

TITLE: KEY MANAGEMENT ISSUES OF ARMENIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract Reform in management of education is one of the crucial topics reforms in Armenia. The author discusses current issues of management of school system. Education management system is described as passive which means that the system mainly reacts to external requirements and current operational issues. The author discusses new dimensions of management, such as information management, investment management, research management. Corruption and the lack of social capital are considered as results of management problems. Management of outputs is discussed as one of new trends of Armenian education, which is still in the process of formation. Human capital management issues are considered as one of preconditions of succeeding in educational reforms.

Key words management, output, management of investments, information as a management tool, human capital, social capital, teacher induction.

I. CURRENT ISSUES OF MANAGEMENT

In 1998, the World Bank loan project “Education management and financing reforms” initiated the process of decentralization of management of school education. Among the objectives of the process was increased independence for schools and their transition to a system of management through school councils. In 2002-2005, all schools in Armenia moved on to the system of management through councils. All school principals and council members were trained. School councils consist of representatives of teachers, parents and supervisory bodies, in accordance with defined quotas. In the initial phases, the memberships of the councils were different, based on the number of students. In 2005, it was defined that school councils everywhere should have five members.

Transition to a system of management through councils aimed to ensure the participation of various stakeholders, which is a premise of democratizing education. But studies reveal that a vast number of stakeholders are not aware of the activities of school councils. Manukyan (2006) reported that surveys conducted in Armavir, Shirak and Kotayk marzes and Yerevan city have shown that 60.5% of parents do not know about school councils. The study of the websites of various schools showed that only one school in Armenia has published information on the activities of its council, and for a short period of time at that.

Within the context of the decentralization of education, the issue of meeting the specific needs of educational institutions becomes important. The educational system is managed based on the logic of identical schools. But schools in central Yerevan and near border villages cannot possibly have identical needs. In this regard, it would be much more effective to develop differentiated approaches with regard to certain issues for urban, rural, upland and near border schools. For example, many rural schools have classes combining two or three grades (when pupils of various ages study together). Such schools need

teachers who have the skills of working in classrooms with children of various ages and teaching several related subjects. This problem has also been mentioned in the National Curriculum of General Education (2004), which states that “the education system does not take into account the peculiarities of villages.”

One of the shortcomings of the management process is that discordant activities are sometimes taking place. In particular, the Sanitation Rules for Structure and Maintenance of Public Schools set out hygienic requirements concerning class hours. One of the requirements according to Official bulletin (2002) is the following: “The teacher shall use the introductory part for checking how the students have prepared their homework and for logistical activities, the main part of the class for presenting the material of the new lesson, and the final part—for rehearsal and reproduction.” National Curriculum of General Education (2004), though, provides: “In the learning process, the teacher and the school may choose any pedagogic technique and method that will ensure the achievement of the level of education required under the subject standards.” This means that if a teacher chooses a method that does not contemplate rehearsal and reproduction in the final part of the lesson, the teacher would be violating the Hygienic Requirements concerning classes.

The current system of management of the education sector in Armenia is a passive one, which means that the system mainly reacts to external requirements and current operational issues.

Although in recent years attempts are made to introduce new management approaches at various levels of education, but the old and authoritarian approaches are still prevalent. In particular, one of the conclusions of the monitoring conducted by Transparency International Armenia (www.transperancy.am) states “Many teachers and principals openly mentioned that the relevant governmental officials have never shown any interest in their opinions”. The system does not have the capability of absorbing new things and adapting to them. Without those capabilities new mentalities cannot be formed. One of the manifestations of the absence of inclination toward novelties is that any good ideas or management mechanisms become tainted. The new mechanism operates under the dictation of the old mentality, which results in the distortion of the original good idea.

The control and command methods prevalent in management cannot ensure development, because they do not encourage creativity and initiative. Effective management is currently based on the target model. The essence of the model is that managers set the targets, distribute the budget, and define the rights and responsibilities that are needed in order to reach the targets; they enable the staff to work towards objectives. In transition societies, policy makers should realize that the management and governance culture must be changed in order to succeed.

