RETAINING AND ATTRACTING TALENTED TEACHERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. Kazakhstani education is facing one of the major issues of graduated students’ rejection of teaching in secondary schools in Kazakhstan. This article studies the problem of teachers’ outflow. In order to rectify the problem of teacher outflow, this research paper tries to explore effective measures to attract talents. The authors find out the positive and negative aspects of teaching in secondary school.

Keywords: secondary education in Kazakhstan, attracting talented teachers, teachers’ outflow.

Introduction

In the past several decades, the education system has played an important role in developing countries. Kazakhstan is no exception. Teachers are at the helm of an education system. That is why the necessary measures were taken in order to ameliorate existing conditions in the teaching sphere and retain talented teachers in schools. A common strategy used to study education is from a student’s perspective. For this study, it was of interest to investigate education from teachers’ perspectives. To discuss the context of Kazakhstani secondary education we decided to start by describing the major developing documents – state programs for the development of education. Since 2005 there were accepted several development programs:

The State Program for the Development of Education in the Republic of

We, therefore, analyzed the development programs for 2005-2010, 2011-2020, and 2020-2025 years and investigated whether the issue of raising the status of teaching as a career is elucidated in Kazakhstan.

Research problem

The annual number of graduated specialists in education, there is still a need for teachers. “During the 2016-2019 period, the number of the teaching staff was more than half a million people. There are no effective mechanisms to attract and retain qualified teachers in schools” (State Program of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025, 2019, Nur-Sultan, p. 6). In spite of offered benefits and support from the government up to 35% of teachers go to other areas. Eventually, this makes up for the problem of teachers’ outflow. It is a problem in the case that graduated talents are still rejecting the idea of teaching in secondary schools. Nowadays outflow of talents occurs to be one of the most hard-solving problems in Kazakhstan.

Research Purpose

Our research aims at identifying the required needs and conditions in order to attract and retain talented teachers in secondary schools in Kazakhstan.

Research Questions

1. What factors influence pre-graduate students’ decision to teach in secondary schools as their profession?

2. What measures might be effective in attracting talented teachers?
3. How effective are the measures taken in Kazakhstan to raise the status of teaching as a career?

4. Why do teachers of secondary schools intend to quit and pursue careers in other professional areas?

Assumptions

Teachers’ working environment remained in the dark until 2005. We consider the issue of teachers’ outflow to be a serious problem in Kazakhstan. Our study puts forward the opinion that the reason for the outflow is insufficient measures. We believe that existing conditions provide deficient attraction power for talents. Inasmuch as we do not see the outcome of those measures. Moreover, we think that the real teaching environment does not meet the attracting and retaining requirements.

Key terms

Program – a set of measures or activities that are taken in order to achieve a long-term goal.

Retaining talented teachers - keeping talented teachers on the job by offering them benefits.

Attracting talented teachers – recruiting talented teachers by offering them benefits of a particular vacancy.

Secondary education in Kazakhstan – the second stage of education, formally taking place before tertiary education in Kazakhstan.

Review of Previous Research

Motivation is one of the main components of successful teaching. And a salary is included in the components. Several studies suggest that a low salary is a demotivating factor. Kulkova and Kosintseva (2016) asked young professionals how satisfied they were with their salaries. The research showed that a low salary and overloaded circumstances are demotivating factors. Aidyn (2012) suggested one of the main factors that demotivated the subject was the working conditions as well. Orazkeldiyeva (2019) conducted research that supports the motivating aspect of rising salary.

One of the first examples of problematic interaction with students is presented
in Aydin’s (2012) study. The study found out that one of the problems arises from the affective states of children. Another study by Maslinsky and Ivanyushina (2016) also considers the interaction with students to be problematic in the teaching environment.

Kulkova and Kosintseva (2016) used a survey to find an answer to why young teachers consider teaching stressful. Martynenko et al., (2020) found among the significant factors of abandoning a pedagogical career, the survey participants noted a too high level of academic load, which is a forced decision for school leaders in conditions of an acute personnel shortage. In conversations and responses to open questionnaires, it was explained that a high workload reduces the quality of lessons, and leaves no room for reflection, and personal and professional development, which is key for any teacher, and for a young teacher, in particular.

Contrasting Kulkova and Kosintseva (2016) think the most quitting factor is workload however Maslinsky and Ivanyushina (2016) found a factor reflecting teacher expectations with regard to the success of daily tasks.

