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36 Eliminating the Stavka System in Kyrgyzstan

Rationale, Impact, and Resistance to Change in the Post-Soviet Era

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INTRODUCTION

Learning from “best practices” has become popular rhetoric among politicians and policy makers. The approach rests on the (erroneous) assumption that what went right in one educational system will necessarily work in another. Because it is associated with policy borrowing and lending, the approach has drawn the attention of comparative education researchers (Schriewer, 1990; Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). Using a recently attempted teacher salary reform in Kyrgyzstan as a case in point, this chapter aims to show the limitations of transnational policy transfer between educational systems that are structurally different. We suggest that a comparative study of teacher remuneration policy is ideally suited to demonstrate how difficult it is for longstanding practices to change, particularly when new policies are incongruent with existing hierarchies and social norms.

In this chapter, we will examine two globally prevalent teacher remuneration systems, the first of which was attempted to be transferred onto the second. The first type of remuneration is found in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, which we will refer to as the “workload system,” and the second is a legacy from the Soviet Union called the stavka system, which has remained ubiquitous in the post-Soviet region. In the workload system, teachers are compensated based on a fixed annual salary and work on either a full-time or part-time schedule. The stavka system is an hourly wage system, compensating teachers per their assigned teaching load (typically 18–22 teaching hours per week) and other tasks such as grading and homeroom duties. Since the teaching load can change from year to year and often fluctuates even within a single school year, the stavka system does not guarantee a fixed salary for teachers. While in the Soviet Union, the stavka system provided optimal flexibility for teachers and schools to customize work schedules and school programming, in the post-Soviet era, the stavka system left teachers financially vulnerable because of salary fluctuations. Because the stavka system does not guarantee a steady income, it has exacerbated schools’ perennial challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, country after country in the region struggled with maintaining the large apparatus of civil servants whose salaries were below a national wage average and who deplored the loss of privileges granted to them under the previous communist regime (Deyoung, 2006; Gleason, 2003; Hann, 2002; Luong, 2004). This chapter will present the case of one country, the Kyrgyz Republic, and its effort to pivot away from the stavka system to the workload system. In examining Kyrgyzstan’s challenge in eliminating the stavka system, we will explore the rationale of why the stavka system nevertheless endured five years after the implementation of a reform aimed to remove it; the impact this reform has had on the recruitment and retention of new teachers; and the nature of resistance to change in the post-Soviet era.
BACKGROUND

The Soviet compensation system in the education sector was highly fragmented and complex (Nosek, 1966; Nove, 1993). The defining characteristics of the Soviet (and post-Soviet) stavka system were the low base salary for one teaching load, the opportunity to take on additional teaching hours, and a range of supplemental payments for additional work, either pedagogical or administrative. Figure 36.1 illustrates the nuanced and complex composition of teacher salaries in the stavka system, which includes five components and numerous sub-components that factor into the salary formula. The main source of income is generated from the assignment of a teaching load, and other components of the wage include a range of pedagogical and administrative tasks, such as homework duties, grading student notebooks, and organizing extra-curricular activities. As the approximate percentages of each salary component in Figure 36.1 show, supplemental payments and allowances were a small addition to teacher earnings. For the most part, teachers' earnings were determined by how many hours they taught. This in turn was largely dependent on the staffing needs of schools as well as teachers' negotiations with the principal regarding securing additional teaching hours.

In the Soviet era, the teacher “compensation package” also included periodic bonuses and non-pecuniary benefits. Teachers received bonuses from schools when their students earned prizes in academic competitions (“Olympiads”); gifts from parents and the school for holidays and special occasions, and periodic access to vacation packages from teacher unions. Additionally, teachers enjoyed extensive social benefits from the government, including discounts on public transportation, subsidized utility costs, and plot of land allocations in rural areas or subsidized housing in urban locales.

After the fall of the Soviet regime, most social benefits afforded to teachers ceased to be provided. The transition to capitalism ushered in major economic crises in the 1990s, depleted the State budget, and impoverished the country. It also made it impossible for public sector salaries to compete with the private sector (Dudwick et al., 2003). The situation of teacher salaries in Kyrgyzstan steadily deteriorated in the course of two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union. By 2010, the average teacher salary in Kyrgyzstan was at an all-time low, at approximately 55 percent of the average salary in the country (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014).

