

**Trust towards Public School Teachers, Quality of Education and Human Capital in  
Azerbaijan**

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Junior Research Fellowship Program

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*Executive Summary.*

According to Caucasus Barometer 2010, most people in Azerbaijan trust public school teachers. However, society has changed its attitude towards the teaching profession and the duties of a teacher. Speaking about trust to the representatives of any profession, we mean the belief that they fulfill their obligations *bona fide* and have the expected result of the performance. Many people in Azerbaijan do not expect teachers within school settings to give knowledge necessary for entering university. This is demonstrated by high number of students training with tutors (Silova and Kazimzade 2011). In general, the quality of education provided by teachers at schools deteriorates. Given their minuscule salaries and prevalence of cronyism in the public education system, teachers do not have high stimuli for working hard and being more responsible. These problems are likely to lead to distrust towards teachers, which in its turn will further undermine the quality of education in public schools.

There are different ways to improve teachers' performance and the quality of education. This paper considers five policy alternatives: 1) introducing tuition fees in public schools; 2) tightening control over the work of the public schools; 3) increasing the average teacher salary to 500 manats in five years period; 4) promotion of competition among

teachers while encouraging progress in work in the form of awards and bonuses; 5) introducing taxes on tutoring; 6) leaving everything as it is, taking no action. The potential outcomes and trade-offs of these policy options are compared with five-dimensional selection criterion drawing on Bardach's (1996) eightfold path and multi-goal analysis framework advanced by Weimer and Vining (1999). These five selection criteria are: cost of the project, the time, 'political feasibility', equality among teachers and among students, and effectiveness of the project. Based on this analysis, I recommend setting strict control over the educational process in public schools with the synchronous stimulation of competition among teachers with awards and bonuses and gradual increase in teachers' salaries in five years period.

This paper proceeds as follows: The next section outlines the background of the problem. The second section describes the research design. Afterwards the evidence of distrust towards public school teachers is discussed drawing on data from different books and articles on education, CRRC's Caucasus Barometer 2010 dataset, the survey of the psychological center of Sveta Mejidova, the research of Elmina Kazimzade and Naila Ismailova 2009-2010, and in-depth interviews with experts. The fourth section provides analysis of stakeholders. The last section analyzes policy options available to decision-makers to solve the problem of distrust of public school teachers in Azerbaijan. I conclude with brief discussion of recommended policy.

*Key words:* teachers, education, Azerbaijan, trust

### *Background of the problem*

In Azerbaijan, a teacher has always had great respect. For many people a teacher has also been a mentor. The Soviet system taught to be respectful and honorific to the teaching profession. So, at that time the level of trust towards public school teachers was high, and hardly anyone could ever think of the incompetence of one's teacher. After the Soviet Union had collapsed and the state independence of Azerbaijan had been restored, problems in the education system appeared. It was necessary to conduct new reforms that could change existing educational system, which was different from the previous one, and did not justify itself as something new. Subsequently, a number of reforms were introduced in order to improve the quality of education. According to the presidential decree of 30 March 1998 on the implementation of the reforms in the education system of Azerbaijan Republic in accordance with international standards in the field of education development and strengthening its logistics, the Ministry of Education does comprehensive work. Reforms are aimed to update the content of education - reforms in the curriculum, introduce a new system of teaching materials; adopt the concept of evaluation, a new strategy and the concept of continuous teachers' learning, update the content of initial teachers' training, introduce a new model to improve the management and teaching staff (*Elchin Sardarov 2010*). Moreover, today most of the reforms are focused on improvement of the information and communication technologies at schools and conduction of final exams. However, the quality of education is not really improving.

There is kind of stimulation of teachers' work in the form of award "The best teacher". In 2010 one hundred of teachers got a lump-sum award of 5000 manats (*The presidential decree of 5 July 2010*). Also, the teachers' salaries were going to increase in average to 10% (*The presidential decree of 6 September 2010*). Nevertheless the teachers'

salaries (in average 172.4 manats (Kazimzade, Elmina and Naila Ismailova 2009-2010)) are still so minuscule that they are close to the subsistence minimum (the cost of living for working population is 102 manats (Moyazarplata.az 2011)) in Azerbaijan. Most of the teachers have children and have to provide them with all necessary things, including education. They also have to pay for utilities. In many developed countries the teaching profession is considered as highly paid. In Azerbaijan, in turn, the salaries rise insignificantly, and the stimuli attract and involve only few teachers.