**Methodology**

Since we tried to discover teachers’ working conditions from their perspective and find out the correlation between teachers’ job satisfaction and quitting teaching professions, we decided to choose a qualitative approach to study the problem of teachers’ outflow in Kazakhstan. Consequently, we opted for a qualitative approach, in order to fill missing gaps by interviewing teachers. To collect qualitative data we used a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling to select participants for the study. We have 10 participants and 10 interviews.

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According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative approach is used to explore in-depth the main idea of the study from the respondents’ perspective. Conducting our study we refer to Rabionet, in the sense that it is important to take into consideration the personal attitudes and opinions of the participants, so a qualitative interview design is an ideal “tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experiences” (Rabionet, 2011, p. 563). Since we conduct the study from the teachers’ perspective, we need to collect the data about the participants’ experiences, attitudes, and opinions about the existing conditions in secondary schools in order to answer research questions.

A qualitative interview was employed as a method for collecting the data needed to address the research questions stated in this study. The data collection timeline was the period from 01.03.2021 to 21.03.2021. In order to collect data three steps were taken.

Firstly, all the recorded interviews were transcribed and read for getting a general idea of the responses which were either in Kazakh or Russian. After transcribing, the responses were organized by the school (urban/rural) and the level of their experience.

Candidates consented to participate via signing consent forms that explained the study purpose as well as the risks involved and sending an online agreement. The school name was not defined in order to prevent the risk of the school being identified and compared to other schools. The participants were identified as P1, P2, P3, etc.

**Findings**

Qualitative data analysis was employed as a method for analyzing the data needed to address the research questions stated in this study. According to Bloomberg and Volpe, “qualitative data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the masses of data collected. Broadly speaking, qualitative
data analysis is an attempt by the researcher to summarize all the collected data in a dependable and accurate manner” (2008, p. 3). Using the qualitative interview approach, ten secondary school teachers were interviewed. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed by hand. First, all audio recordings of interviews were listened to by us, after listening to the recordings transcripts were coded. The usage of codes helps to organize the received information into themes that will help to find answers to the research questions. Consequently, according to the codes, special themes were defined. The defined themes can be observed in the table below.

**Research question one: What factors influence pre-graduate students’ decision to teach in secondary schools as their profession?**

All the participants were asked why they choose to teach as their profession. The majority of the participants describe teaching as the ability to give knowledge to the younger generation.

*Teachers have always been famous since time immemorial because we teach children, we give them knowledge. We put creativity into them. We give them unlimited opportunities and aspirations for creativity. (Participant 7)*

However, all the respondents claimed that the existence of discrepancy between the salary and the work teachers execute was glaring until recently. Secondary school teachers suffered from the low salary they received for such an important job.

*Honestly, before new measures were taken, the salary was two or three times lower. I thought the teacher spent more than he/she earned. (Participant 6)*

In addition to the low salary, two participants pointed out that the lack of teaching practice during studying in higher education may negatively influence pre-graduated students’ decision to choose teaching in secondary schools as their profession.

*I think there is a certain barrier for our pre-graduated students. Of course, I believe that there should be a practice, a very good practice, that students should be in schools, that they should be in contact with children, and in the future, I think they will understand that the teaching profession is still worthy and it is necessary. (Participant 7)*
There is a further explanation for rejecting the idea of teaching in secondary schools by pre-graduated students. One participant casts doubt on the program of higher pedagogical education because the program does not include the new curriculum implemented in secondary schools in Kazakhstan.

*Students come with a traditional base, and they are taught traditionally, they start working at the school according to the updated one, and it is very difficult for them to rebuild. This program is challenging for both children and adults. That is, it does not correspond to what a person is preparing for, and what he sees.* (Participants 8)

Based on the received answers, we can conclude that several factors influence pre-graduated students’ decision to teach in secondary schools. Personal beliefs and attitudes can influence students’ decisions positively. Nevertheless, the factors such as lack of practice, inconsistency between the theoretical knowledge base and practical part of the teaching, and not unreasonable stereotypes about the low salary may affect negatively.

**Research question two: What measures might be effective in attracting talented teachers?**

As mentioned above several measures were taken in order to retain teachers in secondary schools in Kazakhstan. For example, raising teachers’ salaries is one of the taken measures. All respondents are satisfied with their current salary now. Moreover, the majority of the respondents stated that improvement of the financial aspect of teaching is the best aspect of the taken measures. Therefore it is the most attractive measure to attract new talented teachers.