Owing to the low teacher salary and non-existent social benefits for teachers, the post-Soviet stavka system in Kyrgyzstan came to function solely as an hourly wage-based compensation system, with teachers having to work long hours to make a living wage. Allowing teachers to take on large teaching loads became the primary way for principals to incentivize teachers to stay in the teaching profession. Allocation of additional teaching hours meant that principals wielded immense power. Principals appropriated teaching hours in a range of ways, including based on the needs of the school as well as to accommodate the established allegiances between teachers and administrators. The range of assigned teaching hours per teacher varied from as little as several hours per week to an excess of over 35 teaching hours, not including other tasks that were also compensated (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2010). In some schools, such as those with teacher shortages or high student enrollments, teachers were in advantageous positions to take on more teaching hours. In other schools, teachers were at the mercy of principals to receive an allocation of enough teaching hours to make a living. The stavka system in Kyrgyzstan often meant that older teachers who had strong relationships with the school principal or tied to other school administrators would get to pick not only how many classes they wanted to teach, but also which classes, a reflection of strong collectivist and age-stratified values in the country (Kuehnast & Dudwick, 2002). This left early career teachers in a disadvantageous position, with many choosing to leave the profession altogether. Those teachers who were not able to secure enough teaching hours at their school but did not leave the profession sought additional work in other schools or outside of their teaching roles to supplement their income, including in low-skill jobs such as commerce and trade at local bazaars (Nyizov & Shamatov, 2006). All of these factors had a negative impact on the status of teachers and the prestige of the teaching profession.

One consequence of the decline in the status of the teaching profession is the negative selection into the teaching profession in Kyrgyzstan: only those education graduates that fail to secure a more attractive position enter the public education sector (Shamatov, 2006). Merely 17 percent of students who enroll in a teacher education program became teachers upon completion of the

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**Figure 36.1** Composition of the teacher remuneration system before and after 2011 reform.

The other 83 percent either switch their degree specialization over the course of their studies or find work in other spheres.

In 2006 and 2009, Kyrgyzstan participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an internationally administered test of student knowledge of reading, mathematics, and science; both years, the country scored at the very bottom. This added to the emerging crisis scenario rhetoric about the decline of education quality in the country within the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), among the international donor community, as well as in the public sphere. Concern about a looming crisis of the pedagogical cadre became prevalent as well (Shammatov & Sinazarov, 2010).

The abysmally low teacher salaries, futile recruitment and retention practices, and embarrassment and concern regarding Kyrgyzstan's bottom-rank performance on the PISA test were all factors that contributed to the crisis scenario within the teaching profession that unfolded in 2010. That year, teachers from rural schools organized public protests in the capital city of Bishkek, forcing the government to evaluate the need to raise the salaries of teachers and reconsider policies to attract and retain teachers.

With internal pressure as well as pressure from international organizations promoting "best practices" solutions (notably, UNICEF, USAID, and the World Bank), MoES set forth to reform the stavka system. This led to the implementation of a teacher salary reform in 2011. The reform had several objectives: making the profession more attractive to young teachers; attract new graduates to the teaching profession; preventing teachers from taking on excessive teaching loads, which was deemed detrimental to education quality, and raising student learning outcomes by incentivizing teachers to improve in their work (Interviews with Policymakers, March 2014). Ultimately, the reform was unsuccessful in moving the teacher remuneration structure beyond the old stavka system. In this chapter, we examine why this was so, arguing that each component of the reform countered established norms and social hierarchies at the school level and was thus undone by those who lost privileges in the wake of the reform. The research questions that guide our work are the extent to which the reform was successful in attracting new, young teachers to the profession, whether teachers teach fewer hours after the reform, and if the reform was successful in motivating teachers to improve the quality of their work through an incentive pay system.

