Country Study Report on Pedagogical Approaches Case of Kyrgyzstan

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Context

- Kyrgyzstan is situated in Central Asia.
- Soviet rule established between 1918 and 1922.
- Kyrgyz language gained the status of state language in 1989.

After the break-up of the USSR, series of reforms, such as

- securing membership in international organisations
- introducing a national currency, privatization
- shifting from a monistic power structure to a pluralistic electoral system
- moving from a centralized state economy to a market-oriented
Soviet education

- Centrally-designed curriculum
- Espoused education equality and uniformity, but never really monolithic or egalitarian.
- Promotion of Russian identity and incentives to study Russian
- Quality issues in rural schools, and Soviets attempted to improve rural schools
- Less parental involvement (parents “give their children’ education” to schools)
Changes during Perestroika

In the 1980s changes in education

- Kyrgyz language adopted as the State language in 1989

- Kyrgyz schools increase (by 17 %), Russian schools decrease (by 39 %)

- Innovative teachers attempted to encourage their pupils’ creative thinking

- “Netradissionnye” (non-traditional) and “pedagogy of cooperation” widely endorsed (Lysenkova et al, 1986)
Post-Soviet changes

- Issues with enrollment and decline with graduation rates
- Students drop out increase
- Lowering quality, especially in rural schools
  - 70% population & 83% of schools in rural areas.
  - Private schools established in urban areas
Literature on teacher practices

Sablonniere et al (2009, p.628): “At the time of the Soviet Union, Central Asia inherited from Soviet Union a pedagogy that focused predominantly on the teacher / expert approach”.

Price-Rom and Sainazarov (2010) study of active learning pedagogy

“Active-learning” (also “progressive”, “student-centered”, “learner-centered”, “interactive teaching and learning” methods) pedagogies constitute a model of teaching that highlights “minimal teacher lecturing or direct transmission of factual knowledge, multiple small group activities that engage students in discovery learning or problem solving, and frequent student questions and discussion” (Leu and Price-Rom 2006, p. 19).
Research Design and Methodology
Guiding Questions

- What are the prevailing pedagogical approaches used in the education system in Kyrgyzstan?
- Is there any innovative practice among the existing pedagogical approaches which is found to be effective for learning?
- If so, what are these practices, and how and in what ways are they effective?
- What are some of the features of a pedagogical approach that responds to the changing learning requirements of the future?
Data collection

- Interviews conducted by phone and electronic mail (10 respondents)
  - Respondents:
    - MOES and KAE representatives
    - International scholar
    - Local education experts

- Document analysis
  - MOES documents
  - National curriculum document
  - Education Development Strategy 2012-2020
  - KAE teacher training materials
  - Research reports
Lesson observations

Due to time constraint, it was not possible to conduct lesson observations.

Lesson observations from my previous research studies (e.g., Tate, Shamatov & Weeks, 2011; Shamatov, 2011; 2013)
Study Findings
Philosophy, culture, families, values shape education and learning

**Soviet legacy vs. Market relations in education**

- Marxist-Leninist (materialist, atheist) ideology on education to mold a Soviet / collective-oriented citizens vs. educating for market
- Parents’ limited role in their children’s schooling
- Teachers as promoters of communist ideology / truth vs. teachers in a free market society
- Teacher-centered vs. learner-centered pedagogy
- Teacher promotes upbringing (*tarbia* /vospitanie)?
Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Kyrgyzstan

- Curriculum, a new term and concept in Kyrgyzstan

- Instead, different documents exist: education plan; state standard of education; education programme; Education Development Strategy 2012-2020.

- New National Curriculum Framework (Soros Foundation) and Subject Curricula (ADB) introduced
Competency-based curriculum

- Shift from content-based to competency-based curriculum.

- Competency is defined as the integrated ability of a person to apply different elements of knowledge, skills and abilities in real life situations. The main goal of this approach is for children to be able to use their school knowledge in real or close to real-life situations.
Unfortunately,

- Education overload, shortage of textbooks and teaching materials, and the poor quality of available materials impede teachers’ pedagogical practices.
- The poor quality of textbooks is attributed to the textbook development and publication procedure.
- Ineffective assessment practices also affect teachers’ pedagogical practices.
  - School based examinations mostly require students to regurgitate content from the textbook
  - Norm referenced 5 point grading scale
Curriculum development and teachers role

TOP DOWN

- Ministry of Education
- Oblast (province)
- Rayon (district)
- School / teachers

Feedback/ proposals from schools on curriculum change not sought
Pre-service and in-service training
Pre-service teacher education

- inherited from USSR and normally 4-5 years.
- Majority of pre-service graduates do not want to work as teachers
- Teacher-centered pedagogical practices
- Outdated teaching materials
- Fragmented use of interactive teaching methods
- Lack of reforms and donor involvement in pre-service
- Bologna integration push for learner-centered teaching approaches
In-service teacher training

In-service trainings are conducted at teacher training institutes (TTI) – requirement for it once in 5 years