Table 1.1. Changing Role of Government in the Education System

Old Role	New Role
1. Design education development 2. Develop and implement curricula	1. Develop a vision 2. Manage by outcomes, set criteria, and govern nationwide exams

3. Interfere with all details	3. Monitor outputs by evaluating the system and the learners
4. Provide all educational services	4. Consolidate and coordinate beneficiaries
5. Act as the only source of funding	5. Act as an important source of funding by facilitating cooperation with local authorities and the private sector.

Source: Adams (2001)

II. NEW DIMENSIONS OF MANAGEMENT

2.1 Information as a management tool

Investment in information systems is justified, because managers will use them to improve the delivery of educational services and to achieve the set targets. The Education Management Information System is operating in Armenia since 1999 and collects valuable information on the formal basic education system. It was created within the framework of the World Bank credit project “Education management and financing reforms”. The creation of such a system can lay the groundwork for a new management culture. But the practice of analyzing information and managing the system based on that analysis is not yet established in Armenia. If the collected information is not used in the decision-making process, then its collection is not helpful. Some of the data collected are in need of serious analysis and management interventions. In particular, according to the annual yearbook “Education and Armenia” of 2004, there were 313 students in the schools of Armavir Marz who were repeating the same grade, while there were no such students in Tavush and Vayotz Dzor marzes. Is the quality of education in Tavush and Vayotz Dzor marzes so high, or it is so low in Armavir Marz, or teachers in Armavir Marz have strict evaluation procedures? It is not clear what managers do when they receive such information.

2.2 Management of investments

During the years of independence, numerous programs were implemented in Armenia by international organizations. Those programs have provided serious support to a process of educational reforms. There are numerous examples, when Armenian authorities in charge of managing education have cooperated effectively with international organizations. For example, effective cooperation was recorded in training of teachers on new methods and civilian education programs. However, programs in Armenia financed by international organizations are not always becoming sustainable or serving as inputs. It is only logical that the term most frequently used is “international projects”. As a result, there are cases when programs ensuring significant investments are not continued. Normally, it is very easy to design projects; it is more difficult to implement them, yet achieving sustainability is the most difficult task.

In some countries a three-color scheme has been developed for international programs. The color green denotes programs, the implementation of which is promoted by the ministry. Those programs can be implemented without any negotiations with the

ministry. The color yellow denotes programs, the implementation of which is conditional upon negotiations with the ministry and receiving its endorsement. The color red denotes programs, the implementation of which is forbidden. This approach facilitates the activities of international organizations, since it enables them to make a decision on the direction of their activities. Such a scheme is not available in Armenia and as a result it is not always that the international programs serve the real needs of the system.

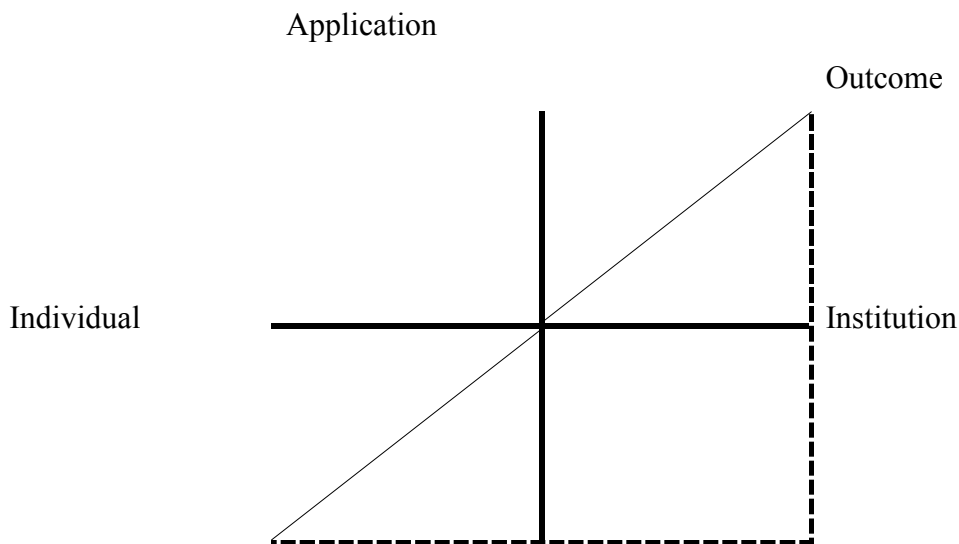
One of the problems in management is that an atmosphere of distrust exists in the educational system. Management bodies and the public accuse schools of collecting money; schools complain about the authorities and blame them for legislative gaps and scarcity of resources. People are dissatisfied with the quality of education provided by schools, and schools, in their turn, complain that they do not receive proper professional support. And this atmosphere of mutual accusations hinders progress in the system.

