

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

## Journal of Eurasian Studies

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/euras](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/euras)

# Parental informal payments in Kyrgyzstani schools: Analyzing the strongest and the weakest link <sup>☆</sup>



Rubén Ruiz Ramas

Faculty of Political Science and Sociology, UNED, 28040, Madrid

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 12 February 2015

Accepted 1 June 2015

Available online 25 April 2016

## Keywords:

informal economy

informal payments

post-socialism

education

Kyrgyzstan

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explain why parental informal payments emerge and then spread in different manners in Kyrgyzstani schools and to examine their interaction as informal institutions with the school as a formal one. It is argued that the main reason behind informal payments is the survival of the schools; parents' acceptance of them was a result of necessity. In a small percentage of experiences where marketization of public schools was successful, there was a socioeconomic segregation of pupils, advancing toward a *de facto* privatization of public schools. Then, while the key logic behind informal payments was the upgrading or elitization of schools, the nature of the engagement of givers and receivers was by choice rather than by necessity. Finally, following Helmke and Levitsky (2004), I link the survival strategy to a *substitutive* relationship to formal public school outcomes, and to the elitization strategy, a *competing* nature with the formal logic of Kyrgyzstani basic education. Special attention is given to the social function approach toward informal economy practices, and to the significance of social stratification on how those informal practices work. The paper focuses on the comparison of informal payments in two schools representing the two strategies previously described: an *elitnaya* school from the center of Bishkek, the 13th Gymnasium School; and the conventional 21st Middle School in the *novostroika* (new settlement) of Enesay, the capital's periphery. The fieldwork of this research was developed in two stays during the months of July/August and October/November in 2011.

Copyright © 2016 Production and hosting by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of Asia-Pacific Research Center, Hanyang University. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Faculty of Political Science and Sociology, UNED, 28040, Madrid.

E-mail address: [ruben.ruiz@madrid.uned.es](mailto:ruben.ruiz@madrid.uned.es).

<sup>☆</sup> I would like to thank the two anonymous referees and Abel Polese for their helpful comments and suggestions of literature. I must also express my appreciation to Guljamal Sultanalieva and other anonymous insiders, who supported me during my field research with patience and valuable insights. Finally, this paper would not have been possible without the inquisitiveness and social commitment of a gang of women who drove me nuts: Nati, Marta, Andrea and Dido.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2015.06.003>

1879-3665/Copyright © 2016 Production and hosting by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of Asia-Pacific Research Center, Hanyang University. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

After the disintegration of the USSR and the Soviet system, Kyrgyzstan experienced a sharp decline in state funding of education. Public spending on education was cut in half, from 7.9% of total public spending in 1990 to 3.7% in 2000 (Mertaugh, 2004, 172). Simultaneously, a package of reforms was implemented, aimed at introducing market mechanisms into public education that would permit self-financing through the introduction of additional pay services and the creation of donor funds and commercial classes, an enclave of mixed public–private funding within public schools. Starting in the mid-nineties it became apparent that

schools were underfunded and parental informal payments<sup>1</sup> became an extended and institutionalized practice.

The general objectives of this paper are twofold. First, the author aims to explain why parental informal payments emerge and then spread in different manners. To do so, we examine their relationship to formal mechanisms of marketization in education. In doing so, special attention is given both to theoretical perspectives supporting a social function approach (Cassidy, 2011; Morris & Polese, 2014; Stenning, Smith, Rochovská, & Swiatek, 2010) toward informal economy practices<sup>2</sup> and to the significance of social stratification when analyzing how those informal practices work (Williams, 2011). This paper argues, on the one hand, that the primary reason for the importation of informal payments from higher education and health sectors to Kyrgyzstani elementary and secondary schools was the insufficient funding schools received in a context of declining public funds and a general breakdown of new legally marketed services. With the main reason behind informal payments being the survival of the schools, parents' acceptance of them was a result of necessity. Unlike the transitional discourse of neo-liberal scholars, parental informal payments are not a Soviet legacy bound to disappear. Formal public and private funding are still insufficient, and state and economic institutions are still dominated by informal practices. On the other hand, while formal education marketization mechanisms have not provided solutions for the lack of either funding or transparency in cost-sharing tools, they have reinforced the use of parental informal payments quantitatively and qualitatively. In particular, in the small percentage of experiences where marketization was successful, school directors discovered a path to the greater commodification of education oriented toward generating the socioeconomic segregation of pupils. This process was possible by expanding market logic to informal payments and, thus, advancing toward a *de facto* privatization of public schools. That is, while the key logic behind informal payments was the upgrading or elitization of schools, the nature of the engagement of givers and receivers was by choice rather than by necessity.