*I am satisfied with the work conditions. Because teachers’ salaries are rising every year. For example, the percentage will increase from the new year.* (Participant 7)

Half of the respondents expect that the next effective measure in attracting young teachers is decreasing workload. Because according to the law “Status of the teacher” teachers have a lower workload now. In addition, basic salaries are rising at the moment.

*At the moment, I think so. That is, the load on teachers is not so big. It will be
16 hours from next year, and that's fine. For example, in urban schools, some teachers work 30-35 hours, and this is a lot. This is when you have 7-8 hours a day, at least. Yes. And the salary will be taken into account. Therefore, the teacher will work less and receive more. (Participant 6)

Another effective measure is the betterment of the technical infrastructure. One participant from the urban school stresses the new technical equipment in the school. Some participants find the technical infrastructure as an aspect that helps to conduct lessons.

I am satisfied with everything at school. Because, at my discretion, for example, all the conditions for my classes were created in that school. For example, providing a computer and the Internet. And each room has its own interactive whiteboards, with which all the conditions for working with students are created. (Participant 4)

Bringing all the information above together we make a conclusion that rising teachers’ salaries, decreasing the workload, and betterment of the technical infrastructure might be effective measures to attract and retain the talents of secondary schools. According to the answers, the existing discrepancy between the salary and the workload is shortening. That factor will affect the decision to teach positively. Similarly, participants note that better technical infrastructure, which helps them to conduct lessons in a more interesting way, may influence positively.

Research question three: How effective are the measures taken in Kazakhstan to raise the status of teaching as a career?

All interviewees consider that the taken measures are effective according to the law about “Status of the teacher” and the state program called “The State Program for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan”.

Effective. Of course, they are effective. I was just saying that a lot of things had changed. The surcharge, of course, has changed. I think our future students and teachers will definitely be attracted by this. We are glad that such status is provided to us in Kazakhstan. (Participant 5)

Also, some young teachers emphasize that a program called “With a diploma to the village” can improve and help the schools to invite talented teachers. Therefore, financial support from the government is significant not only for the
teachers and for schools.

A program with a diploma to the village is also provided for young teachers. It worked before and is now working successfully. Even on the basis of our school. We have a lot of teachers who have received lifting credits, including me. Yes, we got a lift, in order to get housing, in the area where we work...the only incentive is probably finances and conditions." (Participants 6)

Nowadays the government of Kazakhstan knows about the issue with teachers’ outflow. Consequently, that is why the government referred to this issue more seriously. The programs and laws that were taken before are effective now and it is working usefully.

The research question four: Why do teachers of secondary schools intend to quit and pursue a career in other professional areas?

All participants have been bombarded with difficulties in secondary schools. However, several difficulties make them think about quitting or changing a profession. Half of the respondents confessed that they have ever had thoughts about quitting. The first factor that makes participants struggle is difficulties in interaction with students and controlling the class.

With students (difficulties), yes, there were, especially with children of teenage age. There are always such problems. For example, the children of the 8th grade do not want to sit in class, and you have to explain the topic to them again and again. It's very exhausting, building discipline day in and day out. Even when you go to work at a young age, the student does not always take you seriously. At the beginning." (Participant 6)

The next factor is difficulties with parents. More than half of the participants emphasize that working with parents is hard work nowadays.

Working with parents is more difficult than working with students. If earlier, when making a remark, a parent took the side of the teacher and they solved this problem together. But that's not the case now. Parents don’t hear the remark now. Their main task is to prove that my child is golden. (Participant 9)

According to Participant 1, we can observe that the problem with infrastructure is still actual in some schools, especially in rural schools. Despite the fact that
technical infrastructure is ameliorating, teachers and students still face this challenge.

In rural areas there are no such conditions, such as the Internet, for example, we have such a problem at school. There are 2-3 computers in the computer room. (Participant 1)

The extra workload is also an actual problem. Teachers of secondary schools still experience the issue of extra workload nowadays.

How to explain, an extra workload is work that is not related to your professional activity, which is loaded, for example, by the school administration. Paperwork. It happens that they give you a task suddenly, which you must complete in an accelerated way. There is a lack of time. (Participant 5)

The last negatively influencing factor is students’ low motivation to study.