INTRODUCING THE 2011 REFORM

The implementation of the 2011 reform came at the precipice of teacher discontent when teachers were earning historically low wages. Since this period followed a time of civil unrest and ethnic tensions in the country and because of strong involvement of the international community in the educational sphere in Kyrgyzstan, international organizations, including UNICEF and USAID, played advisory roles to MoES in developing the new teacher compensation structure. These two international aid agencies as well as one local consulting firm presented different models for the reform. Each model proposed implementing a workload system and abandoning the stavka structure. The workload salary reform, once initiated, took on several major challenges in the education sector, including preventing teachers from taking on excessive teaching loads by standardizing the workload among all teachers, enticing young teachers to join the teaching ranks by raising the salary, and motivating teachers to improve their performance and rewarding them financially when they did so. In an effort to eliminate the inequitable distribution of teaching hours, which depended largely on a teacher's relationship with the school's principal and administration, the reform limited the total number of teaching hours to 20 and implemented a work week with a maximum of 32 hours. The 32-hour limit became the "guaranteed" salary component, and included teaching and non-teaching tasks such as grading student notebooks and homeroom duties (see Figure 36.1). To attain the goal of attracting new highly qualified teachers to the profession, the rate of compensation per teaching hour was now determined by qualification based on the level of education of teachers (see Table 36.1), rather than the Soviet-era category system, which skewed compensation to reward experienced teachers. Assigning the highest hourly rate to teachers with a Master's degree or higher (50 Kyrgyz som) benefited younger teachers because the Master's degree was only introduced a few years ago. Finally, to motivate teachers and improve their performance, an incentive pay component was introduced.

However, within six months of introducing the salary reform in Kyrgyzstan, the reform began to be dismantled, reformed, and reversed back to the stavka system. Within a period of three years, the new remuneration system that attempted to employ the workload system was in effect reverted back to the old teaching load system, premised on teachers yoking for additional teaching hours to boost their income. There are three areas of failed reform attempts that this chapter will analyze: the attempt (1) to value educational qualifications over seniority or age, (2) to impose a weekly work and teaching load ceiling, and (3) to replace the semi-automated promotion system with performance-based pay.

Table 36.1 Hourly teaching salary rate by qualification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Hourly rate (Kyrgyz som)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary pedagogical degree</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's or specialist diploma</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree or higher</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY, AND DATA COLLECTION

The interpretive framework applied in this study is informed by the theory of self-referential systems (Niklas Luhmann), in particular its application to comparative policy studies in education (see Steiner-Khamis, 2010, 2012). We use the framework to explain the system logic of the Soviet teacher remuneration system, to understand why it increasingly became dysfunctional, and to identify the actors in the system who benefit from the system, and periodicaly make an effort—in this case years after the dissolution of the socialist state—to keep the old system in place. We add an agency-driven and conflict-sensitive perspective onto system theory, acknowledging that every fundamental reform empowers some groups at the expense of others.

Data for this research was collected in March 2014, as part of a study commissioned by UNICEF (UNICEF Kyrgyzstan, 2014). Over 40 policy documents were collected at the national and school district levels and analyzed to trace the trajectory of reform change from its inception in 2011 to the 2013/14 school year when this research was undertaken. Two hundred and seventy-nine schools were randomly selected from three nationally representative regions of the country and teacher salary data was collected from each school. The study was carried out in three provinces, including in the capital city of Bishkek, Chui province, and Jalal-Abad province. Within the three provinces, schools were selected in seven school districts. Ten schools were selected for site visits. Site visit schools were selected through a purposive sampling technique to ensure diversity of representation of schools by location (urban, rural, mountainous), school size based on student enrollment (low enrollment,
over-enrollment), language of instruction (Kyrgyz, Russian, Uzbek, multiple-languages), and school status (gymnasium, other special status, regular school). As with the selection of provinces and districts, non-probability, maximum-variation sampling criteria were used to ensure a diverse representation of schools in the study.

A questionnaire on teacher perceptions of salary distribution before and after the reform was administered in each of the 10 schools and completed by a total of 217 teachers. Interviews and focus groups with teachers and school administrators were also conducted in each school. Across the 10 schools, 54 school administrators and education officials were interviewed. In each school, focus groups were organized with cohorts of experienced teachers (with 15 or more years of teaching experience) and beginning teachers (less than five years of teaching experience), for a total of 148 teachers. The goal of age-stratified focus groups was to investigate the research question of whether the reform succeeded in attracting new teachers to join and remain in the profession and whether new and senior teachers perceived the reform to be beneficial or disadvantageous for their age group. The organization and distribution of the Stimulus Fund, an incentive pay component of the salary, was discussed with teachers and administrators at each of the 10 schools and questions about the distribution of the Stimulus Fund were included in the teacher questionnaire. Additionally, seven schools shared data of the Stimulus Fund distribution amounts and/or the criteria used to determine Stimulus Fund payouts to staff. The multi-level data collection and analysis (i.e., national level, district level, school level, and individual level) increases the validity of the study and enables robust analysis.

