TRANSLATION OF NIS EXPERIENCE TO THE MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of qualitative study was to analyze the process of translating of NIS experience to the mainstream schools and to explore the perceptions of the mainstream school teachers from one pilot school co-operating with Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (hereinafter NIS), the towards the process of translating of NIS experience to the mainstream schools. The researcher was interested to find out the perceptions of the mainstream school teachers toward the process of policy transfer from NIS.

The researcher utilized the qualitative single case study. The instrument of data collection was one-on-one interview: participants were asked to answer to 10 open-ended questions to provide insight on translation of NIS experience to the mainstream schools and teachers` perceptions of this process. The qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed by defining themes and codes.

The findings of the research revealed that most of the teachers showed the positive attitudes toward the process of translating of NIS experience to the mainstream schools. Notwithstanding the positive influence, most teachers highlight that more time to measure success of the adopted innovations. Human resources are also important new system different from traditional one adopted.

Key words: policy borrowing, policy transfer, teachers` perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Since Kazakhstan gained independence, one of the most important government`s goal is modernization of the education system of Kazakhstan. Therefore, during the last two decades Kazakhstan has taken efforts to establish a new independent education system. The first steps toward this direction have already been taken to prioritize the establishment of the network of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (hereinafter NIS), under the direct control of the President's Administration. A new system was established to "combine the best traditions of Kazakhstani education and the international practice" is applied NIS-wide (Nazarbayev, 2008). Uteulina (2009, as cited in Bridges, 2014, p. 73) defines another unique characteristic of NIS which provides with autonomy which provides these educational institutions with the opportunity to "test modern educational programs, verify their effectiveness and develop technical solutions for their further integration into the national education system". NIS has made the international experience of such countries as Singapore, UK and the USA instrumental, seeking to identify the policy options and understand the process of change. Nowadays, NIS are implementing new programs, and students of this school demonstrate good results. However, NIS was established not only to develop to use innovative practice, but also to transfer its experience to the mainstream schools. The process of transfer started in 2011 and continues till 2020. Teachers from the mainstream schools are engaged in seminars and online lessons. However, the implementation of the new NIS-based curricula and assessment system to the mainstream schools will be launched only in 2015.

Communist crisis in the Soviet Union and changes in political systems in several countries in Eastern Europe, kindle social scientist`s interest. Scholars from political and economic spheres also had a high demand to this topic what made it "cross-disciplinary" (McLeish & Phillips, 1998, p.49). As education is considered to be a policy making instrument and a prime mover to changes, it had been affirmed that it contradictes to main directions of social science (McLeish & Phillips, 1998). All this attract attention to the situation in other countries, therefore scholars began to compare the situation in developed countries with situation at "home".

It is difficult to define the origin of policy borrowing because its development went side by side with the development of comparative and international education. Also the policy borrowing process can be referred to the goals of comparative education considering that main objectives of borrowing process seek to understand the process of comparison and aftereffects of educational transfer.

According to Phillips and Ochs`s observation and analyses of British interest in German education, policy borrowing passes through four stages "cross-national attraction, decision, implementation and internalization" (p. 451). (Figure 1)
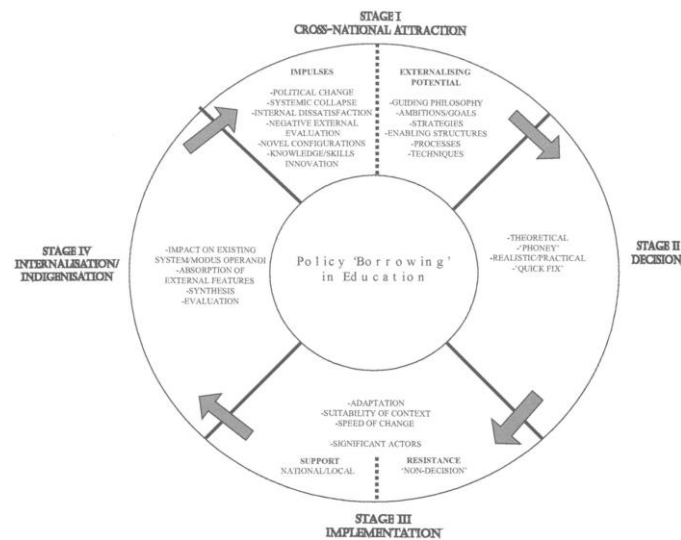

Figure 1. Policy Borrowing In Education: Composite Process (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014).