One of the conditions for effective management in a transition period is to have a clear plan of human resource development. Welsh, Hua and Cassidy are of the opinion that an effective method for capacity building is when individuals become agents of change and are encouraged by managers to put it into practice. In this case, changes at the individual level grow into institutional values (see the *ideal model* presented below). If change is limited to the level of individuals, then the result is that individuals absorb resources, but the system does not become stronger. **The consequence will be a waste of inputs** (see the *resource absorption model*).

In this regard, the system does not make full use of the potential of people, who have received education related degrees from various universities of the world. Specialists, receiving education abroad with the financial support of international organizations and foreign governments, normally do not take up employment in governmental bodies in charge of managing education when they return to the country, which can be considered a waste of inputs.

Diagram 2.1. Ideal Model

From Individual Strengthening to Institutional Strengthening

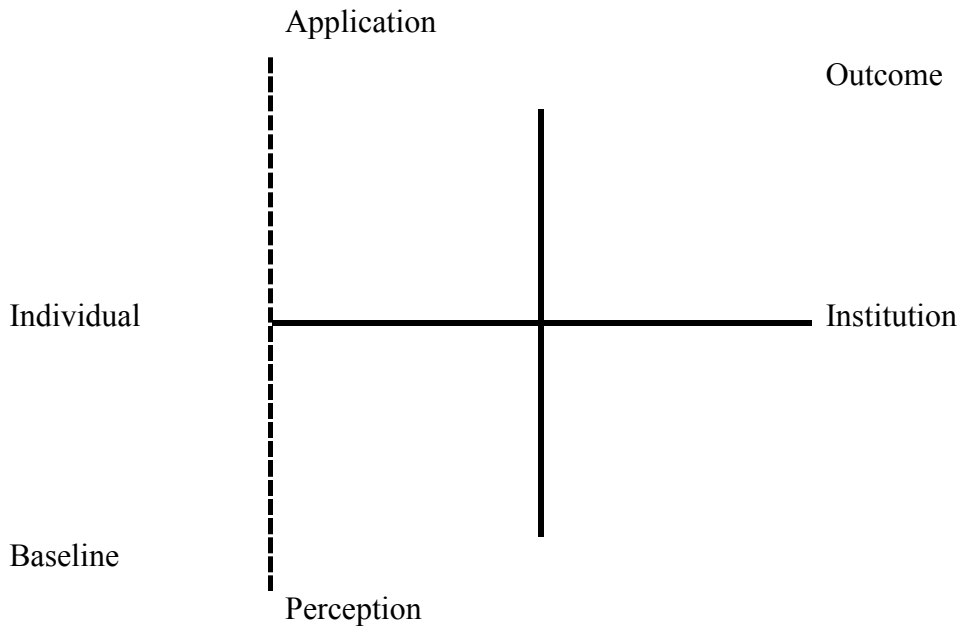


Baseline

Perception

Diagram 2.2. Individual Resource Absorption Model

Weak Individuals, Weak Institution



2.3. Links between Research, Educational Policy, and Investments

In the modern world, educational policies are based on surveys. The educational policy in Armenia is formed more on the basis of international experience, rather than surveys conducted in the country. It is only logical that reforms implemented in Armenia are justified by international experience, rather than the results of local surveys. This is one of the factors contributing to skepticism about education reform. The majority of surveys of the education sector are usually conducted by universities. However, research activities are not adequately performed in the universities of Armenia. Subject-specific funding is earmarked in the state budget for research in teaching, as well. However, it is unclear to what degree this research is used in education policy. The number of dissertations defended in pedagogy has increased sharply. According to official data from the Higher Education Qualification Commission, 31 pedagogical doctorate dissertations were defended in Armenia in 1996-2000, while the number was 100 in 2001-2005.