The control over education is made in the form of different commissions that come to school from time to time. Main control is conducted by school administration.

Today there are many unresolved issues. Though the majority of the population continues to trust public school teachers, Azerbaijani society has changed its attitude regarding the teaching profession and the duties of a teacher, and teachers differently perceive their duties and differently approach to the problem of students' attendance, education and behavior.

### *Research question*

The main research question pursued in this paper is: What determines the level of trust towards public school teachers in Azerbaijan? And if the trust is low and positively associated with the quality of education, what can be done to increase it?

Speaking about trust to the representatives of any profession, we mean the belief that they fulfill their obligations *bona fide* and deliver the expected results of the performance. It is worth mentioning that in Azerbaijan along with public schools there are private schools. Various factors affect the attitude towards teachers in public and private schools. Therefore, in this research we focus only on the trust towards public school

teachers.

In Azerbaijan, everyone has constitutional right to get education, which means that everyone can get necessary knowledge. A teacher's role in every person's life is very important. In addition to the required school knowledge, they teach morality, ethics, and behavior in society. People who graduate from the schools have a certain base which allows them to adapt in the society, to use their knowledge in practice and express themselves in any sphere of activity.

This paper drew on various data sources including secondary analysis from different books and articles on education, data from CRRC's Caucasus Barometer 2010, the survey of the psychological center of Sveta Mejidova, and the research of Elmina Kazimzade and Naila Ismailova. Also, the research drew on in-depth interviews with experts such as Nana Kalantarova, the former director of School 56 in Baku (1972-1984), former head of the district department of education, and currently Deputy Head at Administration Office at Khazar University, and Elmina Kazimzade, Director of the Center for Innovation in Education in Azerbaijan and Coordinator at the Open Society Institute in Azerbaijan.

### *Who trusts, who does not?*

Data from CB 2010 show that, 22% of Azeri respondents completely trust, 44% chose mostly trust, 18% more or less trust, 7% mostly distrust, and 5% completely distrust public school teachers. So, the majority of people in Azerbaijan trust public school teachers. We can get more information if we take a look at other answers of the respondents of Caucasus Barometer 2010.

People whose current perceived economic status is high, who are happy and generally satisfied with their lives are more likely to trust public school teachers. They do not see the

problems or do not perceive them as bad as others do. For people with good economic situation it is common to hire tutors for children, and they do not think this is a problem. People whose economic status is low do not have or have little opportunity to hire tutors. This is the reason why they are not satisfied with teachers' performance. They expect teachers to give the necessary knowledge.

There are some other factors that affect people's attitudes towards public school teachers. People who trust public school teachers are loyal to the government, and especially to the president, approve of the direction of national politics in Azerbaijan and think that voters are free from pressure.

Another factor effecting trust towards teachers is the age of a respondent. People who are younger than 35 trust public school teachers less. Those who obtained their secondary education during Soviet system still associate contemporary education with soviet education. For them a teacher cannot be incompetent. A teacher does what s/he is supposed to do and nothing else and, therefore, should be respected. On the other hand, the younger generations have witnessed injustice and different violations done by teachers at schools.

Trust towards public school teachers in Azerbaijan can be explained by low expectations. Many people in Azerbaijan are satisfied with the current situation at schools. However, their trust means that they let their children go to schools, attend lessons, and study there. Sometimes parents even hire the teachers of the school for private tutoring. Nevertheless, people in Azerbaijan are not so confident that the education delivered by teachers is enough to enter the university, or at least to show good knowledge. Today most students prepare with teachers for the university entrance exams. It is something common, and majority of people do not see it as a problem. Parents think that it is impossible to enter the university without getting trained with a tutor. In fact, it is really difficult. Here the question is: does the performance of teachers really justify itself? Maybe more qualitative

lessons could help enrollees to have less problems and difficulties while applying to university. Currently, a high percentage of people who get trained with tutors demonstrates that the quality of education is not as good as it is supposed to be.

It is worth adding that in Azerbaijan public school teachers are not so highly trusted as the president: 63% of the respondents of Caucasus Barometer 2010 say they fully trust president when only 22% of respondents completely trust public school teachers.

