

# **SCHOOL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL TEACHERS' WELL-BEING IN KYRGYZSTAN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Teachers' motivation and encouragement are considered as one of the priority areas in the Education Development Strategy of Kyrgyz Republic Ministry of Education and Science. At the same time, teachers claim that the specified salary structure, benefits, and working conditions do not meet their basic needs. In this study, we've tried to determine the extent to which teachers' expectations and needs correspond to their constructive, organizational, and communicative components of professional activity and their implementation.

The results of the study revealed that the teachers in schools are not happy with the distribution of responsibilities among them. Apart from these facts, the teachers express overall satisfaction with their work. For instance, they are satisfied with the working conditions, teaching load, and professional development opportunities proposed by the administration. Moreover, many teachers expressed their respect for the profession itself. The insights of the study can be further researched in detail.

***Keywords:** teacher well-being, teacher job satisfaction, school teachers, scheduling program*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Each part of the educational system is greatly influenced by economic and social changes [3] and has a direct impact on the overall trajectory of a country's socio-historical development [2]. The school teachers' quality work results are in well-educated graduates who contribute to the development of the country and plays an important role in ensuring a high level of education in the country. Many researchers note that one of the factors influencing the professional performance of teachers is their professional well-being.

The Education Development Strategy of Kyrgyzstan for 2012-2020 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic shows that teachers have increasingly become objects of managerial approaches brought about by international donors. The language "what must be done with and for teachers" is used rather than "what teachers can do for education reform based on their practical experience" [10]. However, there are very few articles by Kyrgyz

researchers identifying factors affecting the well-being of school teachers. And there is an urgent need for research in this area of education in Kyrgyzstan. The work is conducted directly with school teachers to find out their emotional state, well-being, and how satisfied they are with their work. And this would help us reveal how effectively the state-created working conditions contribute to their work.

## **Literature Review**

A variety of factors can influence teachers' well-being and job satisfaction: the quality of the relationship with their supervisors, the quality of the physical environment in which they work, and the degree of fulfillment in their work [1]. Teacher's job satisfaction is a very important issue as it greatly affects a number of important workplace behaviors such as productivity and efficiency, systematic absenteeism, long-term mobility, and job rotation [13]. Job rotation is the administrative control of employee engagement to minimize employee exposure to hazards (D. Baker, 2020), which can reduce feelings of inequality among employees.

Shafer (2019) considers the main factors of teachers' satisfaction with their activities are working conditions (wages, the nature of relationships with the administration and colleagues, the possibility of professional growth, the prestige of the profession, etc.), the content of work (the creative nature of work, interaction with all participants in the education process, etc.), work results (positive dynamics of the student, gaining of pedagogical experience, etc.). Russian professor Zinchenko (2016) substantiates the degree of teachers job satisfaction and their well-being as an important influencing factor on the educational process in general. It is also interesting that researchers (Davydova, Mitina, Danzanov) propose to consider well-being with professional performance as one of the significant criteria for the professional development of a teacher. For example, Danzanov (2010) notes that job satisfaction and well-being are the necessary factors in the effectiveness of a teacher's work and an important qualitative characteristic of the subject of his / her professional performance. According to the researcher, satisfaction with professional performance is one of the conditions for a teacher to fulfill his/her professional duties in educational institutions. A better performance from a teacher can only be expected if they are satisfied with their job (Ali, 2011). Along with other factors influencing teacher satisfaction, the researchers also consider administrative support, since administrative support plays an important role in the efficiency of any kind of organization with an administrative structure (Ali, 2011) be it governmental or non-governmental institution, or a commercial private sector organization. The researcher S. Anastasiou (2014) states that the teachers' performance is influenced by several factors including the creation and maintenance of a healthy and creative work environment. Such an environment for the teachers should be the aim of educational managers all over the world.

It appears that school organizational climate may be one of the key factors in making the teachers feel satisfied and, accordingly, make their job performance more productive, functional, and desirable. Afshin (2019) suggests taking steps to assess the climate of schools and identify the dimensions which are critical for the health of schools, proving the findings of Zahoor (2011) where it was stated that in order to help teachers feel satisfied with their job it should be constructed in a favorable organizational climate at schools. Parlar et al. (2017) indicated in their research that professional cooperation, school administrator's support and the level of having a supportive working environment at schools and teacher leadership give positive and significant relationships. In addition to this, the results of the study show that professional cooperation and supportive working environments at schools are important variables explaining teacher professionalism.