The interactive teaching method was applied in recent years in a number of schools in Armenia. However, there are no studies into their effectiveness and usefulness as inputs. It is not clear to what extent the application of the method has impacted the progress of students and their civilian qualities. Are the numbers of students in schools using those methods growing or declining? If growing, then to what degree is the growth due to the

application of new methods? What problems come up during the application of those methods? Availability of data based on studies around the mentioned questions would be a significant contribution to the effectiveness of teachers training implemented within the framework of the credit project.

There are no studies into success stories with a view to spreading them. A UNICEF Armenia-supported “Rapid Assessment of Supplementary Models and Financing in Kindergartens of Armenia” study report states that, during 2005-2006, the number of kindergartens in the Ararat Marz grew from 62 to 115. This is a major success that deserves to be studied.

Another problem with the effectiveness of research work is that innovative and pilot projects are very few and far between in Armenia. The legal framework for implementing such projects is incomplete. In this regard, Hovsepian and Avetisyan (2003) propose to draft model procedures for pedagogical scientific experiments, finance the implementation of those experiments, establish mechanisms for their promotion and sustainability of their results.

III. CORRUPTION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

The Transparency International Armenia (www.transperancy.am) NGO conducted a telephone survey on corruption among 1500 respondents during the period from August 1 to 31, 2005. 62.9% of respondents mentioned that corruption in Armenia has increased in the last three years, 4.5% mentioned that it has decreased and 15.5% stated that corruption has remained the same. 11.5% of respondents mentioned governance bodies as the most corrupted entities, including ministries, and the next most corrupted entities are the courts and institutions of the educational system with 8% of the responses each. In effect, according to the public the educational system is one of the most corrupted areas, which is a cause for concern. According to Anti-Corruption Monitoring report (2006) “Corruption distorts the education system, demoralizes education, and makes the socialization of the next generation a negative and chaotic process. If the impact of corruption on education were measured in terms of lost opportunities for long-term development and future gains, the damage estimate would be several-fold greater than the corrupt “shadow” amounts circulating within the education system.”

According to PRSP impact assessment report (2005), 21.4% of Yerevan residents responded “yes” to the question “Do gifts for teachers contribute to pupil's better marks?” 12.4% responded “probably yes”, and in Shirak the responses were correspondingly 20.6% and 6.6%, in Kotayk 12.4% and 7.4%, in Armavir 13.0% and 8.8%.

The same survey also studied the impact of money collection on families. Part of the respondents (in Armavir 58.8%, in Kotayk 49.2%, in Shirak 65.4%, in Yerevan 43.8%) mentioned that if they do not give the money the child would feel downcast.

Corruption phenomena are an obstacle to the effective cooperation between the community, parents, the school and the government, thus hindering the formation of **the social capital**.

One of the preconditions for development of the educational system is the formation of the social capital. According to Hargreaves (2003), the social capital has to

components. The first one is the atmosphere of trust among the public, the second one is the availability of structures linking people, the cooperation between teacher – student, principal – teacher, teacher – teacher, school – community. Certain shortage of trust is noted in Armenia. There are also problems with the other component for forming the social capital, i.e. cooperation. There is an important provision contributing to the development of social capital in the educational system: The state also supports the establishment and operation of in-school, inter-school, Marz and national associations of teachers. However, this provision still remains a statement of wish. The provision of the model charter of subject methodological associations (2004) in formal basic education institutions of Armenia stating “inter-school groups consisting of the leading teachers of the number of schools may be formed with the initiative of various institutions” is not enacted either. With the exception of foreign languages, there are no professional associations of teachers bringing together the teachers involved in the rest of the subjects, very few teachers become members of nongovernmental organizations, the trade union movement is not active. Interestingly enough, instead of professional or nongovernmental associations, teachers are actively involved in political parties.