In general, today there are some factors that have changed the attitude towards a teacher in society. The teacher's authority has weakened, the prestige of the profession has decreased, and there many reasons to concern about the education delivered by public school teachers.

*What are the reasons to distrust?*

What are the factors that cause distrust of public school teachers in Azerbaijan?

1. *Corruption and nepotism.* Corruption is one of the main problems in the Azerbaijani society. Bribery of teachers leads to discrimination against students who are unable or unwilling to bribe teachers. Moreover, any teacher who takes a bribe loses the respect of the students. Injustice that students and their parents have to face with increases distrust towards teachers. According to the psychological center of Sveta Majidova, 47% of parents believe that the number of teachers taking bribes is over 50%. Among the teachers, only 7% indicated that they took bribes, and 41% of the teachers said they bribed the representatives of other professions. All appearances, these responses of the teachers do not reflect the real situation, but they give the evidence that in our society paying bribes is not such a disapproved act as taking them.



2. *Irresponsibility of the teachers.* This happens when a teacher does not seriously approach to the educational process and when a teacher has no capacity to enforce discipline in a classroom. Irresponsible teacher also leaves a classroom for a while or may not control the attendance of students. Nana Kalantarova says: “Today a school does not monitor the attendance... In the past form-masters had a great responsibility if a student missed 1-2 days of classes. Nowadays in some schools it is a great thing to find the students of eleventh grade (attending classes).”

3. *Biased attitude towards students.* A teacher who favors certain students often discriminates against others. According to the psychological center of Sveta Majidova, 25% of the students agree that unfair treatment by the teachers is one of their major problems in school.

4. *The popularity of tutoring.* According to the psychological center of Sveta Majidova, 48% of students' parents reported that their children are training with tutors. 60% of all students (and 78% of the students of 11<sup>th</sup> grade) indicated that they had tutors. Many teachers in Azerbaijan, in addition to school work, are engaged in tutoring activity. To the question “When do the teachers have an opportunity to have additional earnings?” 67% of teachers selected the answer “additional classes with students, including tutoring”. The teachers think it is normal to have additional lessons with their students for a fee, and they do not refer it to the extortion of money (*The psychological center of Sveta Majidova 2008*). The popularity of tutoring must alert the parents that their children did not get the necessary knowledge during the study, but, in turn, some parents hire a student's teacher as a tutor.

5. *Low level of knowledge of enrollees to the universities.* Despite the fact that tutoring has become common and widespread in Azerbaijan, the level of knowledge of applicants is low. Maleyka Abbaszade, the Chairman of the State Commission on Student Admission (SSAC), says that applicants with an average level of intelligence, who

successfully passed the school final examinations, show low results at the university entrance exams. “Those who passed school final exams with mark “good” or “excellent” were supposed to show the result of about 400 points (maximum score - 700). However, 20-30% of those enrollees in each specialty group scored in average not more than 200 points” (Zerkalo.az 2010). Moreover, according to Abbaszade, the number of graduates with high level of intelligence who enter the universities is only 3-5% of the total number of entrants (Xronika.az 2011). This is the case despite the fact most of the applicants train with tutors. Hence, today the basic knowledge obtained in secondary schools is not enough to enter a university with high scores. Lack of knowledge among school graduates proves that school education and school teachers do not justify themselves.

6. *Lack of skills.* Currently the teaching profession is not chosen by the best applicants. The rating of the Pedagogical Institute in Azerbaijan is very low (Informer.az 2010). Many people enroll there without clear desire to become teachers (Kazimzade, Elmina and Naila Ismailova 2009-2010). The younger generations of teachers lack the right skills, and the older generation of teachers is reluctant to adapt to innovations and new creative approach to teaching.