Today's children are difficult, it is difficult to teach. After all, children do not want to learn, today. This is difficult for some teachers because children do not want to learn as before, as if they are going somewhere else, in a different direction. They think they don't need to learn. (Participant 10)

Reaching a conclusion, we identified four factors that make teachers intend to quit and pursue careers in other professional areas. All respondents consider that such difficulties will be experienced in any way. Young specialists especially struggle with students and parents. However, the extra workload is an immortal difficulty. Despite the statements about decreasing the workload in the law “Status of the teacher”, secondary school teachers are still bombarded with extra paperwork, such as reports, journals, and collection of information.

Discussion

According to the results of conducted interviews, we found out several factors influence pre-graduate students' decision to work in secondary schools. Factors such as lack of practice, inconsistency between the theoretical knowledge base and practical part of the teaching, and not unreasonable stereotypes about the low salary affect their decision negatively. Similar to the reviewed study by Kulkova and Kosintseva (2016) Kazakhstani young specialists face demotivating factors. Participants pointed out that the main reason why pre-graduate students reject the
idea of teaching in secondary schools is the stereotype of low salaries. The study conducted by Kulkova and Kosintseva described the situation of teachers’ unsatisfactory relation to the level of salary. The study showed that half of the respondents were not satisfied with the salary they received for the amount of their workload. However, in the Kazakhstani context, the situation has changed. Respondents of the present study showed their satisfaction with the salary they receive. We can explain the situation of the stereotype of the teachers’ low salary by highlighting the fact that teachers’ work has been paid unfairly low until the implementation of the law “Status of the teacher”.

Among participants, there are teachers who shed light on the issue of paucity of pre-graduated students’ teaching practice during studying in higher education. This aspect of demotivating factors is unique. While reviewing the literature similar factors were not found by us. Teachers reported that students during studying higher education do not receive enough practice in teaching. Therefore, they may be biased by not trying themselves as future teachers in secondary schools.

The main result obtained from this study was that from the teachers’ perspective, attractive measures were effective. Measures such as the following: raising the salary, decreasing the workload, and betterment of technical infrastructure. However, secondary school teachers experience difficulties such as difficulties with students and parents, extra workload, and students’ low motivation. Stated factors forced teachers to think about quitting at least once. The issue of rejecting the idea of teaching in secondary schools is primarily led by the stereotype of low salary. Also, pre-graduate students suffer from a lack of practice. These findings tie well with previous studies wherein the demotivating factors were presented as well. Aydin (2012), Orazkeldiyeva (2019), Kulkova and Kosintseva (2016) studies support the motivating aspect of rising salary. The research conducted by Kulkova and Kosintseva (2016) points out the imbalance between workload and salary. A similar pattern of results was obtained in the study by Martynenko et al., (2020). The researchers found a too high level of academic load. In addition, they consider a high level of load to interfere with personal and professional development, which is key, especially for a young teacher. Another demotivating
factor stated in our study is difficulties with students. The finding is directly in line with previous findings found in the study conducted by Aydin (2012). Aydin (2012) found out that one of the problems arises from the affective states of children. The participant of his study pointed out the negative influence of low motivation of students as well as the majority of participants of our study. The results showed that secondary school teachers had thoughts about quitting. Overall, these findings are the following findings reported by Maslinsky and Ivanyushina (2016). The authors found out that factors perceived by teachers as professional difficulties are related to their attitude to changing their profession. When comparing our results to those of older studies, it must be pointed out that secondary school teachers are still suffering from difficulties making them leave their profession. However, an interesting finding was revealed, during the data analysis, we discovered the fact that secondary school work conditions were unsatisfying in the past. The participants of our study are mostly satisfied with the offered work conditions after the implementation of the law “Status of the teacher”.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

The previous chapter presented an explanation of the findings of the study. This chapter will draw conclusions and suggest recommendations. The study aimed at identifying required needs and conditions in order to attract and retain talents in secondary schools in Kazakhstan. To achieve the purpose of the study the following research questions were addressed: (1) What factors influence pre-graduated students’ decision to teach in secondary schools as their profession? (2) What measures might be effective in attracting talented teachers? (3) How effective are the measures taken in Kazakhstan to raise the status of teaching as a career? (4) Why do teachers of secondary schools intend to quit and pursue a career in other professional areas? To collect qualitative data 10 secondary school teachers were interviewed. This chapter is organized according to the research questions. A conclusion and recommendations are provided in a combined way for every research question.

