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Exploring school-based education stakeholders' perspectives on quality of education in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the context of School 2030 initiative



**NAZARBAYEV
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Schools2030 is a ten-year participatory learning improvement program based in 1,000 government schools across ten countries.

Using the principles of human-centered design and focusing on the key transition years of ages 5, 10 and 15 years old, Schools2030 supports teachers and students to design and implement education micro-innovations. These low-cost and scalable innovations will inform and transform education systems to improve holistic learning outcomes for the most marginalized learners worldwide.

It is led by the Aga Khan Foundation, alongside nine other organizations: LEGO Foundation, USAID, Jacobs Foundation, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Oak Foundation, Porticus, Dubai Cares, Education Cannot Wait and Itau Social.



Context & Research Sites

- **Three regions:**

- **Chuy**

- **Naryn**

- **Osh**

- **5 schools in each region**



- Education quality has always been a contested concept, with no universally accepted standard definition.
- Education is a complex system embedded in a political, socio-cultural and economic context.
- This two-year research project seeks to understand quality of education from the perspectives of key stakeholders in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
- This project is **funded**, **managed**, & **implemented** by:
 - * **Jacobs Foundation**
 - * **Aga Khan Foundation**
 - * **Nazarbayev University** in collaboration with researchers from University of Toronto, Canada, and Coventry University, UK.



#	Name	Designation	Affiliation	Role in this Project
1	Duishon Shamatov	Associate Professor	Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan	PI
2	Mir Afzal Tajik	Associate Professor	Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan	Co-PI
3	Sarfarozi Niyozov	Associate Professor	University of Toronto, Canada	Senior Research Consultant
4	Stephen Bahry		University of Toronto, Canada	Research Consultant
5	Mehmet karaku`s	Assistant Professor	Coventry University, UK	Research Consultant
6	Project Manager	1 Part-time project manager based at Nazarbayev University		
7	Research Assistants	1 RA each in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan		
	We also			

Purpose of the study

- The purpose of our study is to identify and generate classroom and school based effective, sustainable, culturally relevant and contextually workable ideas and practices around quality of education, so as to change the paradigms of thinking on how sustainable, workable and replicable solutions can be developed in countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
- The study will help develop evidence-based, actionable, and contextually relevant strategies to improve holistic development of children and young people through genuine commitment and meaningful engagement/partnerships among key stakeholders



What are the stakeholders' conceptions of quality of education?

What teaching and learning strategies are used to achieve the quality of education?

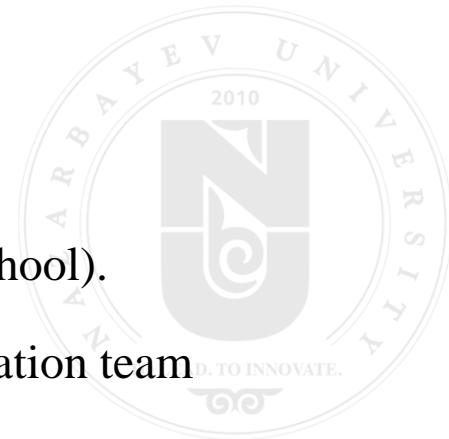
What opportunities, resources, and support are available to these school leaders and teachers to achieve the perceived quality of education in their schools?

What issues and challenges do these school leaders, teachers, and students face in achieving the perceived quality of education in their schools? How do they address these challenges?

How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected the delivery of quality education in schools in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan?

What recommendations can be made to enhance education quality in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's schools?

- Human capital, human right and social justice approaches to quality of education as a theoretical lens.
- Mixed-method research design,
 - * semi-structured interviews,
 - * focus-group discussions,
 - * nonparticipant-observations,
 - * survey questionnaires and documents.
- 15 schools (75 Survey participants, 5-6 interviews and FG at each school).
- Interviews with MoES, regional education managers, and AKF education team