7. *Implementation of new curricula and new textbooks.* New curricula do not often conduce to the development of education. Sometimes it is difficult for teachers to adapt these programs, and it is much more difficult for students. Some parents do not trust school teachers, when they are dissatisfied with the homework given to their children at school, especially when they have to attend it. It takes time, and parents start to feel distrust of teachers who cannot cover all the necessary tasks at school. But this is not the real reason to blame teachers because, in fact, the curricula are too complicated. New textbooks also cause many problems during studies. The students are dissatisfied with inaccuracies, errors, and difficult language of the textbooks. Teachers who face with such problems cannot always

cope with the tasks. The Chairman of SSAC notes, that frequent changes in educational program at schools and frequent publication of textbooks on various subjects cause lower entry scores among the applicants (Xronika.az 2011). Another problem is that *the university entrance exams* do not help the students to improve their skills either, but just train them to solve the tests. After these exams most students forget the best part of the things they knew. Elmina Kazimzade mentions that this test system has had a negative impact on trust towards education in Azerbaijan.

It is worth mentioning that not all teachers show the reasons to distrust them. As Nana Kalantarova says, “there are such teachers that love their profession, and students trust and respect them”. Both Nana Kalantarova and Elmina Kazimzade note that, in general, the teaching profession is considered prestigious in our society. This is due to the fact that older generation retains respect towards the teaching profession.

However, today the prestige of the profession is decreasing. The teaching profession is not chosen by the best enrollees. Those with the greatest potential and abilities choose to apply for other professions, which are the most prestigious.

According to a survey conducted by Elmina Kazimzade and Naila Ismailova, 50.4% of teachers indicated that they had chosen the profession accidentally, 57% of students of pedagogical faculties chose the profession on the advice of their parents, only 27% were interested in the profession, and 10% applied because of love for children.

Unfortunately, if the situation in education stays the same it will cause deterioration and erase such problems as lack of qualified personnel, an increase of social problems, a decrease of teacher’s authority and changes in children’s relation towards adults, fall of morality in society, and other problems.

### *Stakeholders*

The main stakeholders are the teachers, the principals, the public schools, the Ministry of Education, the students, and the parents. In addition, the interested parties include universities, NGOs, the government, the broader society, and Azerbaijan Republic itself. These stakeholders need talented, clever, prospective students, who can highly contribute to different spheres in future.

Some teachers benefit from current situation by earning money from tutoring and bribes. Others, who like their profession, are concerned with distrust among population and decreasing respect. They really like their profession and just want more stimuli to work.

Also, there are parents both interested in the problem solution and its stagnation. The second ones encourage teachers with tutoring and taking bribes. In fact, the lowering trust towards teachers and the deterioration of education quality brings no real benefits.

Teachers determine the future of their students. Wasting time by sitting in a classroom without acquiring knowledge is not beneficial, though many students still do not realize it and do not demand better teaching.

Also, other governmental and non-governmental organizations are interested in improvement in Azerbaijan's education system. The knowledge foundation acquired in school increases work potential and also helps people to express themselves in society. The entire Azerbaijani society is interested in solution of the problem in education system as distrust of teachers leads to disrespect towards adults and to a change in the morality and ethics in society.

### *What can be done?*

What can be done in order to improve the school education in Azerbaijan and increase the level of trust towards public school teachers?

The main criteria for the alternatives are:

- a) cost of the project (the financial expenditures of the state budget of Azerbaijan Republic);
- b) the time (how quickly the problem will be solved);
- c) ‘political feasibility’ (the perception of public authorities, principals, teachers, students, parents and society of the ways of solving the problem);
- d) equality among teachers and among students of public schools;
- e) effectiveness of the project. Will people in Azerbaijan feel the results such as an increase of the quality of education, better teachers’ performance, a higher level of trust in public school teachers, a decrease in the number of tutoring, a higher level of intellect of the school graduates, and other economic and social benefits?

One of the main criteria is the effectiveness of the project. It is important to have the expected results and to see the changes in education system. Another important criterion is the political feasibility of the project. People in Azerbaijan must be interested in reforms and not be frustrated. In other case there is no expediency to implement the project. Also, it is necessary to consider the cost of the project in order to make it real and not to constrain the government in opportunities. Thus, these criteria must be priority when searching the best alternative.

It is obvious that people have to adapt to the changes. So the reforms cannot be implemented at once. Though, it is better when they give the expected results as soon as possible. The equality among teachers and among students of public schools should be considered as in every reform in Azerbaijan Republic.