The first stage is cross-national attraction. Here authors talk about "impulses" by which they understand prerequisites of borrowing process. Steiner-Khamsi (2004) defines some trigger events which induce the "cross-national attraction" which can cause the policy borrowing process in developing countries: "political change; systematic collapse; internal dissatisfaction; negative external evaluation; new configurations and alliances; knowledge and skills innovation; the aftermath of extreme upheaval" (p.56). Some of them are valid for Kazakhstan. The independence was the significant "political change" in the recent history of Kazakhstan. "negative external results" of PISA 2008 were the driving force of changes. Within the process of globalization and joining to the Bologna Process, Kazakhstan entered the knowledge and skills innovation age (Kubow and Fossum, 2007). Thus, education reforms in the secondary level were one of the essential "tool" to correspond to the world standard and to educate the competitive Kazakhstani nation in the 21st century.

The process of educational policy borrowing also should be in the frame of process such as "guiding philosophy". In case of Kazakhstan it is "increasing competitiveness of education and development of human capital through ensuring access to quality education for sustainable economic growth" (Nazarbayev, 2010). Next are "ambitions, goals", for example, one of the goals is to bring up the citizen of Kazakhstan who will be "intellectually, physically and spiritually developed" (Nazarbayev, 2010). Accepted "strategies" are followed "enabling structures" for instance newish Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools. The last two stages are "processes" and "techniques" criteria-based assessment (which is applied in NIS) and new methodological based (that taught teachers on the base of Centers of Excellence) respectively (Phillips and Ochs, 2004).

One of the steps to reach these aims proposed by the president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev was national project "Intellectual Nation 2020". The main aim of this project is "to bring up a new breed of Kazakhstani youth and the transformation of Kazakhstan into a country with competitive human capital" (Nazarbayev, 2008). As the result, the project "Twenty intellectual schools for gifted and talented children" was set out (Bridges, 2014, p.73). NIS have the autonomy to use the new programs and the assessment system. So, NIS pursuit the best international practices in education to adapt it in the national context. According to the Philips and Ochs (2004) this process is called "policy borrowing".

Singapore education system was very attractive to the NIS. Analyzing the Singapore`s educational system NIS seeks to know what makes the Singapore`s educational system successful? Hogan (2014, para 4) discusses that Singapore has very strict classroom instruction, teaching is focused on the traditional curricula knowledge and high performance on the examination such as TIMSS and PISA, strict rules of "selection, training and professional development of principals and teachers". Analyzing different data it evident that Singapore pays a lot of attention to the assessment system on the country, thus for the last two decades Cambridge International

Examination (CIE) played the significant role in the development of the education system in Singapore. So Kazakhstan borrowed the practice of curricula and assessment system from the CIE and from the Netherlands` Central Institute for the Test Development (CITO). Switzerland became a model of the International Baccalaureate, John Hopkins Centre for Talented Youth provided the approaches for identification and support of the talented children. Bases of trilingual policy were taken from Estonia, Quebec and University of Cambridge Faculty of Education played an essential part in teachers` development program (Bridges, 2014). NIS was established not only for development of the system within the network, but also to translate the experience to the mainstream schools. According to the NIS development strategy till 2020, existing NIS schools are supposed to work with 35 the mainstream schools, in order to share knowledge and experience. According to the development strategy NIS works in following directions "new teaching and learning approaches; learning to think critically, assessment for and of learning, using ICT in teaching, teaching talented and gifted children, responding to the age-related approaches, management and leadership of learning" (NIS, 2012 p.50).

From provided information above it is clear that borrowing process pass through the "development" and "implementation" stages. However, the policy borrowing process was only introduced within a framework of Autonomous Educational Organization of NIS. It implies that the last stage of the policy borrowing model "internationalization/indigenization" is not completed. The dominant idea of last stage is instill borrowed policy at home. This stage will be considered completed when the policy will be adopted in the mainstream schools in Kazakhstan by 2020. All NIS actively collaborate with three to seven partner schools, which also co-operate with three other mainstream schools. So, the process represents the embranchment.