As a result of the absence of professional associations, teachers work in solitude with no place to discuss issues relevant to their specialization. The state does not organize conferences and workshops of teachers, which would facilitate the formation of such an environment. The structure of schools does not promote cooperation between teachers, either. A significant number of schools have only one specialist per subject, which limits the possibilities of teachers for interacting with other specialists on the same subject. In this sense, it might prove useful to separate elementary, middle, and high schools, because it would then be possible to create communities of teachers teaching the same subject. Researchers consider that cooperation between teachers as one of the most important preconditions for strengthening schools. Newmann and Wehladge (1995) mention that “If schools want to have better student achievements, they need to establish professional communities, based on objectives acknowledged by everyone, cooperative work and collective responsibility”. Employment contracts made in Armenia with teachers do not require cooperation between teachers.

The government is not using the Best Teacher, Best Principal, Best Caretaker awards effectively to further strengthen the social capital. For example, the Teacher of the Year of the U.S. travels all around the country over the duration of one academic year (keeping the job and the salary) and conducts seminars for teachers, publishes articles, and participates in the development and implementation of the educational policies of the country. Effectively, the state uses the human capital to develop the system and form the social capital. In Russia, the award winners of the best teacher competition publish articles in the “Teacher of the year” journal specially created for them. This is also a good practice one can adopt. In Armenia, the competition culminates in the award giving ceremony and the state does not use the potential of award winners in any way. Moreover, the procedure for conducting the competition does not ensure transparency, since the public and teachers do not have the possibility to see the capabilities and merits of the winners.

IV. MANAGEMENT OF OUTPUTS

Outputs have recently been viewed as an essential feature of education systems. A World Bank report (2005) states: “The struggle to improve the quality of public education has shifted from inputs to outputs.” The imperative to have a competitive education system and growing public demands make this focus on outputs inevitable. One of the challenges facing Armenia is that the system has to provide competitiveness while being subject to more limited financial, physical, and technical capacities than those of many other countries.

In a narrow sense, “education outputs” are understood as the results of graduation exams. In a broad sense, education outputs also include the number of graduates that continue education, the conformity of graduates’ skills with the labor market requirements, civic qualities, and the school’s impact on the students’ growth. This report differentiates between two degrees of outputs: desirable outputs (targets) and real outcomes.

The output focus arises for several reasons:

- * The development of the education system is linked with development of the nation and society;
- * High outputs of education guarantee the prosperity of society;
- * Opportunities are created for assessing the gap between targets and outcomes, and directing inputs at closing the gap; and
- * Teachers understand better what is expected of them.

In recent years, the Armenian education system has made steps toward a transition to output-based education. Much has been done in order to prescribe the desired outputs. In particular, the State National Curriculum on General Education and the State Standards for Secondary Education were adopted in 2004. Criteria have been developed for all levels of education, as well as for specific subjects, which set out the requirements presented to students. These documents lay down the desired outputs of formal basic education, its individual levels, and the subjects that are taught. In 2005, the National Assembly adopted a Law on the State Inspectorate of Education. The Inspectorate already operates within the Ministry system with the primary objective of facilitating compliance with the requirements of educational criteria. A Government Decree of 2004 created the Assessment and Testing Center, one of the goals of which is to summarize student knowledge tests and exams, to carry out analysis, and to publish the results.

Despite the gradual introduction of certain elements of an output-based system, the system continues to talk more about investments and other processes and management of outputs is not taking place. The time has come to talk about outputs management. After the collapse of the USSR, bodies governing education have not presented serious output requirements to education institutions, because keeping the system “alive” was the only concern given the economic crisis and under-funding. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Armenia (2003) states that “as a consequence of lower public expenditure on education, education quality has deteriorated considerably.”