Surveys

Participants	Number
Parents	253
Teachers	293
Students	324
Total	870

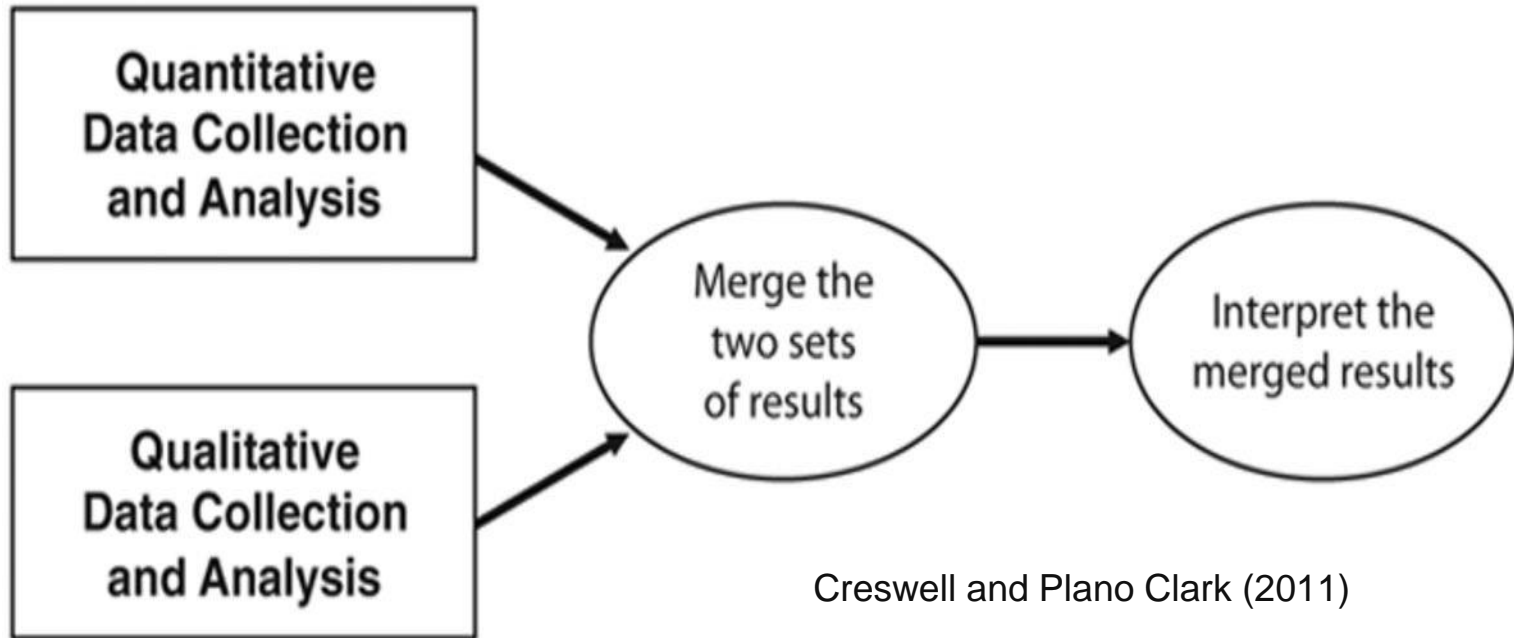


Interviews

	Individual Interviews	FGD	Total
Quantity	22	39	61
Minutes	609	891	1500

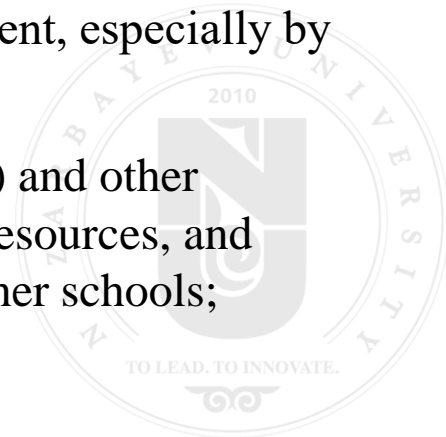
Female Participants	Male Participants
70.7%	29.3%

Convergent parallel design



Creswell and Plano Clark (2011)

- Growing realization among key stakeholders to improve education quality
 - * Schools, communities, and government desire to improve education quality
 - * The Ministry of Education is committed to support change and research
- Quality of education is linked to only cognitive domain measured by students' marks in national level tests and Olympiads
- No importance given to other domains of a child's holistic development, especially by parents (growing competitions among schools...)
- The schools supported by AKF (Schools2030; Reading program etc.) and other organizations seem to have more enabling environment, teamwork, resources, and stronger partnerships with parents & communities as compared to other schools;
- Teaching profession is dominated by young female teachers....

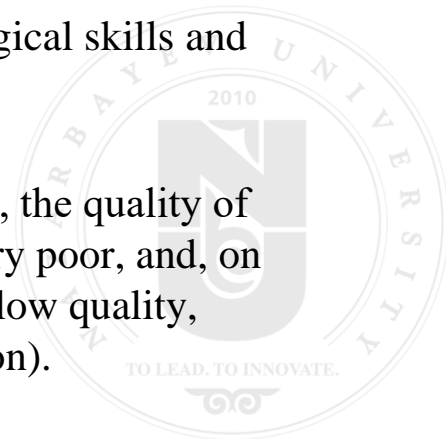


School Leaders' Voices

“Teaching, unfortunately, is not the career of first choice for many teachers. Therefore, bright graduates join other professions and those who could not get any other jobs end up doing teaching. These teachers lack not only subject content knowledge & teaching skills but also motivation” (Principal Alai Region)