By 2020 with the help of NIS schools and Centers of Excellence (hereinafter CoE) the mainstream schools will adopt the program for mainstream schools. The main directions in translation of NIS experience to the mainstream schools are the following: professional development of teachers; curriculum (content of education); educational work with children and support of educational process. NIS work in accordance to the main guidelines of the translation of experience. They are online lessons, materials uploaded to the website, workshops and seminars, international conferences, centers of the excellence, teachers` network communities, collaboration with basic schools. In order to translate the experience NIS give online lessons and seminars to the mainstream students and teachers. The aim of online lessons is to "enlarge and deepening knowledge, skills of students. In the frame of interactive lessons students do laboratory and practical works and solve higher complexity tasks" (NIS, 2012 para 1). Teachers conduct four online lessons and one seminar in a week on such subjects as Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, English language, and Information technology. In total, in the period from 2011 till the first half of 2014 academic year 1583 online lessons and 140 online seminars were conducted by the NIS teachers. Online seminars hold to teach mew pedagogical technology to the mainstream teachers. More than 800 online lessons we uploaded on the NIS website. Additionally, seminar materials presentations and videos are available to teachers on the websites. In addition to that, the mainstream schools were provided with 1780 CD with workshop materials on criteria bases assessment, work with gifted and talented children and critical thinking ("Online lessons and seminars", n.d., para. 3).

The CoE were established to fulfill commission of the president about translation of NIS experience to the mainstream schools. The mission of CoE is to enhance the teachers` development, translation of NIS and international pedagogical experience to the the mainstream schools of Kazakhstan. Programs for professional development were developed together with foreign partners and divided on three main levels. The CoE were opened in 16 cities around Kazakhstan. Trainers who have certificate of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) trained 7420 the mainstream teachers in 2012. By 2020 it is planned that all teachers will have passed through professional development courses held by trainers from CE and National Centre of Professional Development "ORLEU". In order to support the mainstream teachers during 2013-2014 year there were developed and passed to schools 157 methodological books 2019 in total piece; 31 regional seminars for 1020 participants, 15 urban for 924 participants, 31 pilot schools for 877 participants,33 sections on the international, republic and regional seminars; 4 forums, 240 workshop sessions 123 of which for teachers studying on the courses organized by CE; 17 training workshops; traineeship on the base of seven NIS in Astana, Aktobe, Kokshetay, Taldycorgan, Ust-Kamanagorsk and Uralsk for 52 teachers; publication of the "Pedagogical dialogue" magazine by the Centers with co-operation with faculty of education in the Cambridge University.

The literature shows that numerous researches were conducted on the borrowing process and teachers perceptions on this process in different countries. The main purpose of the studies discussed above was to analyze the borrowing process on the procedural level rather than conceptual. The process borrowing the experience is still poorly researched in Kazakhstan.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the borrowing process from the conceptual side by taking into consideration the cultural accepts borrowing process, thus filling in the gap in the literature in the Kazakhstani context. The findings from the research will beneficial for the school administrators, teachers, and parents who will be involved in this process.

Statement of The Problem

Are the schools ready to accept the experience of NIS? A lot of research has been done on the policy borrowing in other countries, though this sphere has not been widely researched in Kazakhstan. This study will contribute to the process of policy borrowing from NIS to the mainstream schools and teachers` perception of the process.

Purpose of The Study

This case study aims to analyze the process of "policy transfer" between NIS and the mainstream schools in Kazakhstan through examining the perceptions of the mainstream schools teachers.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide your study.
1.   How are the NIS practices transferred to the mainstream schools?
2.   What are the perceptions of the mainstream school teachers' on learning from NIS experience?
3.   What are the facilitating and obstructing factors during the process?

METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used in this study to explore and understand perceptions of the mainstream school teachers towards translation NIS experience to the the mainstream schools. The researcher used single case study to explore and "to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth" (Yin, 2009, p. 32) namely policy transfer process from Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) to its partner school. The qualitative method will enable researcher to work directly with research participants and explore their own attitudes, feelings and opinions related to translation of NIS experience to the mainstream schools.

As this study aims to analyze the process of policy transfer and teachers' perceptions on this process, the researcher used in-depth interviews as "one of the most important source of case study information" (Yin, 2009, p. 106). Limitation of the study is that the results of the study can not be generalized.

Sample

Purposeful and convenience sampling was used in this research. Purposeful sampling was used in this research, because researcher was interested in teachers who worked in particular school and was involved in process of policy transfer from NIS. Half of them are actively collaborating with NIS and the other half does not take active part in this process.