4.1. Measuring Outputs

An important component of any output-based system management is the determination of methods and tools for measuring outputs. Since independence, governing bodies of education have not focused clearly enough on the measurement of outcomes; education institutions were entrusted with knowledge testing and graduation exams while governing bodies became actively involved in the admission process. In this situation, education outputs are based on performance indicators required of educational institutions, which are not reliable given the absence of consistent standards of evaluation. A “good” grade in a school differs from a “good” grade in another school. According to statistics provided by the Education Department for the City of Yerevan, the share of students that received “good” and “excellent” grades during 2003-2004 was 34.6%, growing to 45.8% in 2005-2006. During the same period, the number of students receiving “poor” grades has fallen (from 4,832 in 2003-2004 to 3,139 in 2005-2006). This increase should have been studied thoroughly. However, since measuring outputs was not a priority, it is not clear what supported such an increase—did the teachers perform better, did the students study better, or did the evaluation criteria become less stringent?

In the context of education reform in Armenia, there are plans to implement a consistent policy of evaluating outputs, for which a special institution has been created—the Assessment and Testing Center. One of the most serious challenges associated with the evaluation of output is how to combine objectiveness and quality. Objectiveness in checking outputs requires minimization of the human factor. As a result, preference is given to test assignments that can be checked by the computer. Even in such cases, it is impossible to check the creative skills and critical thinking of students, which are considered very important nowadays and have already been incorporated in both secondary education standards and specific subject standards. According to the State Standards for Secondary Education (2004), a high school graduate must be able “to write fiction and analytical papers” in the area of “Armenian Language and Literature.” It is clear that a computer-checked test cannot measure compliance with this requirement. It is assumed that teachers should develop these skills and evaluate them during classes. However, international experience shows that teachers mainly focus on the criteria checked at exams. An example of this is that in Armenia insufficient attention is paid to Stylistics, because the curriculum content of this subject is not included in the exams.

Starting from 2007, Armenia is implementing a new system of unified high school graduation and university admission exams. The exam papers will be checked by a computer, which will boost objectiveness, though it is clear that establishing a nationwide environment of equity is a vital precondition of exam objectiveness. At the present stage, the objectiveness of exams is an essential safeguard for developing the education system and improving public confidence in the education system of Armenia.

Implementing a performance-based system and effective management of outputs is a major challenge for educational institutions. A number of new functions need to be introduced in this respect: educational institutions should implement self-analysis systems, which will help them understand their shortcomings and the ways in which they need to be addressed. To do this, the staff of an educational institution must operate as a team.

In international practice, it is common practice to measure education outcomes based not only on the absolute results of exams, but also on the growth in students' performance. Taking the latter into consideration determines the extent to which the school has contributed to each child's progress. Schools are classified into four groups.

Table 4.1. Value-added assessment approach

1. High proficiency Low growth	2. High proficiency High growth
3. Low proficiency Low growth	4. Low proficiency High growth

Source: Hershberg, T. (2005)

The second cell shows an ideal school, the students of which have academic proficiency and have grown over the years. The school in the third cell is a failure. The school in the fourth cell can be considered a success, because the academic proficiency of its students was very low upon their admission but the school achieved growth. And, in spite of low proficiency, the school in the fourth cell has positively influenced its students. The students of the school in cell 1 had high proficiency, but the school did not generate much growth: in other words, this school recruited good students, but did not contribute much to their growth. In the USA, such schools are normally found in rich communities.

V. MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL

Studies reveal that one of the factors ensuring better quality of education is the availability of qualified teachers. Numerous factors have an impact on the education process, such as the capabilities of students, their motivation, the willingness on the side of the family to support the child's education, content of education, school provisions and teachers. Based on the studies, the OECD "Teachers matter" report (2005) mentions: "The quality of teachers is the most important variable with an impact on the progress of students". The report (2005) also quotes the results of the study conducted by Sanders and Rivers, according to which "The most effective teachers ensure four times better results, compared to more ineffective teachers".

A significant portion of teachers and parents in Armenia also attach importance to the quality of teachers. In particular, within the framework of the survey of "Secondary education in Armenia: problems and perspectives" conducted in 2003, responding to the question on what is necessary to improve the quality of education, 31.3% of teachers and 29.4% of parents responded "improving the quality of personnel", which had the largest share of responses in both cases.