“We have both old and young teachers. Old teachers closer to retirement have no desire to change and cooperate and young teachers lack experience, pedagogical skills and leadership skills” (Vice-Principal Naryn Region)

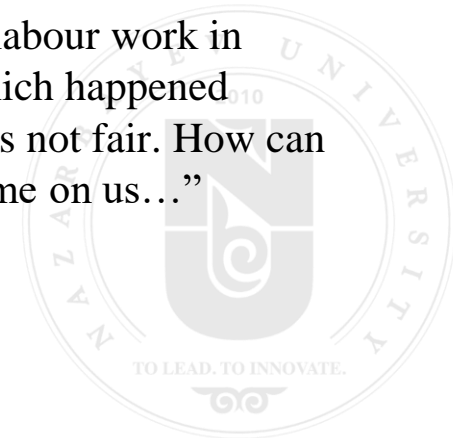
“Teacher quality has declined over the last 10 years. On the one hand, the quality of graduates who get admission to Pedagogical Universities (PUs) is very poor, and, on the other hand, the quality of training provided by the PUs is of very low quality, lacking practical teaching and research skills”. (Principal Chuy Region).



Teachers' Voices

“Majority of our students come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Their parents are usually away to Russia for labour work and there are no adults to take care of these children at home. These students, especially the teenagers, get involved in social issues which badly affect their learning” (Teacher from Alai Region)

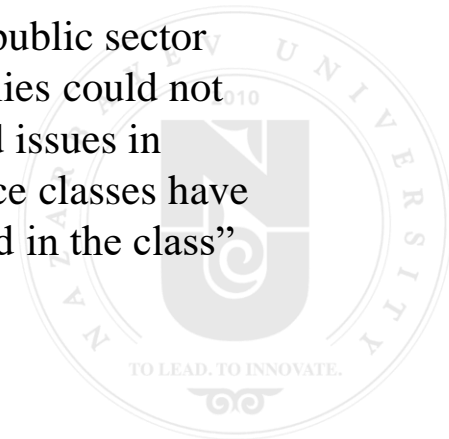
“Once a 9-grader committed suicide and another student got pregnant. Both children had no adult at home to take care of them. Their parents were doing labour work in Russia. The school management was punished for these incidents which happened outside the school hours. Teachers were also blamed for these. This is not fair. How can we control things that happen at home. The authorities put every blame on us...” (FG Teachers in Naryn Region)



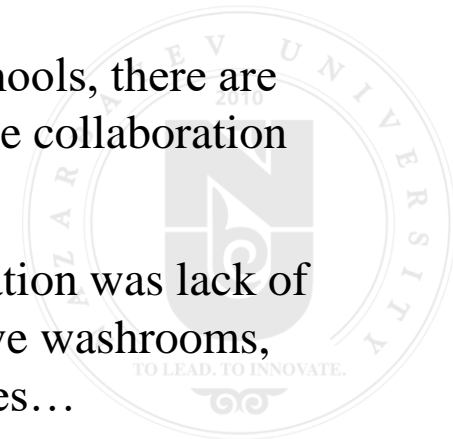
Teachers' Voices

“Mental health issues and suicidal tendencies are common among teenagers from low socio-economic backgrounds in the country. Honestly, we [teachers] are afraid of giving a ‘Fail’ grade to a student who actually fails in the exam. We are concerned about the vulnerable mental state of students in certain age and background” (Teacher from Naryn Region).

“Covid-19 pandemic has further lowered the quality of education in public sector schools. During the pandemic, many students from low-income families could not afford to have laptop or iPad or smartphones and therefore they faced issues in attending online classes. Another problem is that although face-to-face classes have started, students are attached to their mobile phones and get distracted in the class” (Teacher from Chuy Region).



- As the quality of education is measured mainly through students' scores in various tests and Olympiads, which mainly encourage rote-memorization, teachers are compelled to teach to the tests by focusing more on learning of subject matter than on any other domains of holistic development;
- School leadership matters. Principals appointed through political support and nepotism lack both leadership and management skills and thus unable to inspire change in schools;
- While school leaders seem to encourage parents' participation in schools, there are no viable structures, culture, and mechanisms for developing genuine collaboration and partnerships between schools and local communities;
- In all the 15 schools visited, one common challenge to quality education was lack of resources (human, financial and material). Several school do not have washrooms, playgrounds, adequate number of classrooms, library and laboratories...



How might we justify the importance of holistic (academic & non-academic) skills to national and global actors to ensure genuine commitment and meaningful engagement/partnerships?



Thank You!