Then convenience sampling was also used in this study. According to Creswell (2014), in convenience sampling "the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be studied" (p.163).

Instrument

As this study aims to analyze the process of policy borrowing and teachers perceptions of this process, the researcher will use in-depth interviews as "one of the most important source of case study information" (Yin, 2009). During one-on-one interview participants were asked to answer asked to answer to 10 open-ended questions to provide useful information about the process of policy transfer from NIS and teachers` perceptions of this process. This approach facilitates faster interviews that can be more easily analyzed and compared. All interviewees and the answers were recorded.

Data Analysis

All data collected from the participants was transcribed, which in turn, was reviewed to get general understanding of the whole picture. Next, important statements and phrases concerning the central phenomenon was elicited from each transcript and coded. All similar codes were organized into themes or categories to form the main idea of the database. In order to illustrate the preliminary analysis the researcher used a color coded system to highlight specific themes or categories. The next stage is interpretation of the findings. According to the Creswell (2014) interpretation "means that the researcher steps back and forms some larger meaning of the phenomenon based on personal views, comparison with past studies or both" (p. 281). Researcher reviewed important findings and analyses which result in assessment of the level of responses given.

The study incorporated a full description of the data analyzed. This description was presented in the findings. Then, the researcher wrote a rich and exhaustive description of the experience and lessons learned which entailed the formulation of essential structure of the phenomenon.

RESULTS and FINDINGS

Thematic analysis of interview questions has elicited that most teachers have positive perspective to the process of translation of NIS experience to the mainstream schools; however, all of them mentioned that they were against of participation in the beginning this process. Anna Anatolievna mentions:

Honestly speaking, I was absolutely disagree, why we should change the way we teach. In what way our system is bad with the comparison to new one. During all my professional life I have worked with my children, using the methodology that I was taught. They are always ready to my lessons and never miss them. I feel myself comfortable. Children are satisfied with my work. So, I did not see the great necessity in changes at that time.
Her statement illustrates that some teachers are "old fashioned". For them the main indicator for successful lesson is the attendance and readiness for the lesson. However, she is not interested in the students` motivation and how the students comprehension of the lesson. Another participant, Arai Abayevna responds:
I am the person, who is always open to the changes. I do not want to stay in one place. I want to move to develop myself. Despite this fact I also had a twofold opinion on the collaboration with NIS. I was skeptic about the results, because I thought that NIS teachers were so experienced and more qualified, they had been already trained for using new methods.
So, teachers mentioned different reasons, why they have negative perspectives on the first stages of this process. During the period of transition from old to a new system teachers are forced to go out from "comfort zone", because they have to be engaged in something new which makes them to show intransigence to some changes. Fullan and Miles (1992) call this "misunderstanding resistance" (p.748) as one of the factors that prevent the successful reform implementation. Authors explain this resistance claiming that each stakeholder involved in the education changes has personal understanding and view on how the process of changes should operate. Several international publications have appeared analyzing the perception of teachers toward the policy change, especially assessment system and curriculum. Tan (2014) defines two key implications that are needed for in cross-cultural educational research. The former is the "need for comparatives to acknowledge and explore further nature" and the latter is "appreciating the cultural scripts of locality to understand the complex processes of educational policy transfer" (Tan, 2014, p.206). Saule Sericovna mentions that:
You know! One of the factors of negative attitude toward the changes, apart from the fear of responsibility, can be the nature of our teachers. Some of teachers are used to sit in their classes and do not want to "go out". They are not interested what is happening outside their classes. How other colleagues are dealing with the same work. It is very difficult process to turn teaches towards something new.

Also, the participant mentions the school enrolment. She emphasizes that her school is situated in remote from the city center region. Additionally, the housing is significantly cheaper and affordable in that district. It implies that a lot of students are from the vulnerable groups making teacher`s work harder.
Some of the teachers responded that they were under the pressure while implementation stage, because it was necessary to show high results. So, they are more comfortable with the old standards.

Despite the negative attitudes of the teachers toward the process of translation of NIS experience in 2011, by 2015 most teachers changes their perceptions. So, the data analysis allows to educe some categories, what teachers refer to beneficial ones: teacher professional development, Criteria – Based Assessment;leadership; school culture and teacher's beliefs and perceptions and school promotion.

Teacher Professional Development.