A good level of life satisfaction could bring out good work performances. The teachers with a high level of life satisfaction could be better educational agents and their work could be more useful for child development [8]. Matyash & Pavlova (2015), conducting a survey among teachers, found that material security continues to be a serious problem, which was also revealed by Komarova (2001). These researchers stated that one of the most important factors in the unsatisfactory performance of teachers from a practical point of view is the low level of material remuneration. The findings of Marinette (2018) revealed that low salary, poor working environment, lack of job satisfaction and bad principal leadership style contribute greatly to teacher attrition. Having studied the impact of working conditions on teachers' attrition in secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon the researcher found that teacher's attrition has an impact on the quality of education. The researcher's findings revealed that teachers low salaries influence their attrition to a high degree. Secondary school teachers are one of the occupational groups presenting the highest levels of sick leave due to stress in the workplace. This form of stress can cause burnout syndrome, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low levels of personal accomplishment [9]. Work-related stress and emotional distress among schoolteachers are considered a serious concern in the educational context. According to Vincenza Capone's research (2019) the planning development programs to reduce teachers' malaise and improve their evaluation methods involves taking into account the buffering effect of efficacy beliefs, school climate, and organizational justice against burnout and depression. Also, she points that the fairness in the distribution of incentives (material and moral) among colleagues also affects teacher job satisfaction. The next thing she points out as one of the main factors in a teacher's satisfaction is the status in the society the teacher, he/she has earned throughout his /her own career. Nyarko et al., (2014) found that when a teacher feels that he or she is earning a reasonable amount of money or he or she is making use of skills and abilities then that teacher will be satisfied. These researchers also consider that on the other hand, when a teacher feels that he/she is not earning enough or is not making use of abilities, then that teacher will not be satisfied. They came to the conclusion that the

provision of the internal and external needs of employees serves as a catalyst that triggers their satisfaction with their jobs. Khora (2008) examined the role of social support in teachers' careers, and it was found that motivated teachers differ from unmotivated teachers in two respects - their value orientation - educational beliefs or curricular ideologies that appear to influence programmatic decisions (Ennis, C. D., & Chen, A. 1995) and the social support they receive. Research by Bentea et.al. (2012) recommends that school leaders focus on the social environment of their organization and encourage teamwork and positive interpersonal relationships, explaining that a teaching degree should become a professional position that teachers in the education system can pursue as their teaching career progresses. The professional position means promoting, and recognizing their teaching ability, as well as raising salaries after promotion. The research found the salary and good relationship between the employees as one of the most important factors influencing well – being of a person.

### **Kyrgyz Republic Governmental Measures to support the school teachers**

The Law "The Status of Teachers" was adopted in 2001, 10 years after the country received independence status. The Law provides a legal basis in the regulation of relations to the labour activity and social status of teachers, as well as their social status. [11]

This law provides guarantees for the allocation of land to teachers without housing, an annual free medical examination of each teacher, the issuance of an interest-free loan for housing construction, and an additional payment from the local budget. But in reality, teachers do not have such social benefits (Bulan inst. Report, 2018).

On June 22, 2019, at an international conference in Bishkek, the Ministry of Education and Science announced that Kyrgyzstan had achieved the result which shows 73% of graduates from pedagogical institutes go to school to work, although earlier only about 40-50% of them worked in schools ([www.akipress.org](http://www.akipress.org). 2019). But a UNESCO study in 2012 "General Basic Secondary Education by 2015" [7] showed that only 14% of graduates from pedagogy faculties go to work in schools. In their study, the authors noted a serious shortage of teachers, and that many teachers should leave for retirement and be replaced by young teachers. Also, they noted that in addition to low salaries, there are other factors that lead to a shortage of teaching staff - these are meager social packages, poor conditions, and low prestige of the teaching profession ([kg.akipress.org](http://kg.akipress.org). 2012). According to the statistical data by UNESCO "Education Sector Analysis 2007-2017" the overall unemployment rate in Kyrgyzstan was 7.6% in 2015. The low level of teacher salaries, which remain below the national average, remains a serious disincentive for recruiting high-quality candidates into the profession. In recent years, teacher salaries have increased but they are still low and many teachers have to take additional hours

to earn more money [4]. This discrepancy in numbers is a very interesting fact for research. It is also interesting what the success of teachers in schools is if they go to work in the hope of being realized as a professional because the decline in the quality of education since the independence of the country is a widely debated topic in civil society and government. Out-dated curricula, lack of linkages between the labour market and the education system, low teacher salaries and high levels of plagiarism are cited as the causes of this phenomenon [5].