5.1. Management of teacher training

The current system of university admittance exams does not attach priority to the factor of selecting specialization, which means that many students admitted to pedagogical

universities¹ did not initially intend to become teachers. Another cause for concern is that the number of points needed to enter pedagogical universities is relatively low, which means that applicants are those with low academic achievements. Pedagogical education does not attract students who graduated from schools with honors, whose diverse knowledge is one of the preconditions for becoming a good teacher. According to the computer center of Yerevan State University, from among the 107 straight-A school graduates in 2005 only one applied to the pedagogical institute and was not admitted. In 2006, the situation was somewhat better and three out of 93 straight-A graduates applied to pedagogical universities. Although an increase is recorded compared to 2005, the indicator is nevertheless at an alarmingly low level.

In this regard, an interesting experiment is being conducted in Israel. Applicants who have collected the highest points during entrance exams are offered a place of study at pedagogical universities. As compensation, the state allocates allowances, pays the costs of their studies and guarantees a job in school or in the education sector. Those students complete the four year program in three years, and spend the fourth year in a school in order to get prepared for their future work as a teacher. The program is currently being evaluated.

Another problem with pedagogical education is the number of freshmen admitted. The number of admittances does not correspond to the demands of the labor market. For example in the academic year 2005-2006, 3,489 applicants were admitted to state universities and 1,232 to private universities for specialization in teacher training. The same year, 1,607 students graduated from state pedagogical universities and 900 from private universities. Thus, the number of students being trained to be teachers has increased significantly. But there is no similar increase in demand for teachers—those figures are much higher than the number of teachers employed by schools in the same academic year. So, in the academic year 2005-2006, although 4,731 people were admitted to state and private universities for pedagogical specialization only 2,048 of that year's graduates were recruited by schools as teachers. Considering the fact that the number of students will decrease in the near future, and all official documents include provisions for increasing the teacher-student ratio, it can be concluded that within four years, when the 4,731 students will graduate with pedagogical specialization, the schools of Armenia will have an even lower demand for teachers compared to the academic year 2005-2006. This means that more than half of the graduates with pedagogical specialization will not have the opportunity to work as teachers. In this regard, the PRSP implementation progress report (2006) mentions “the current situation with regard to the planning of teachers’ training and the real demand of the educational system, within the context of maintaining the same levels of state orders, needs to be studied”.

There is a need to reform of the teacher training system in Armenia. The effectiveness of the reforms to be implemented in the country will greatly depend on the extent to which pedagogical universities will be able to provide schools with highly qualified teachers. Obviously, the quality of education will greatly depend on the quality of pedagogical education. In this regard, there are concerns in Armenia that the pedagogical education system is not keeping up with the changes. Theoretical approaches are still

¹ In this context, pedagogical universities are institutions exclusively offering pedagogical qualifications.

predominant, as a result of which graduates will continue to have problems in their practical work. Such concerns are not exclusive to Armenia and have a universal nature.

“Many education specialists, researchers and policy makers are convinced that inputs in pedagogical education do not bring about the expected results”, as mentioned in the report of the World Bank (2005). The report quotes the conclusions of studies made by Lewin, according to which “educating teachers and supporting beginners and the school itself is much more effective and less costly than traditional pedagogical education”. Based on the abovementioned observations, it is recommended to reduce the duration of pedagogical education.

The issue of the quality of pedagogical education and human capital management in Armenia is very important, since according to the “Model Charter of a State Formal Basic Education Institution of the Republic of Armenia” State Non-Commercial Organization, “the institution may recruit a specialist with the qualification of a pedagogue, or, in extraordinary cases, a person with a non-pedagogic education, for whom the Ministry shall define the procedure and terms of employment in the institution.” This shows that the state has complete confidence in the certificate of pedagogical education. Moreover, the state has a more active participation in admittance exams, rather than the final exams of pedagogical universities. For comparison purposes it must be noted that in some countries (for example the USA, Italy) teachers, in addition to pedagogical education, are required to pass accreditation or take qualification tests before being hired. The importance of pedagogical education was particularly on line during the rationalization phase, when many teachers without pedagogical higher education were left out of the schools. The PRSP implementation progress report states that rationalization “has created certain corruption risks”.

5.2. Management of teacher induction

The state entrusts school principals with the whole responsibility for recruiting teachers. Among OECD countries, only Northern Ireland has such a system. In a number of countries (for example Austria, Germany, Switzerland) the school sends the teacher’s application for work to the central or local authorities, who based on a defined set of standards select the best. In some other countries (England, Sweden, Finland) teachers are selected through open competition. In France and Korea they are recruited based on the result of exams.

Armenia does not have a procedure for recruiting teachers. Our studies in June-August 2006 revealed that no state formal basic education school has announced in newspapers a vacancy for a teaching position. Such announcements are made only by a couple of special schools managed by the Ministry of Education and private schools. It is not clear how a teacher who is willing to work can find out about vacancies in any school. In effect, only a few people have information on vacancies, which is inherent with corruption risks. On the other hand, the absence of public announcements deprives schools from the possibility to collect a large number of applications and to select the best candidate.

One of the consequences of this situation is that concerns have been expressed over data on the education level of teachers. Although the number of students in pedagogical universities has increased from year to year, and the state has reinstated distance learning

in this field, the statistics indicate that the number of teachers with university degrees in teaching has declined in Armenia's schools. According to the "Education in Armenia" yearbook, there were 34,742 teachers with higher education pedagogical degrees in state and non-state schools of Armenia in 2003-2004, and 800 teachers with non-pedagogic secondary vocational degrees. In 2005-2006, the numbers were 31,221 and 1,152, respectively. Thus, the number of teachers with degrees in teaching fell by 3,521 while the number of teachers with non-pedagogic secondary vocational qualifications increased by 352 (of which 107 were in Yerevan—a place over-saturated with teachers holding pedagogical degrees). Also, during the same period, the number of teachers with non-pedagogic higher education degrees grew by 580. One may assume that the reduction in the number of teachers with higher pedagogic degrees was due to retirement age. However, an analysis of the data presented in "Education in Armenia" report shows that during 2003-2004 Armenia's schools employed 1,323 retirement-age teachers and 429 teachers that had less than two years to retirement age (the latter reached retirement age during the 2005-2006 academic year). During the 2005-2006 academic year, 1,004 of the teachers working in schools were receiving retirement pensions. Therefore, even if one were to assume that the 3,521 shortfall was partly due to retirement of teachers with teaching degrees, it would still mean that about 3,000 teachers with higher education teaching degrees were dismissed from or left schools even though they had not reached retirement age.

5.3. Management of novice teachers work

One of the gaps in the education policy of Armenia is that the state does not attach importance to the support of novice teachers. The only document in which beginners are referred to is the model charter for "Methodological unification in state formal basic education institutions of Armenia". This document, among its stated activities for methodological unification, recommends "training and re-training of novice teachers who do not have specific qualifications and teachers without pedagogical education". Considering that the qualification training system is not yet operational in Armenia, the mentioned provision cannot be applied in practice. The issue of support to novice teachers in their work is ignored in Armenia. It is possible that policies for supporting novice teachers are enacted in some schools, but no official support scheme has been defined by the state. Numerous countries have special policies in place for novice teachers. For example in France, Scotland, Israel and England novice teachers do not have a heavy workload, so that they have more time to prepare for lessons, develop their knowledge and skills, and observe lessons conducted by experienced teachers. In many countries, mentor teachers of the school, as well as experts of the local education authorities, work with novice teachers. In Switzerland, Israel and some states of the USA mentor teachers have to take special mandatory courses. In many countries, mentor teachers receive bonuses. In Japan, Switzerland, Northern Ireland and other countries, schools and pedagogical universities conduct joint support programs for novice teachers.

South Korea enacts an interesting policy for novice teachers. In the first phase of the three-phase program, teachers are trained for the skills necessary to manage classes. Thereafter they have a six-month training with the school principal, deputy principal and consulting teachers. In the third phase, novice teachers conduct discussions and analyze the issues that have emerged during the training.

Thus, in Armenia the principle of “sink or swim” is applied to novice teachers. Novice teachers basically try to overcome the unavoidable difficulties and obstacles of the initial phase by themselves.

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