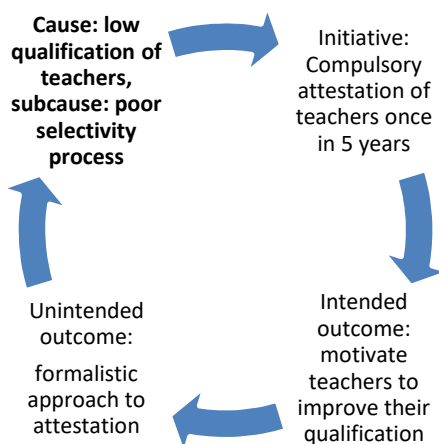


Fig. 5. Assessment of effectiveness of teachers' compulsory attestation once in 5 years

Compulsory attestation of teachers once in five years was aimed at motivating teachers to improve their qualification and encouraging them for further development. Ideally, to get to know teachers' qualification and professional skills it is necessary to check not only portfolio but also visit demo lesson of these teachers as it is almost impossible to evaluate teacher's qualification without observing teacher as a practitioner.

Assessment of implementation of teachers' compulsory attestation once in 5 years

Analysing the implementation of this initiative it is concluded that there is misunderstanding of the idea of attestation process. According to the interview, teachers do not accept attestation as a step for professional development simplifying it to merely filling folders with unnecessary papers. Moreover, the deficit of teachers will not allow this initiative to be strictly implemented. In case of unsatisfactory attestation results who will substitute dismissed teachers? For example, teachers in Pavlodar region passed the test on the major discipline; they were supposed to get 60 points out of 100. However, 114 examined teachers out of 915 could not reach even 60% barrier ("Teachers pass UNT", 2014).

Unintended outcomes of teachers' compulsory attestation once in 5 years

This initiative was addressed to motivate teachers for further professional development and to improve their practice. In reality, according to the interview, in order to pass compulsory attestation successfully teachers undergo this process for the sake of being attested. This formalistic approach to attestation leads to low teachers' selectivity. It means that all teachers will continue their teaching style and work at the same places, so teachers' qualifications remain unchanged.

Initiative to Launch Performance-based Payment

Figure 6 describes the initiative to launch performance-based payment to pin down “low payment” as a subcause of low qualification of teachers, which is one of the causes of low teacher status.



Fig. 6. Assessment of effectiveness of performance-based payment

The initiative to raise teachers’ salary through performance-based payment was proposed by PED. This initiative was designed as a system of incentives for teachers to achieve good results. For example, the better results teacher and her/his students achieve, the higher salary will get. Performance-based payment increases competitive spirit among teachers to achieve higher results as their co-workers and provide an example of teachers who work hard and receive good salary. Moreover, teachers will be looking for the ways to develop themselves and their qualification. This initiative is considered to be potentially effective, because teachers will strive to earn more points by demonstrating good results of their work. This performance-based payment motivates teachers to continue working hard and as a result increase their salary.

Assessment of implementation of performance-based payment

This initiative was first announced in PED in 2011 and is still in its developing stage. According to the interview, only teachers, who teach in English receive additional payment for that. That is why the implementation assessment cannot be carried out.

Unintended outcomes of performance-based payment

This initiative was addressed to link salary and performance, so that teachers will be paid according to the results of their work and students’ achievements. As a result, it might lead to merely collecting “points” paying special attention to gifted students. They will provide a teacher with desired performance rate followed by higher salary. According to the interview, it is difficult to compare in absolute number performance of teachers at different schools.

Conclusion

With the purpose to analyse the implemented policy intended to increase teacher status, findings are listed below:

1. The main cause of low status of teaching profession is low qualification of teachers.
2. There are three subcauses of teacher low status: poor academic preparation, poor selectivity process and low payment.
3. A number of certain initiatives were introduced in PED 2011-2020 to increase teacher status. The idea behind the initiative was good and initiatives could have been assessed as effective ones, but unintended outcomes changed the results.
4. Despite the all-initiatives implementation status of teaching profession remains unchanged.

Despite the fact that Program of Educational Development 2011-2020 has finished, still, according to the results of Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018, 96% of Kazakhstani teachers believe that increasing their salaries should be the highest priority when increasing the education budget. Also, Kazakh teachers were one of the most overloaded among 48 participating countries (2nd place). At the same time, the main part (69%) of this load is extracurricular activities (Ainleyi and Carstensiii, 2018). Moving to the next circle, the next Program of Educational Development in Kazakhstan on 2020-2025 proved that The Program for Education Development 2011-2020 was not successful by stating in the introduction that the salary in the field of education in Kazakhstan remains one of the lowest in the economy (102,875 tenge with an average salary in the country of 163 thousand tenge), which is a negative factor that restricts the educational development in Kazakhstan.

To sum up the effectiveness of all initiatives, the research concluded that all these initiatives do not have impact on status of teaching profession due to the fact that most of them fail on the stage of implementation. There is no coherent interconnection among all stakeholders to implement proposed initiatives. To evolve quality development there should be constant constructive criticism and feedback analysis at each stage. The process of implementation should be conducted on a basis of continuous monitoring, analysis and reactive set of measures.

Moreover, critical discourse analysis provided us with number of approaches, which should have been applied by the policy makers to make sure that the program was resultative: first, combination of research, policy and practice; second, formulating measurable and clear outcomes; third, modifications of legislation; forth, allocate resources to promote desired pedagogical skills, knowledge and leadership style, fifth, raise the teachers' voice and involve teachers in educational decisions and promotion of changes.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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