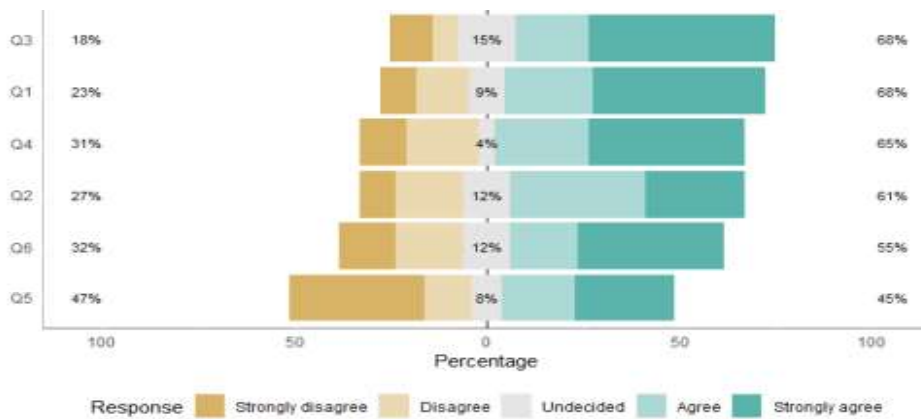
The Education Development Strategy of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic [12] considers the motivation and encouragement of teachers who systematically improve students' achievement as one of the priority areas. At the same time, the teacher community in Kyrgyzstan sees a problem in the government's position regarding the effectiveness of teachers' work; they accuse teachers of the low quality of education, even if they do not claim, then by their attitude, they show their position which almost says that the level of efficiency and effectiveness of teachers does not require a constant request for higher wages, encouragement and improvement of working conditions. For their part, teachers argue (unofficially) that the specified wage structure, benefits, and working conditions do not satisfy their basic needs, since in other sectors of the economy the wage structure is higher, motivation and working conditions are higher. It is most likely that public school teachers cannot provide quality education when there is a gap between the Government and teachers. Having studied all sorts of factors that affect the attitude of teachers to their work and how satisfied they are with this or the services provided by the state, it will be possible to draw conclusions.

This study aimed to examine various factors that affect teachers' self-esteem in secondary schools in Kyrgyzstan. It includes the identification of factors that affect the self-esteem of teachers with more than 5 years of experience and the teachers with less than 5 years of experience and their attitude to their professional activities. This will probably help us to determine the extent to which teachers' expectations and needs do not correspond to their constructive, organizational, and communicative components of professional activity and their implementation.

## **METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

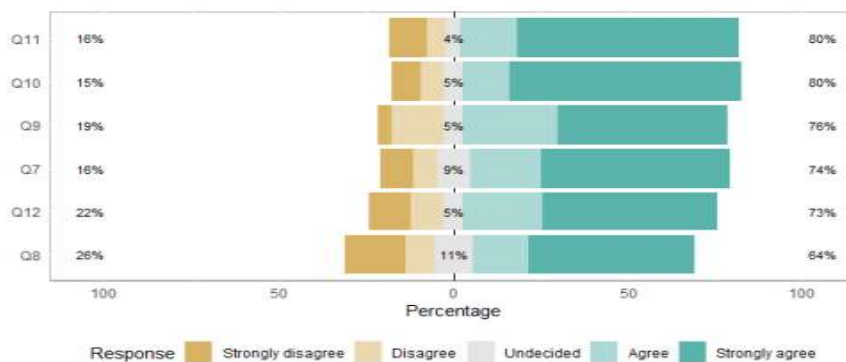
This is a descriptive survey-based study. A mixed research approach was used to obtain quantitative and qualitative information and the 5-point Likert - type - scale was used to analyze data using descriptive and logical statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the overall results of the responses. The purpose of using the mixed method was mainly to get more detailed information from respondents. A simple random sample was used to select the respondents.