Weak capacity of educators at in-service teacher training

Most trainings are outdated, low quality and not focusing on effective pedagogical practices (e.g. criticisms of overly theoretical and irrelevant courses)

Many donors work with in-service (main focus interactive teaching methods), but they often lack of consistency and sustainability
Classroom dynamics and teaching practices

- Mostly teacher-centered practices
- Learners as passive and a good teacher, someone who transfers information clearly.
- Some schools under international donor projects promote student-centered methods.
- Barriers include heavy teaching hours, big class sizes and lack of support from school administrators.
According to Asylbek Joodonbekov (specialist of KAE),

- Majority of primary and secondary teachers use predominantly traditional methods of teaching. They are mostly engaged in giving instructions, lecturing, explaining, and having their students memorize and retell. (interview, August 25, 2013)
Episode of a lesson observation

“When is your mother’s birthday?”
Lesson observation 1

- **Grade:** 7
- **Number of students:** 14
- **Subject:** English language

A horse-shoe seating classroom arrangement (different from traditional “rows facing the blackboard” style).

Teacher used many elements of active learning (group work, presentation, students asking questions from one another, game and competition).

The teacher was hurrying the students all the time, teaching in high tempo. In several occasions, she started asking questions before the assigned time was over.

Teacher tried to involve many students, but ended up asking three girls mostly as they were able to respond better than others. A weaker student could not respond and then she called another student to assist him.

Teacher assigned tasks for groups, but did not monitor and facilitate how students worked in groups.

The lesson had elements of both active and traditional lesson. Teachers often tried to adopt non-traditional methods, but she still had a didactic approach to teaching. She still dominated the whole class activities. She spoke most of the time, asked questions and expected the students to respond, when the students could not respond, she herself responded to her questions.
Lesson observation 2

- **Grade:** 6
- **Number of students:** 25
- **Subject:** Chemistry

Teacher dictated a text to students and students copied what the teacher said. All students had textbooks, but they still had to copy what teacher was reading.

The teacher explained some concepts which she felt were difficult for students.

She asked questions, and then responded to her questions herself, and she had students copy her statements.

Teacher asked questions from several students, and the latter responded by looking at their notes.

Teacher was at the center of everything what happened in the classroom. All the interactions were teacher-centered or teacher-initiated. The students did not ask any questions; neither had they interacted with each other during the lesson.

The teacher used such strategies as questioning, explaining, lecturing and assigning tasks. She explained each rule slowly and step by step. Though, it was not obvious whether the students developed in-depth understanding of the topic discussed in the class.
Development of non-cognitive / 21st century skills in Kyrgyzstan

- Critical thinking through Soros Foundation initiatives
- Higher order thinking skills (of Benjamin Bloom) through various international projects
- Debate skills
- Conflict resolution skills and tolerance aftermath of Osh 2010 summer ethnic clashes
Kyrgyzstan in PISA 2006 and 2009

In 2006, among 57 participating countries, students of Kyrgyzstan took the last place.

In 2009, last position among 65 countries (highest was Shanghai-China – 556)
Improvements in PISA 2009

Reading literacy
- Mean 285 to 313
- Minimal standard 11.8% to 16.6%

Mathematics
- Mean 311 to 330
- Minimal standard 10.6% to 13.1%

Science
- Mean 322 to 330
- Minimal standard 13.6% to 18.3%
Kyrgyzstan. Comparing PISA 2006 and 2009 mean scores
Voices of Kyrgyz educators

- Our teachers mostly teach to develop rote memorization and retelling. But the PISA asks questions like ‘Why? How do you use this formula? How does this formula work in real life?’

- Our children cannot apply their knowledge in real life situations. For example, there was a question in the PISA test asking where you should put a torch in order to get maximum lighting in the room, which requires knowledge of physics. Most students from Kyrgyzstan could not answer the question correctly.

- Students should develop in-depth understanding of concepts rather than memorizing, learn how to apply their knowledge and skills in real life situations. They should develop critical and analytical thinking and problem solving skills.
Some skepticism of PISA results

Some MPs questioned the validity sampling: “Why were not the only best schools selected?”

“Our education is from the Soviet period, so it cannot be that bad. The Soviet education was (is) the best”

“How come our students perform so poorly, I don’t believe this. Our students regularly win international Olympiads in different subjects”
Equity issues

The PISA showed the issues of equity and access to quality education.

Private, semi-private schools, new type schools (gymnasiums, lyceums, author schools) in big cities perform better.

Rural and mountain schools poorly.
Figure 17  Mean science performance by school location, PISA 2006

UNICEF programme countries

- Azerbaijan
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Kyrgyz Republic
- Montenegro
- Romania
- Russian Federation
- Serbia
- Turkey
Conclusions

- Small number of teachers use active learning pedagogy due to international projects
- Majority of teachers use traditional teaching methods
- There is a need to systemic efforts and developing local capacity so that there will be long-term sustainable impact and all the teachers develop in-depth understanding of effective teaching and learning methods and they can use these methods to teach better.