RESULTS

Our research findings show that each of the three reform goals were subverted or undone in the course of three years, with changes to the reform beginning as early as four months following the implementation of the reform. In this section, we examine why each reform component proved unsuccessful and why it was undermined by those who had the most to lose from the reform.

Figure 36.1 illustrates the salary structure in Kyrgyzstan before and after the 2011 reform and also depicts the salary reform plan as intended. The reader will note the extent to which the salary structure three years after the reform mirrors the pre-reform stavka system. Similar to the stavka system that was in effect before the reform ("salary structure before reform"), the remuneration system in the post-reform period ("salary structure after reform") relies on the number of teaching hours rather than on a predictable income based on a fixed number of teaching hours. In a context where interpersonal connections and favoritism prevails (Kuehnert & Dudwick, 2002), teacher dependence on a well-established rapport with school administrators who are in charge of assigning additional teaching hours continues to determine teaching assignments and income. The following sections explain how and why the 2011 salary reform was resisted and undone, largely by senior teachers.

School and Teacher Responses to the 2011 Salary Reform

Shifting Compensation from Seniority to Qualification

The percentage of beginning teachers in the country (those defined by MoES as teaching less than five years) is small compared to teachers at or near retirement age. To entice recent university graduates, particularly those who have earned Master’s degrees, MoES introduced a component of the reform that would prove to be the most contentious: the shift of compensation away from seniority to education qualifications. Before the 2011 reform, the teacher compensation formula included a teacher’s years of work experience ("stavka") as well as a teacher rank ("category") component. The category component of the salary was attained through an attestation process that included teachers demoting their lessons and compiling a lesson plans portfolio that was shared with school administrators and district education offices. For the most part, attaining a next-level category was a semi-automatic process with teachers moving through the ranks every couple of years or sooner if they received achievement awards or worked with students who won prizes in Olympiad competitions. The category was largely a seniority-based component. As Figure 36.1 shows, categories comprised up to an average of 19 percent of salaries of teachers. According to MoES, in 2009, approximately three-quarters of teachers in Kyrgyzstan had the highest category (Interviews with Policymakers, March 2014). Under the new reform, the category compensation component was eliminated, though additional pay for teachers’ years of work experience (10 percent for 5–10 years of service, 20 percent for 10–15 years of service; 30 percent for 20 or more years of service) was retained. The categories were replaced with a scale of per-hour compensation based on education level: teachers with a secondary pedagogical degree are compensated at the lowest hourly wage, next level of compensation is awarded to teachers with higher education or Bachelor’s degrees; the highest wage is reserved for teachers with Master’s and PhD degrees (see Table 36.1).

For the vast majority of teachers who had attained the highest teaching category, the elimination of categories and introduction of education qualifications meant that they were bumped from the rank that offered the highest level of compensation to a middle rank in the education qualification criteria. Under the new salary scheme, the most experienced teachers lost their category but did not qualify for the highest per-hour salary because none of the teachers who were educated in the Soviet era had earned Master’s degrees (for the simple reason that Master’s degrees were phased into the higher education system in Kyrgyzstan only at the turn of the millennium). Our focus groups with senior teachers and interviews with school administrators and policymakers showed that the move to a qualifications-based formula for calculating the largest component of teachers’ salary (the base salary) was detested by the older teachers. As one senior teacher stated, “not having the categories means teachers are not differentiated based on experience. This does not honor the work of teaching veterans and also does not offer any incentive for young teachers to continue to improve their pedagogical training” (Teacher Focus Groups, March 2014). Experienced teachers perceived themselves at the pinnacle of their careers to be the “losers” of the reform because it was designed to attract and reward teachers who had high education credentials that did not exist at the time of the Soviet Union. This component of the reform thus caused great discontent among senior teachers; they expressed a sense of abandonment and betrayal by the government. As we will now examine, the number of new teachers entering the profession increased when the reform was announced but declined significantly within two years of the reform’s commencement.