The CoE provide the mainstream school teachers with the 3 level professional development courses. In the frame of this program 7 teachers passed this courses. Three of them were involved in my research. All these teachers emphasize the improvement of the quality of their lesson. Aizhan Amirovna replies:

What about me, I can see significant change in the way my lessons reversed. Before I worked according to an old scheme so, I was the script writer, and no one was able to change the way of the lesson and make mistake. But, I was under a delusion that I am the main person in the class. Now, I look on my students from another side and I it is more interesting for me prepare the lessons. I understood that any opinion of the child has the right to be.

By the old scheme teacher means the traditional lesson, where teacher explain the theme of the lesson, then students do some exercise for practice, which are graded and get the home work. Teacher centered approach

shifted to the student centered one. Participants highlight that preparation to the lesson take more time than before, they start to plan more carefully trying taking into account the individual needs of the students. Likewise teachers apply different interactive methods to raise the students` motivation. Aizhan Amirovna continues:

Other teachers from our school, especially young teachers started interested in my lessons and observe them, they want to learn something new and apply it in their practice. They also try to invite me on their lessons and ask give them feedback.

It signals that the teachers understand the necessity of development and show the interest in own professional development. Teachers also visit the seminars, workshop, and open lessons prepared by the NIS teachers, which also conduce to their development as a teacher.

As one of principle of translation of NIS experience it is professional development of teachers, NIS together with the CoE exert a force on actualization of this principle.

Criteria-Based Assessment

In all the mainstreams schools in Kazakhstan students are assessed by five scale assessment system. Despite the fact it is called five scale assessment systems, teachers in Kazakhstan use only marks like five, four and three, where five stand satisfactory, four fir good, three for satisfactory. As, the system does not provide students with the clear picture of their achievements NIS started to apply Criteria-Based Assessment (CBA) and transfer their practice to the mainstream schools. All participants highlight the effectiveness of the CBA. Svetlana Ivanovna mentions:

Students sometimes are not satisfied with their marks and always asked me "Why I got three? Why my classmate have higher mark than me, we have similar works?". I tried to explain them providing the arguments showing the difference, some students were still disagree with my decision. When I started apply the elements of CBA number of such questions reduced, because students had the criterion of assessments rubrics that provide them with the clear explanation of the given mark.

All of the participants respond that use the elements of criteria-bases assessment yield the results both to students and teachers. Having the assessment rubrics and assessment criterion students know the requirements and demands of the subject. Meanwhile, teachers are manage to provide a fair assessment to all students in the class. The teachers using the criteria-based assessment give students constant constructive feedback according on the bases of assessment rubrics.

So, it is obvious that the criteria-based assessment leads to the improvement of the grading system in the school. However, data shows that teachers using few elements of new assessment system. Teachers explain that elaboration of assessment rubrics is a time consuming and complicated process. It allows to make an assumption hypothesis that despite the fact that teachers see real benefit of using the criteria-based assessment, they are not willing to apply this assessment system to all lessons with for each cycle of schooling
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School Culture, Teacher's Beliefs and Perceptions

In the process of change the school environment and mission of the school are very important. As it was written by Hargreaves (1994) "missions also strengthen teachers` sense of efficacy, their believe that they can improve the achievement of their students" (p.163). So, if the teachers have an aspiration for realization of the school mission, it will allow them to work collaboratively. Analysis of the interviews allows me to claim that the culture in the school changed completely from the time of adopting the NIS experience. Anna Anatolienva mentions:

There are changes in collaboration between teachers in our school. During the decades we used to work individually, hiding our own materials from other teachers. Now teachers become more open to each other. We started to prepare lessons together and share with our materials.

Almost all participants mentioned that they started to cooperate. Furthermore, they highlighted that teacher start to demonstrate interest to other teachers, their methodology, and experience. In addition they start to visit each other classes and provide feedback to one another. One of the participants called the changes as a "wind of change".

I can say that after collaboration with NIS teachers, observation of their work, participation in numerous seminars, and workshops the ideology has changed. NIS teachers more are open in comparison with us. The collaboration with NIS teachers widens the mindset of the teachers.

According to the information provided by participant the changes in the school culture are apparent. Before the participation in the process of translation of NIS experience in school we can observe the elements of individualism in teachers` work which were replaced with collaborative culture.