School managements' solution of promoting the elitization of the school by increasing the informal payments demanded from parents has also affected the nature of the interaction between informal payments and the formal institution (the public school) that receives them. Thus, building upon the literature of informal institutions, the second objective of this paper is to examine the inter-

action between formal and informal institutions. Following the framework created by Helmke and Levitsky (2004), I complete the criteria that divide the main categories of parental informal payments by adding to the survival strategy, the *substitutive* relationship to formal public school outcomes, and to the elitization strategy, a *competing* nature with the formal logic of Kyrgyzstani basic education. Therefore, the relevance of social stratification on how parental informal payments are analyzed leads to three questions. Do parents engage in this informal economic practice *by necessity* or *by choice*? Is the strategy behind parental informal payments the school's survival or its upgrading and elitization? Finally, is the relationship of interaction that informal payments have with the formal logic of the Kyrgyzstani state either substituting or competing?

This introduction is followed by an examination and discussion of the main theoretical approaches to this research. The second part provides a general assessment of the motivations behind parental informal payments and a typology of them. The third part is dedicated to comparing informal payments in two schools representing the two strategies previously described: informal payments as part of an elitization strategy/competing interaction and informal payments as part of a survival strategy/substituting interaction. Thus, one school is an *elitnaya* (elite) school from the center of Bishkek, the 13th Gymnasium School also known as *Trinashka*; and the other is the (*conventional*) 21st Middle School in the *novostroika* (new settlement) of Enesay, the capital's periphery. By focusing on these two schools at the beginning of the nineties, before parental informal payments existed, we have the opportunity to isolate the effects of the presence of marketization mechanisms and different management strategies through a process-tracing paired comparison (Tarrow, 2010). The two schools were selected randomly as examples of two school types, *elitnaya* and *conventional*.

The fieldwork of this research was developed in two stays during the months of July/August and October/November in 2011. The data collection methodology includes semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers and director of studies from several schools and also 5-parents discussion groups from the Schools No.13 and No.21. I looked for two main types of empirical information. On the one hand, the narratives of both parental and school personnel engaged in informal payments either in survival or elitization strategies. On the other hand, I searched for quantitative data concerning the amount and the frequency of payments as well as qualitative descriptions of the process behind this informal economy practice. The data gathered in interviews and discussion groups allowed me to contrast information provided in other reports and papers, and also to assess to what extent the *Trinashka* and the School No.21 were representatives of the group of schools they belonged. In addition, the research includes semi-structured in-depth interviews to near twenty local experts on education, government officials from the education sector, MPs of the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament) and other representatives of political parties, education sector trade unionist, and members of both local NGO (ErEp, Door Eli, El Pikir) and international agencies of cooperation (USAID) which have developed projects focused on the education and the issue

<sup>1</sup> "Informal payments" are all kind of payments not officially sanctioned and/or collected by the state or local government as a prerequisite for school attendance. Such payments may include admission, private family costs for learning materials, class supplies and transportation; special activities such as field trips and tutoring services (both legal and illegal/extra-legal); renovations, equipment, utilities, supplementary payments to teachers and principals' wages and regular education services which are underfunded by the state, among others (definition modified from ESP/NEPC, 2010, 19).

<sup>2</sup> The informal economy can be viewed as the production and sale of goods and services that are licit in every sense other than being unrecorded by, or hidden from, the state for tax, benefit and/or labor law purposes (European Commission, 2007; International Labour Organization, 2002). This category does not include goods or services which are illegal in themselves, such as illegal drug or arms sales.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1127167>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1127167>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)