From 2009/10 to 2010/11, when teacher salaries were at a historical low, the country saw a decrease in the number of teachers from 71,100 to just over 69,000 (3 percent decline). In 2011/12, the year the teacher salary reform was announced, over 6,400 more teachers joined the teaching ranks nationwide (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014). By 2013/14, just two years after the reform began, the number of new teachers entering the profession again declined. Furthermore, the number of teachers with 5–10 years of work experience also declined, while the number of the most experienced teachers in the profession stayed flat. This data suggests that the reform was not ultimately successful in attaining a steady pipeline of new teachers and retaining teachers relatively new to the profession. We will return to examining why it was that new teachers rather than experienced teachers were most negatively impacted by the reform, despite the perception of older teachers that they were the “losers” of the reform.
In an effort to eliminate the inequitable distribution of teaching hours that was largely determined by teachers’ relationship with school administrators, the 2011 reform limited the total number of teaching hours to a maximum of 20 hours and a work week of no more than 32 hours (which included up to 12 hours of other duties such as grading student notebooks, homeroom responsibilities, and professional development hours). The 32-hour limit became the base salary component. Additional salary supplements for teachers’ years of work experience (10 percent for 5–10 years of service; 20 percent for 10–15 years of service; and 30 percent for 20 or more years of service) and supplements for teachers working in schools located in remote or mountainous areas remained intact as a carryover from the stavka system.

In practice, however, this reduction of teaching hours meant there were not enough teachers to teach the requisite subject hours and that teachers were effectively unable to earn a living wage. This situation was particularly exacerbated in urban school districts, in which schools are mostly overcapacity and require more teaching hours to accommodate a large student body. Teachers living in urban areas also grapple with a higher cost of living than those in rural areas, making the cap on permissible work hours a financial burden on teachers. It is likely that policymakers intended for this reform to attract many new teachers to the profession, but also possible that they underestimated the unintended consequence of this aspect of the salary reform. Regardless, the reform began to be reverted at the school level almost immediately, with schools assigning more teaching hours beyond the 20-hour limit. According to school administrator interviews and teacher focus groups, in addition to more teaching hours, it was largely senior teachers who petitioned school principals to retain ‘strategic vacancies,’ a practice of leaving teacher vacancies unfilled at the beginning of the school year so teaching hours can be redistributed among current teachers rather than hiring new teachers (School Administrator Interviews, March 2014). Principals also worked with district education office government officials to have case-by-case exceptions made for their schools to expand work hour limits for current teachers when new teachers could not be found in time for hire. Just months after the teaching limit was set, it was amended. Over a period of three years, the permissible weekly teaching load was increased from 20 to 25 hours, then to 27, and finally to 31 hours. Table 36.2 enumerates the legislative changes that took place following the reform that effectively reverted the new salary system from a weekly workload back to the stavka system.

With a 31-hour per week teaching limit, teachers were back to competing for teaching hours and negotiating with the principal to be assigned the maximum permissible teaching load and additional teaching hours. This advantaged the experienced teachers who had longstanding rapport with the principal at the expense of the new teachers who received less teaching hours and consequently lower earnings. Table 36.3 presents a sample of schools from the study and shows the difference in earnings in 2013/14 between beginning teachers and experienced teachers, ranging from 12 percent to 47 percent more favoring experienced teachers. This huge variation results mainly from additional teaching hours that principals assign to experienced teachers.

Bowing to pressure from schools in Bishkek and other urban areas, and with backing from the Teachers Union, the 2011 reform underwent massive changes (Interviews with Policymakers, March 2014). As Table 36.2 shows, the initial policy (issued in January 2013) was revised twice in the same year, and then again substantially amended two years later, in June 2013. The political pressure to abandon the restrictive teaching load component of the 2011 salary reform was in fact so massive that MoES lifted the ceiling as well for total permissible work hours from 32 to 49 hours per week, which stands higher than the maximum work week load specified in the Labor Code of the country.