School promotion

Since collaborative work with the NIS school the people`s perceptions toward school have changes. In accordance with the interview responses other city schools are informed that this school is involved in this project and interested in the changes that happened. Moreover teachers mentioned that parents also more actively participate in the school live and interested in the students` achievements. One of the participants Gulnur Kairatovna tells:

I was involved in the seminar where I met teachers from different cities. And when I was introducing myself, they said "We now your school. It is in one project with NIS". I was y surprised.

Leadership

In the period of change the role of the school principle plays a pivotal role as it was mentioned by Hord & Sommers, (2008) principle is "gatekeeper or a key to change and improvement" (p.6). Therefore the school principals should be able to turn teachers towards the changes and help them incorporate into new knowledge in their practice. Interviewed teachers say that distributional leadership system operates in their school of. Anna Anatolievna mentions:

I am a leader of the professional learning community in our school. In our team there are 7 teachers including me. We are responsible for the promotion of the development of teachers in our school who did not pass the level courses. We are trying to share our knowledge with other, on the other hand we also learn from our colleagues.

Other processional communities also exist in current school particularly department communities and communities are monitor pupils' academic progress. So, it means that teachers also have the opportunity to try themselves as leaders of different communities – it can facilitate positive results of implementation of the new practices. However, the principles should facilitate and control this process and

The findings of the current study underpin the findings of the research done by Rulison (2012). Rulison (2012) conducted in-depth interviews with the USA teachers to analyze their perception on the implementation of new curriculum. Rulison (2012) indicated that most of the interviewed teachers have a "blind faith" (p.92) to the administration during the period of change. It is also valid for teachers participated in research in Kazakhstan. The teachers follow the instructions from the side of administration and NIS teachers, because they do not know about the new standard, especially how this process should be realized. As example, the pilot school which gets the experience from NIS at the same time should work collaboratively work with three the mainstream schools in the city. However, the teachers are ignorant of the policy of further dissemination of the experience. Instead, they just hold the rare seminars for other city schools.

In May of 2014 our school held city seminar for other the mainstream school teachers, where we demonstrated what had we learned during the three year period.
In general, all teachers highlighted the lack of teacher professional development and preparation (Rulison, 2012; Antoniou, 2014). In contrast to the findings from the USA and Cyprus, the current study reveals that this issue is not salient for the teachers participated in the research project. Kuralai Abayevna highlights:

I can not say that we were left along on the way of exploring something new. From the beginning NIS teachers supported us. We can call them fany time and ask advice. NIS teachers are open to share what they have learnt, with us and they show real interest.

Similarly with the outcomes of the research by Rulison (2012) and Antoniou (2014) most of the participants in this study point out that teachers are forced to use instructional strategies which downplay the role of the curriculum, so teachers face challenges, stress and tensed time line to prepare lesson plans. Furthermore, teachers were unsure about constancy of the reforms.

In conclusion, I want to highlight that analysis of the data allows me to find out that there are existence of such called "symbols" among the teachers. By symbols we mean catching and fashionable concepts widely used but not comprehended. For instance, such definitions as "Action research" , "Lesson study" or "Critical Thinking" used by the teachers, but they do not deeply understand the meaning of this words. The participants mention that they use these methods, but not their everyday practice. It can be caused with unwilling results of implantations

of these methods. So, teachers should clearly understand of what they do and grasp the concrete purpose of their actions.

The NIS teachers provide the online seminars and lesson to three the mainstream schools as one way of translating of NIS experience. From the participants responses it is clear that teachers attend the seminars for teachers, but do not involve students into participation of the online lessons. Teachers refer to the absence of internet connection or discrepancy in the timetable. So, NIS should reconsider time of online lessons and try to make all conditions for comfortable for the mainstream school teachers.

According to the plan of transition of NIS experience, the schools which co-operated with the NIS should work with three schools and transfer knowledge that they get from NIS schools. Most of the teachers suggest expanding the co-operation of NIS schools with other schools of the city. Hence, it means that schools do not work intensively with other three the mainstream schools, only providing rare with seminars and workshops. So policy makers should control the process of new policy transfer outside the schools which intensively collaborate with NIS.

In general, the policy transfer from NIS to the mainstream schools flows in accordance of the plan, NIS teachers provide the mainstream schools` teachers with essential support. However, the teacher's willingness, aspiration, and deep understanding of importance and necessity in structural adjustments of national educational system will lead to the success. The process of changing is very complicated process which requires a lot of effort and takes a long period of time. So, to judge about successful implementation of the new system is too early.

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