**Research question one: What factors influence pre-graduate students’ decision to teach in secondary schools as their profession?**
The findings regarding the first research question revealed that personal attitude plays an important role in the decision to choose teaching as a profession. Participants of the study mainly chose to teach by choice. However, the findings also elucidate the negatively influencing pre-graduate students’ decision to teach in secondary schools. The lack of practice, inconsistency between the theoretical knowledge base and practical part of teaching, and enshrined stereotype of teachers' low salary make young specialists reject the idea of teaching. Based on these findings, we conclude that despite the desire to teach in secondary schools in Kazakhstan, the fact that teachers received low salaries in the past, is still influencing young specialists’ decisions. In addition, young specialists experience difficulties in service, because they do not have enough practical teaching skills. Our recommendation for the organs responsible for policy formulation of the Ministry of Education and Science is to provide more practical knowledge to pedagogical students. The recommendation for policymakers is to start working in the direction of eradicating the stereotype of teachers’ low salaries. All forces should be directed at changing the situation in secondary schools for young specialists. Young specialists should feel confident in their theoretical and practical knowledge and comfortable with offered measures in secondary schools.

Research question two: What measures might be effective in attracting talented teachers?

First of all, our assumption on the issue of teachers’ outflow from secondary schools in Kazakhstan is directly connected with insufficient measures in order to attract and retain teachers. Also, we considered the real teaching environment to not meet the attracting and retaining requirements. Nevertheless, our assumptions do not coincide with the findings. The findings showed only positive opinions on the subject of taken measures and working conditions. All participants of our study claimed that they are satisfied with current working conditions and found measures to be effective in order to retain talents. The measures such as rising salary, decreasing workload, and betterment of infrastructure are actually effective for attracting talents and retaining teachers. The majority of the participants highlighted the financial attracting measures to be effective in order to attract young specialists.
to secondary schools. This allows the conclusion that nowadays the teaching environment meets the attracting and retaining requirements and taken measures for attracting talents are effective. A recommendation for policymakers is to study the issue of secondary schools' outflow carefully in order not to remain in the dark about the necessary attracting and retaining requirements. The government’s efforts to overcome the problem of outflow must not stop here.

**Research question three: How effective are the measures taken in Kazakhstan to raise the status of teaching as a career?**

The findings regarding the third question can be understood as the effectiveness of the law regarding the “Status of the teacher”. According to the findings, participants found measures implemented by the law regarding the “Status of the teacher” to be effective, especially in the sense of raising the status of teachers in Kazakhstan. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that the prestige of teachers affects secondary school teachers’ satisfaction with the environment as well. Raising the status of teaching as a career is one of the important aspects of attracting and retaining teachers. While policymakers may recognize that teachers play an important role in the education system, they should exert every effort to transform a “low-paid”, “thankless”, and “stressful” profession into a prestigious and honorable profession. The secondary school administration should provide teachers more support and protection in order to prevent situations when the administration does not come down on the teachers' side as described by a participant of the study.

**Research question four: Why do teachers of secondary schools intend to quit and pursue a career in other professional areas?**

The results obtained from the collected data demonstrated the factors influencing secondary school teachers’ intent to quit or change professional areas. The following factors were discovered: difficulties with students and their parents, students’ low motivation, extra workload, and problems with technical infrastructure in several regions of Kazakhstan. This is a significant finding in the understanding of the teacher’s intention to quit. Young teachers especially suffer from these factors. The findings lead to the following conclusions: secondary school teachers are still experiencing negative aspects of their work environment and conditions. Teachers’
intention to quit or change their profession depends on not only offered working conditions such as extra workload and the technical infrastructure issue but difficulties with students and parents impact more. Based on the analysis of the findings it can be suggested recommendation that policymakers should take into consideration the implementation of the measures provided by the law regarding “Status of the teacher” and “The State Program for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan” in every region of Kazakhstan, especially, rural regions should be monitored more carefully. A recommendation for secondary schools’ administration is that they should pay more attention to parents’ behavior, communicate and work more towards preventing controversies. The school administration should advocate for teachers’ rights better and find satisfactory conflict resolution avoiding infringements of teachers’ rights. Further, it can be suggested to school administrators to consider negative factors of the teaching environment such as unnecessary paperwork and extra workload. Also, our recommendation is the employment of motivational programs and rewarding systems for teachers in secondary schools in order to invest in attracting and retaining talents.

References:

