

Promoting Teacher Professional Development at Scale

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

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POLICY BRIEF

Context and Background

More than 20 universities and vocational colleges are engaged in training future pedagogical professionals in Kyrgyzstan on the basis of approved educational programs and standards¹. The number of students in pedagogical specialties in vocational colleges is significantly exceeding other specialties². The government of the Kyrgyz Republic has taken steps to improve the quality of teacher training and reduce the problem of teacher shortages in schools. In 2022, teacher salaries were increased, and the threshold score of the nationwide testing for enrollment in pedagogical programmes was raised to attract more qualified students. Yet, there is a concern related to the existing teacher professional development (TPD) programmes which should ensure quality, equity and efficiency.

Currently working teachers have the opportunity to periodically attend TPD courses provided by the public institutions such as:

- Republican Institute for Advanced Training and Retraining of Pedagogical Workers (RIAT) under the Ministry of Education and Science,
- Issyk-Kul and Osh regional institutes of education,
- Regional methodological centers of education in Batken, Jalal-Abad, Talas and Naryn regions,
- Educational-methodical classes at city/district departments of education.
- Methodological centers at educational institutions of higher and secondary vocational education, including Issyk-Kul State University named after K. Tynystanov, Naryn State University named after. S. Naamatova, Osh State University, Osh Institute of Education.

In 2017, the RIAT was reorganized, ceasing to be a structural subdivision of the Kyrgyz Academy of Education under the Ministry of Education and Science, becoming an independent institution operating on the basis of the “Regulations on the procedure for

¹ https://soros.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Gosstandary- VPO_bakalavriat-i-magistratura.pdf

² <https://2020.edu.gov.kg/spuz/enrolprofchues>

advanced training of pedagogical and leading education workers of the Kyrgyz Republic”³ developed in the same year, which regulates procedure for professional development. Advanced training programs are implemented by 5 departments, as well as the Center for Innovative Technologies for Advanced Training of Language Teachers.

Professional development programmes offered by RIAT include courses for teachers of various subjects, out-of-school education specialists, managers, methodologists, and librarians. The schedule for advanced training is approved annually by the order of the Minister. All schools are required to familiarize themselves with the schedule and provide lists of teachers for training. School administrations keep track of planned training schedules and send teachers to attend courses as needed. Training expenses are covered from the government budget. In order to qualify for a Certificate of Completion of the Advanced Training Course, teachers need to complete a 72-hour course. Yet, the existing practices are not providing evidence of tangible improvements in teaching practices resulting in improved academic performance of school students as seen from the National assessment of educational achievement⁴.

Starting from 2019, RIAT training will be translated to an online format on the <https://ec.ripk.kg/> platform that provides access to 66 online courses. The introduction of online courses reduced costs associated with teachers' travels and doubled the number of attendees.

Only recently, along with the state system of advanced training, more private initiatives started offering TPD courses to teachers and became successful among teachers. They differ from the existing courses by providing more practical skills, training is conducted in the format of interactive training (Creative-Taalim private school), online training (MUGALIM online school), hybrid training (Sanarip-Mugalim).

Teachers are also participating in various training programmes within the framework of projects of local and international organizations, for example, over the past 3 years, over 200 teachers have been trained in Education for Sustainable Development.

Despite the fact that the statistics of course participants in RIAT began to grow with the use of online learning mode (from 2016 to 2020 increased by 10 thousand participants), the coverage of teachers with advanced training courses remains at a level below 20% of the total pool of working teachers as cited by the Director of RIAT. Initiatives at the republican and local levels aren't meeting the needs of the total pool of teachers that constitute more than 80,000 people⁵. There are challenges in scaling up current TPD initiatives in the country to produce a tangible impact on teaching and learning quality.

Existing Issues and Challenges of TPD

³ Положение о повышении квалификации ПРУ, http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/ECA/Kyrgyz/TCH/Regulation%20About%20Teacher%20Development_Kyrgyz%20Rep.pdf

⁴ National assessment of educational achievement report 2017, <https://edu.gov.kg/media/files/fa89cc70-d2ac-4419-9e22-651bdff187f8.pdf>

⁵ National statistics committee, <http://www.stat.kg/ru/opendata/category/1583/>

As the Kyrgyz Republic emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher professional development with regard to equity, quality and efficiency are critical to recover learning loss. Key trends and challenges include:

- In the context of approved teacher professional development, until recently RIAT played the main role in providing advanced training leading to an officially recognized certificate. Recently, regional methodological centers gained a more active role in providing TPD.
- Despite the increase of the course participants in RIAT with the use of online learning mode (from 2016 to 2020 increased by 10 thousand participants), the coverage of teachers with advanced training courses remains at a level below 20% of the total pool of working teachers.
- Although mandatory TPDs became more frequent (before it was required once in 5 years⁶, now once in 3 years), training does not fully meet the needs of teachers in a dynamic information and technological environment.
- Although online TPDs are available, unstable internet connection and lack of technical base are an obstacle for teachers from remote regions, where power outages are frequent.
- Most teachers have only smartphones as gadgets for online learning.
- There is discomfort and reluctance to learn online, especially among older teachers who lack basic IICT skills. In this regard, more preference is still given to traditional forms of education.
- Since 80.9% of teachers in Kyrgyzstan are women, teachers in rural areas often have to interrupt their studies to do the household chores.

The need to reform the state system of advanced training, changing the structure and content is due to a number of factors, including:

- Imbalance between labor market demand and teacher training, use of outdated curricula, lack of flexibility and rapid response to current trends and updates in pedagogical science and technological advances, lack of awareness of training needs and the prevalence of lecture-based learning, where theory prevails over practice, the load of instructors is designed to train a certain number of teachers, which demonstrates prevailing of the quantitative indicator of effectiveness of the training.
- Changes in the requirements for the educational process, which should include the development of ICT skills, functional literacy, a focus on spiritual and moral education and other relevant competencies.

Additional support is needed to ensure equal access to teacher professional development. Currently, advanced training for teachers does not meet the requirements for ensuring equity, quality and efficiency. Not all teachers have equal access to courses for various reasons (remote regions, lack of gadgets, low ICT skills, teachers from ethnic minorities). The quality of the courses offered does not meet the requirements, as evidenced by the low attendance and negative feedback from

⁶ Interview with the former Director of RIAT, https://24.kg/obschestvo/155458_kak_povyishayut_kvalifikatsiyu_uchiteley_chtobyi_nebyilo_styidno_zaihuroki/

teachers⁷. The system is not effective due to limited financial resources, which does not allow covering 100% of teachers, conducting field training and developing innovative courses.

Proposed Solutions and Policies

Throughout the country, there is an understanding of the importance of moving from the approach of advanced training and retraining towards the concept of continuous professional development of teachers. The process of reforming the RIAT is in progress. RIAT tends to change its approach and focus on the role of a coordinating center, advise what courses should be developed, design qualification requirements for teacher competencies, thereby allowing other TPD providers to enter the market.

In order to help mitigate ongoing challenges, the following solutions are proposed:

- To reduce the dominant role of the RIAT, licensing requirements should be streamlined so that different providers (private initiatives/international projects/educational institutions, etc.) can provide TPD services to teachers throughout the country with recognition of the certificates they provide.
- Develop a unified TPD e-platform based on the RIAT where all approved TPD courses of different providers, e-library and resources can be accessed. The electronic platform can serve as an information platform for cooperation and collaboration of teachers across the country, receiving feedback and technical support, as well as issuing a digital certificate.
- In order to solve the problem of the content of the TPD courses, it is necessary to enable the teacher to choose relevant or on demand (based on needs study) courses from different providers (for example, on new subjects or the requirements of the updated standard), and also to introduce an accumulative system in which it will be possible to take 36-hour course per year, for 3 years - 72 hours in accordance with the Regulations.
- Develop criteria for evaluating the quality indicator of TPD: introduce a system of pre-test / post-test, mentoring, teacher-to-teacher exchange of experience, regular surveys among students / parents / school administration, systematic evaluation of teachers' learning outcomes (Kirkpatrick model - a four-level model for evaluating the effectiveness learning: Reaction (emotional level), Assimilation (level of knowledge) and Result)
- Poor Internet connection, lack of technical capabilities can be solved through the use of different formats and a flexible system for completing courses: online, distance, hybrid/mixed formats. Educational materials can be presented in the form of multimedia (video, audio), texts, infographics, etc.
- To overcome the problem of lack of ICT skills among a certain group of teachers and popularize online learning, there is a need to develop simple and accessible video instructions/lessons, as well as provide ongoing technical support to users of the electronic platform.

⁷ Исследование эффективности и качества системы подготовки и переподготовки/повышения квалификации работников системы школьного образования
<https://edu.gov.kg/media/files/7ff70b6a-60b3-40af-9eff-3ef67d30607a.pdf>

- Consider introducing a voucher system for finance TPD courses, taking into account the experience of other countries.
- Reform of the state system and its lead agency may include the following updated functions of the RIAT:
 - Consolidating: RIAT becomes the Republican Innovative Educational Center, develops and approves uniform requirements for TPD programs,
 - Teaching: organizes courses according to request/needs.
 - Educational: organizes scientific and methodological conferences, round tables, workshops, webinars, public lectures, discussion of innovations and global trends in pedagogical science.
 - Organizational: organizes professional communities/associations of teachers for the exchange of experience, mutual learning and cooperation.

Prioritized Area for Scaling TPD

The Program of Education Development for 2021-2040⁸ states that “the development of new technologies will require mastering the potential of ICT, teaching digital skills. In this regard, the education system will increasingly need to improve computer literacy among teachers and students, improve the educational infrastructure taking into account digital technologies, strengthen distance and other forms of education through a changing technological environment.” Among the problems it is noted that the provision of computers in schools is still insufficient and amounts to 42.1% of the minimum requirement, the inadequacy of digital skills, training programs for teachers, digital materials, and distance learning platforms are an obstacle to the digitalization of the learning process.

A priority area for scaling TPD can be the development of an online platform that will contain approved courses for teachers from different recognized providers.

1. A platform that hosts information about relevant, meaningful, needs-based courses for teachers from all the providers. Courses will be both asynchronous and synchronous with support from mentors and subject experts. It will serve to collect feedback on teachers’ needs and inform providers.
2. The platform will enable collaborative learning of teachers as well as from experts through fora and reviews sections for all courses. Teachers will be able to give feedback and share their experience.
3. The platform will be user-friendly and easy-to-navigate for both experience and new teachers with different levels of ICT skills. In addition, technical support will be provided, as well as video instructions for navigation on the platform. Equity provision for users from remote areas with limited internet access will be provided via development of mobile applications.

⁸ ПРОГРАММА развития образования в Кыргызской Республике на 2021-2040 годы:
<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/preview/ru-ru/158227/10?mode=tekst>

4. All certificates will be issued in digital format.

5. Course information will be regularly updated; training takes place in different formats and in different languages: online, remotely, offline, hybrid format, as well as different durations: 2 hours, 4 hours, 12 hours, 24 hours, 36 hours, 72 hours. Teachers can take several courses of different length to accumulate at least 72 hours in 3 years as requested by the law.

6. All providers interested in providing information on their courses should ensure:

- interactivity of courses and diversity of materials: multimedia, interactive quizzes, self-assessment, reading materials, mini-projects, video fora, case studies, etc.
- quality and assessment transparency: rubrics for assessment, tests, badges and other verification tasks.

7. A mechanism based on “an educational check” will be introduced, which can be used by a teacher to select a course and learn on the platform for free.

Going forward, the proposed actions will be presented to the RIAT, governmental, private and international stakeholders to provide quality, equity and efficiency of TPD initiatives.