**Table 1.** Responses of teachers on working conditions [14]. Own source.



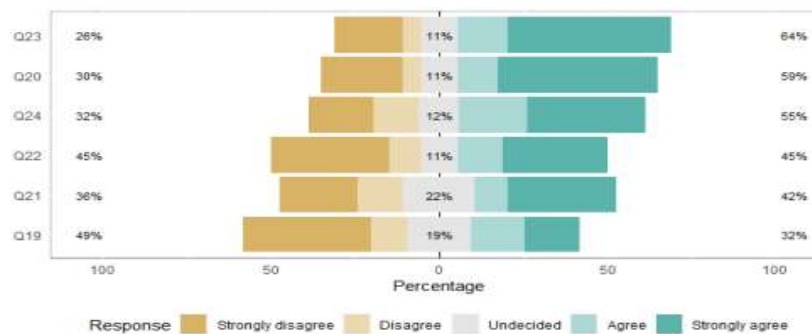
According to the results in table 1 which is with the responses on working conditions the statement “I would like to see clearer rules and procedures for all activities at our school” (Q3) gets 68% of agreement. This result means that the rules and procedures for organized activities at schools are not clear for many teachers. We also see that the majority of teachers agree with the statement about a convenient workload (Q1), once again it asserts that the teaching load in schools is distributed correctly. The overall picture for statements about working conditions shows more positive responses. 12% of teachers were undecided with the statements but more “*Strongly agree*” answers were given than “*Strongly disagree*” scales to the statement “The work of a teacher consists of routine activities (Q2). This result proves the statements by Budi Utomo [6] and Zinchenko (2016) who discussed much the factors influencing teacher’s motivation and personal expectations, and proved that teachers may lose their motivation to work because of the monotony of work. The hesitation to the statement “The large number of students in the classroom has a negative impact on my methodology” (Q6) may be caused by the fact that the teachers do not (or are not able to) monitor the overall level of their student’s achievements and the results of their own teaching methods.

**Table 2.** Responses of teachers on professional development [14]. Own source



This part includes items on teachers' attitude towards the teaching profession itself: "Teaching encourages me to be creative; "Teaching turned out to be more interesting than I expected, and all these items are given in the positive form. As we see most of the responses are positive; the statement 'I am pleased with the opportunities for professional development offered by my work' (Q7) gets 74% of "Agree" and in comparison, with other statements this is the least percentage. This result shows that the professional development policy at schools needs some improvement. Teachers show their positive attitude towards their profession giving mostly positive answers to the statements

**Table 3.** Responses of teachers on school financial remuneration [14]. Own source



Looking at the ratio of the responses to the statement on teacher remuneration we see that the most "Strongly disagree" answers (49%) get the statement "The teacher's income is sufficient for ordinary expenses" (Q19). 19% of the respondents were undecided with this statement and 32% (which is the least percentage) of them agreed with the statement. 64% of the respondents pointed out that they need to constantly take out a loan due to lack of salary, 11% of them were undecided with the statement though we can assume that they would agree with it too, just hesitated to say "yes". 59 percentage of the respondents do not strongly agree with the statement (Q20) that they are well paid in proportion to their efforts, 30% of them think that their effort is appreciated appropriately. 45% of the respondents do not know what the calculation of their salary is (Q22- I understand what the calculation of my salary consists of) so, we find that not all teachers are informed about the calculation of their salary. Thus, there is a need to inform teachers about their salary calculation so that they would be able to stick up for their own rights. An interesting fact that 22% of the respondents were undecided with the statement "Insufficient income prevents me from living the way I want" (Q 21), and 36% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Thus, we can assume that the teachers' life is not as bad as it is discussed by society (unofficial) and they do not consider their income level preventing things from living the way they want. At worst they might not imagine the way of better living or they get used to their current way of living and don't want to change it. We also see that 55% of the respondents need to work part-time elsewhere to cover all their expenses (Q24). Taking into consideration this fact, we can assume that teachers work hard trying to earn more to provide themselves

with a comfortable life. Overall results on remuneration statements show that the public-school teachers of Bishkek city are not satisfied with their income, and they need more information about the calculation of their salary.

## RESULTS

The teaching profession is one of the most important ones in society. A teacher is the only person who, most of his or her time, is professionally engaged in the upbringing and education of children. We see they adapt to the conditions created for them.

Most of the respondents have shown positive attitudes towards their work. They are satisfied with the conditions created for work, teaching load, and the proposed by the administration the professional development opportunities (to a certain degree). Also, many teachers expressed their respect for the profession itself. They reacted positively to the statement that teaching children turned out more interesting than they expected. They believe that they have a lot in common with their colleagues out of their work.

Regarding finances and remuneration, it seems that teachers in Kyrgyzstan have come to terms with the fact that they almost always have low salaries that only a few teachers with extensive work experience expressed their dissatisfaction and mostly these are the teachers with long experience. But we do not exclude the fact that most of the teachers work part - timely in other places and try to cover their daily expenses, also they regularly need to take loans because of insufficient salary. We do not blame school administrations for not giving due attention to their teachers, but we encourage them to be open to them, to study and develop programs taking into account the government's capabilities that support teachers morally and financially. The research results can become the main object of future research and a topic for further detailed study.

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