### Table 36.2 Increase of permissible teaching and total work hours, 2011–13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Maximum teaching load (hours per week)</th>
<th>Total permissible work hours (per week)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decree 18, 19 (January 2011)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decree 270, 31 (May 2011)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive of MoES, 0407/4451, 1 (September 2011)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decree 373, 24 (June 2013)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 36.3 Average salary of beginning teachers (less than five years’ teaching experience) vs. experienced teachers (more than 15 years’ teaching experience), 2013/14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average salary of beginning teacher (Kyrgyz som)</td>
<td>6,647</td>
<td>3,578</td>
<td>6,260</td>
<td>5,864</td>
<td>5,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average salary of experienced teacher (Kyrgyz som)</td>
<td>8,869</td>
<td>6,245</td>
<td>10,241</td>
<td>6,686</td>
<td>9,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent difference in pay between beginning and experienced teachers</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introducing Incentive Pay

The Stimulus Fund was introduced as an incentive-based bonus component of the 2011 reform package, intended to motivate teachers to improve the quality of their teaching. Incentive pay was recommended by the donor agencies that advised MoES on solutions to improve the work quality of teachers. It was recommended that the Stimulus Fund be allocated by MoES in the amount of 20 percent of the total teacher salary per school. However, MoES implemented incentive pay at a rate of just an additional 10 percent from the total of a school’s salary budget, to be disbursed on a quarterly basis. MoES also provided a list of recommended criteria for schools to use to allocate the incentive pay, with the final criteria selection and mode of Stimulus Fund distribution left to the discretion of schools. Table 36.4 lists the recommended criteria and includes a dimension (added by the authors) that classifies each suggested criteria by type of goal or outcome. As the table shows, professional growth and development, administrative duties, and professionalism are criteria that appear with more frequency than criteria pertaining to teaching quality and student learning. While important to the success of schools, criteria that are administrative in nature do not directly impact teaching quality and instead direct teacher attention on tasks other than teaching. An analysis of Stimulus Fund distribution schemes from seven schools that shared this data with the research team shows that schools opted to add their own criteria for the Stimulus Fund in a manner that exhibited control and micromanagement of teachers and reflected power dynamics within schools. Among the added criteria are “teacher attitude towards work and work quality,” “reports to the district, city and national level,” “substitute work (including planning, documentation, tidiness),” “organization of work in the classroom,” and “fulfilling administrative duties” (Stimulus Fund Criteria collected in March 2014). All of these added criteria reflect the goal of ensuring teacher compliance and micromanagement on the part of the administration.

While the introduction of incentive pay was intended to facilitate camaraderie, knowledge sharing, and friendly competition among teachers to foster better pedagogical practices and
Each Stimulus Fund distribution type represents a unique coping mechanism to overcome the challenges posed by the other disputed components of the reform. As such, schools have used the leverage they have over allocation of the bonus pay in a number of ways. First is to mitigate the impact of eliminated category-based compensation by distributing the Stimulus Fund in higher numbers to senior teachers than to less experienced teachers. As teachers in one school explained, their school has devised a points system for distributing the Stimulus Fund, with each point having a cash value of approximately 170 Kyrgyz som. Beginning teachers are allocated two points whereas experienced teachers get five points. In total, the school has approximately 600 points to distribute, including points to be distributed to school administrators, at no more than 10 points each. Second is to exert more control over the work of teachers by evaluating them based on criteria that track compliance and completion of administrative duties. Finally, as was disclosed to us in the course of interviews, at least one school that we visited entirely ignores the suggested allocation schema of the Stimulus Fund and opts instead to distribute the funds equally among all teachers. A teacher at a rural school in Kyrgyzstan, explained that it is not worth the time and effort to track each teacher’s work to administer a nominal bonus pay amount once every three months. She stated, “let me just be honest with you, we just split it equally and that’s that. We all decided to do it some time ago” (teacher interview, March 2014).

As such, each pattern of incentive pay distribution undermines the goals of the 2011 teacher salary reform. The category replacement distribution pattern reflects strong support for senior teachers who lost compensation for categories, the teacher micromanagement or compliance distribution scheme appears in schools in which administrators are more concerned with garnering teacher compliance than rewarding pedagogical successes, and schools that adopt the egalitarian distribution scheme either adhere to the view that equal distribution of the Stimulus Fund is the most equitable way to distribute the extra salary or have decided that the time and effort of tracking each teacher’s individual performance for the purpose of distributing quarterly incentive pay is not worthwhile. Finally, the schools that do adopt the performance-based distribution model heavily rely on criteria suggested by MoES that evaluates teachers on dimensions that for the most part do not reward excellence in teaching.

ENCOUNTER AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL: UNDERMINING AND REVERTING THE REFORM

Each component of the new salary scheme was seen by senior teachers as either an overt or a covert mechanism to undermine the life-long contributions of experienced teachers and erode the longstanding hierarchical norms of teacher compensation that was established through the stavka system. Valuing educational qualifications over the longstanding practice of determining pay based on categories was seen as an overt mechanism to undermine senior teachers. Although 85 percent of teachers in Kyrgyzstan hold higher education degrees as of 2014 (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014), the reform’s emphasis on education rather than experience, and particularly the distinction in compensation between holders of Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees (degree distinctions that did not exist when senior teachers completed their post-secondary education), was seen as a reform component aimed to undermine senior teachers and compensate young, inexperienced, but credentialed teachers at a higher rate. Multitudes of senior teachers expressed in focus groups that after years of working on attaining the highest category as a teacher, it is unfair to lose that status altogether. One teacher expressed her anger at the reform explicitly, stating, “we’ve always been lied to, are now being lied to, and will continue to be lied to” (Teacher Focus Groups, March 2014).
The introduction of the Stimulus Fund as a separate compensation component and the limit on teaching hours were seen by senior teachers as unfair mechanisms to shift the salary structure to benefit young teachers. Senior teachers were left with the impression that inexperienced teachers were given a salary boost that they had not yet earned and which came at the expense of older teachers. The limit on teaching hours was seen to benefit young teachers because principals would have to redistribute teaching hours to beginning teachers and hire new teachers altogether. As several senior teachers observed, cynically, "young teachers are not at school to teach, they're there to make money" (Teacher Focus Groups, March 2014).

Although experienced teachers stood to lose from the reform given its goals, this influential group of experienced teachers with strong ties to their schools, longstanding rapport with school administrators, and support from communities leveraged influence to retain their teaching positions and status within schools. They were the key influencers in the adaptation of the new reform, including the way in which schools disburse Stimulus Funds and allocate teaching hours (Belyavina, 2017). Experienced teachers were the key proponents and pushers for the swift revocation of the reform back to a de facto stakya system, which is today once again defined by competition among teachers for additional teaching hours. Findings from our analysis of 10 schools across Kyrgyzstan show that teachers with 15 or more years of work experience have higher average earnings in every school we examined. Table 36.3 shows a sampling of half the schools examined in the study, evidencing that experienced teachers, not young teachers, were the winners of the salary reform. In some instances, beginning teachers make only 53 percent of what their experienced counterparts make (see school 5 in Table 36.3). Because the salary system has been reverted back to a de facto stakya system, teachers are again vying for more teaching hours; those with fewer years of experience are not able to obtain as many teaching hours as their more experienced counterparts. This inability to secure enough teaching hours and a steady salary are the reasons most often cited by young teachers for why new teachers leave the profession (Teacher Focus Groups, March 2014).

DISCUSSION

Despite good intentions to improve the salary system and align Kyrgyzstan's teacher remuneration structure with that of OECD countries, what this reform did not account for is that it directly contradicts the longstanding norms of compensation in Kyrgyzstan. As Larry Cuban observed (1998), reforms are implemented at schools and schools change reforms if the reforms are not congruent with what the school community regards as "moral and service values inherent to teaching" (Cuban, 1998, p. 459). Teachers assess reforms based on "moral and service values inherent to teaching that differ from the technical and scientific values that policy elites possess" (Ibid.) The logic of reforms at the policy level must match the logic at the school level. In contexts where senior teachers deem that they must compete or employ other mechanisms such as relying on their social ties with school administrators to attain a higher salary, teachers will do so even if it means undermining reforms. We propose to take the observation of school-induced policy change a step further by inserting a power dimension: those that lose their privileges most in the wake of a reform mobilize resources to undo government-issued policies.

Individuals become the force that determines individual gains, shapes social and economic development, and impacts social and professional status. An individual with agency can deploy power of decision making to meaningfully shape her own life and affect others (Archer, 1996, 2000). Individual agents can also develop the capacity for collective agency, allowing groups to enact change. According to Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons (2006), the process of mobilizing for change takes place in the space between the structure of society, including power relations across groups, and the agency of individuals and groups that coalesce for action (Day et al., 2006). In the context of Kyrgyzstan, individuals are keenly impactful on the enactment and reception of new policies. Thus, if new policies are judged to be incongruent with school contexts, as was the case of the 2011 reform, teachers, and with them school administrators, will mobilize to undermine that policy. As the case of Kyrgyzstan shows, while the structure of the stakya system may be outdated, the logic inherent in its reception as a "fair" system of salary distribution continues to hold steadfast in the country and in the region. If envisaged policies do not align with local values, enacted policies will not meet the goals set out by the policymakers. As this chapter has shown, schools will revert to familiar practices when the status quo is deemed more beneficial than change.

The 2011 salary reform was an attempt to remedy teacher shortage and elevate the status of the teaching profession. It failed. Teachers do not teach fewer hours after the reform: on the contrary, teachers can now work up to 49 hours, which is more than they worked before the reform. The reform has not been successful in maintaining the same momentum of recruiting new teachers to the profession as in the first two years of the reform. Furthermore, schools across the country saw a decrease in the number of teachers staying on after five years of teaching. Finally, there is no evidence that the Stimulus Fund was successful in motivating teachers to improve the quality of their work. Instead, the Stimulus Fund was a catalyst for undermining the reform and reverting the remuneration practices back to the stakya system (Belavina, 2016).

In 2015, the Ministry of Education and Science announced that categories would be returned and a new attestation process would begin in 2016. Although at the time of writing this has not been initiated, it is widely believed that the category structure and attestation process will be similar to its Soviet antecedent.

CONCLUSION

There are at least three conclusions that may be drawn from the analysis of the failed 2011 salary reform. First, power relations within the teaching workforce matter. For the study of the policy process, an important lesson may be learned from the failed reform in Kyrgyzstan: even in highly centralized systems such as in Kyrgyzstan, top-down reform does not work unless power relations, social hierarchies, and norms are taken into account. It is critical to anticipate and closely consider who will benefit and who will lose in a reform. In Kyrgyzstan, the greatest losers were older teachers and teachers in urban schools, both groups that were—due to political and social networks—influential to the extent that they undermined the reform from the bottom up. They were ultimately responsible for undoing the reform so as not to be its losers. Second, salary reforms imply a re-stratification process and therefore longstanding views on what is fair when it comes to remuneration is slow to change. Those that stand to lose or merely perceive that they will be the losers in a reform resist change. Kyrgyzstan shares similar challenges around teacher recruitment and retention with other countries in the post-Soviet region and offers a rich example of the tensions between the structure, rationale, and logic of the old systems and new ideas. While new policies are always framed as a solution to local problems, they often clash with the local context into which they are introduced and become dysfunctional. There is a resistance to change by those that benefited from an old policy even if the logic of the policy is a relic of an old system (in this case the communist system) that is long gone.

A third conclusion deals with global education policy and transnational policy borrowing. The transfer of global teacher policy such as, for example, introducing a workload remuneration system and incentive-based compensation from one context (i.e., OECD countries) to another (the post-Soviet region) implies an active "local translation," recontextualization, or
local adaptation process as a result of which the initial purpose of the global reform may have been replaced by local agendas (see Terway & Steiner-Khamsi, 2017). At the examination of the 2011 salary reform in Kyrgyzstan has shown, the introduction of the Stimulus Fund was implemented at the school level in a way that defeated the purpose of an incentive-based pay structure. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the local agenda became the undoing of the entire salary reform and the reversion back to the stavka system.

Every educational system is a bounded system with a specific set of cause-effect relationships, its own logic, and regulatory mechanisms that ensure the system logic is perpetuated. By demonstrating some key features of the post-Soviet stavka system, this chapter makes a case against uncritical transfer of reform packages from one context to another. We extend an invitation to reverse the current homogenization trend and acknowledge fundamental differences rather than similarities between educational systems. We have done so in light of the busy global trade of educational reform packages that are catapaulted, and more and more (literally) sold from one corner of the world to another with little analysis of the existing system. The governments in developing countries receive loans or grants to "borrow" or lend such reforms, most recently of managerial reforms in teacher policy (Verger, Kosar Altinyelken, & de Koning, 2013), but more often than not simply add them on top of already existing local reform initiatives for the duration of the loan or grant. The dual process of reception and translation is key for understanding why in a given context of global education a policy resonates and is subsequently adopted. The investigation of who benefits and who loses from a reform takes center stage in an agency-driven and conflict-sensitive perspective of system theory. The failed 2011 salary reform in Kyrgyzstan is a good example of how a top-down reform is subverted and changed bottom-up by those that would have lost the most if it had been rigorously implemented.

REFERENCES