This paper considers six *alternatives* for increasing credibility of public school teachers in Azerbaijan:

1. *Introducing tuition fees in public school education.* Paid education would enhance the vigilance of parents and the responsibility of teachers. Teachers would get higher salaries, and thus improve the quality of their work. Corruption level among these teachers would reduce. This option is good, but in Azerbaijan not everyone has an opportunity to pay for education. For children from poor families free education is a unique opportunity to gain knowledge. Tuition fees would be a violation of children's rights to education. Also, we can assume that simultaneously with the implementation of paid education those who do not have ability to pay will be given state credits. Thus, some people will fall into dependence on state loans. The principle of equality is violated here. It will cause discontent among people in Azerbaijan. So, this alternative is not politically feasible.

2. *Strict control over the work of public schools.* Strict control means application of penalties towards principals and teachers for unfair, poor-quality work and irresponsibility. This also means that teachers will be punished for corruption. This alternative is politically feasible. Everything must be under control, and the teachers' work should be transparent. This is a low-cost alternative, because there is already some kind of control over the education system, but it is not tightened. Still the teachers are not responsible for students' attendance, which is not strictly controlled by school administration either. Besides, corruption still remains at schools and the quality of education is poor. Though fear can increase the effectiveness of the teachers' work, at the same time teachers will undergo further stress, which cannot be compensated by low salaries. The profession would become less attractive. So, these changes will also cause new problems that make it doubtful of the effectiveness of the project.

3. *Increase the average of the teachers' salaries to 500 manats in five years period.* 57.3% of teachers give low value to the profession from financial sight. The average salary of a teacher in Azerbaijan is 172.4 manats (Kazimzade, Elmina and Naila Ismailova 2009-2010). 62% of the teachers think that the main reason for taking bribes is low wages (The psychological center of Sveta Mejidova 2008). High salaries will not let teachers depend on informal payments and tutoring. They will have more time for self-preparation for the new lessons and will improve the quality of teaching. A salary will be a certain stimuli to work. The prestige of the profession among students will increase. In order to increase teachers' salaries the state will need to increase its expenditures on education. Today the state uses nearly 8,3% of the whole financial expenditures of the state budget on education (*Law on State Budget 2011*) (Fineko/abc.az 2011). Developed countries realize the importance of education. They prefer investing money in education because it gives a lot of benefits in near future. Thus, member-countries of *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development* in average spend nearly 12,7% of state budget financial expenditures on education. (Bocharov and Spichkina 2010). "Concentration of state budget expenditures on education creates conditions for economic development" (Bocharov and Spichkina 2010).

4. *Competition among teachers while encouraging progress in work in the form of awards and bonuses.* The spirit of competition always improves the quality of work. Bonuses in this case will be an additional stimulus. Almost all teachers must be involved in this competition, and a high number of them must be given awards of different value. It would be also good to give teachers different rungs according to their work experience, its effectiveness and other factors. The only thing is that teachers who tutor earn much more than they could get by winning bonuses (which cannot be higher than the salaries). This means that the option might be good and effective if teachers were more satisfied with their salaries.

5. *Taxes on tutoring.* Though many teachers do tutoring, not all of them indicate it. According to Elmina Kazimzade and Naila Ismailova 2010, only 25,1% of teachers stated that they did tutoring. Tutoring has a negative impact on the quality of a teacher's performance at school. Moreover, most of them tutor illegally, not paying taxes for additional income, and this causes problems to the country's economy. High taxes on tutoring could prevent some teachers from doing this extra-activity and encourage them to pay more attention to work at school. However, overall the project is not high-effective and realistic because it is difficult to control the teachers who also work as tutors. Another thing is that a decrease in the number of teachers who tutor would not stop them from taking bribes.

6. *Take no action, leave everything as it is.* In this case further deterioration of the situation is expected.

### *Recommendations*

Today the Azerbaijani society has to understand the problem of deteriorating education system, and the government has to take measures to solve it. People in Azerbaijan do not expect much from the public school teachers and encourage tutoring, which has become much more popular than it was in soviet period. This proves that many people in Azerbaijan do not trust the classes provided by teachers at schools.

Certainly, the teachers must show better performance. This paper recommends setting strict control over the educational process with application of penalties for different violations and irresponsibility, so that the teachers who do not show the expected results were responsible for it. At the same time it is important to encourage teachers by giving bonuses and awards, to stimulate competition among them, and to show them perspectives of professional growth. Higher salaries will be essential. They will motivate teachers to work



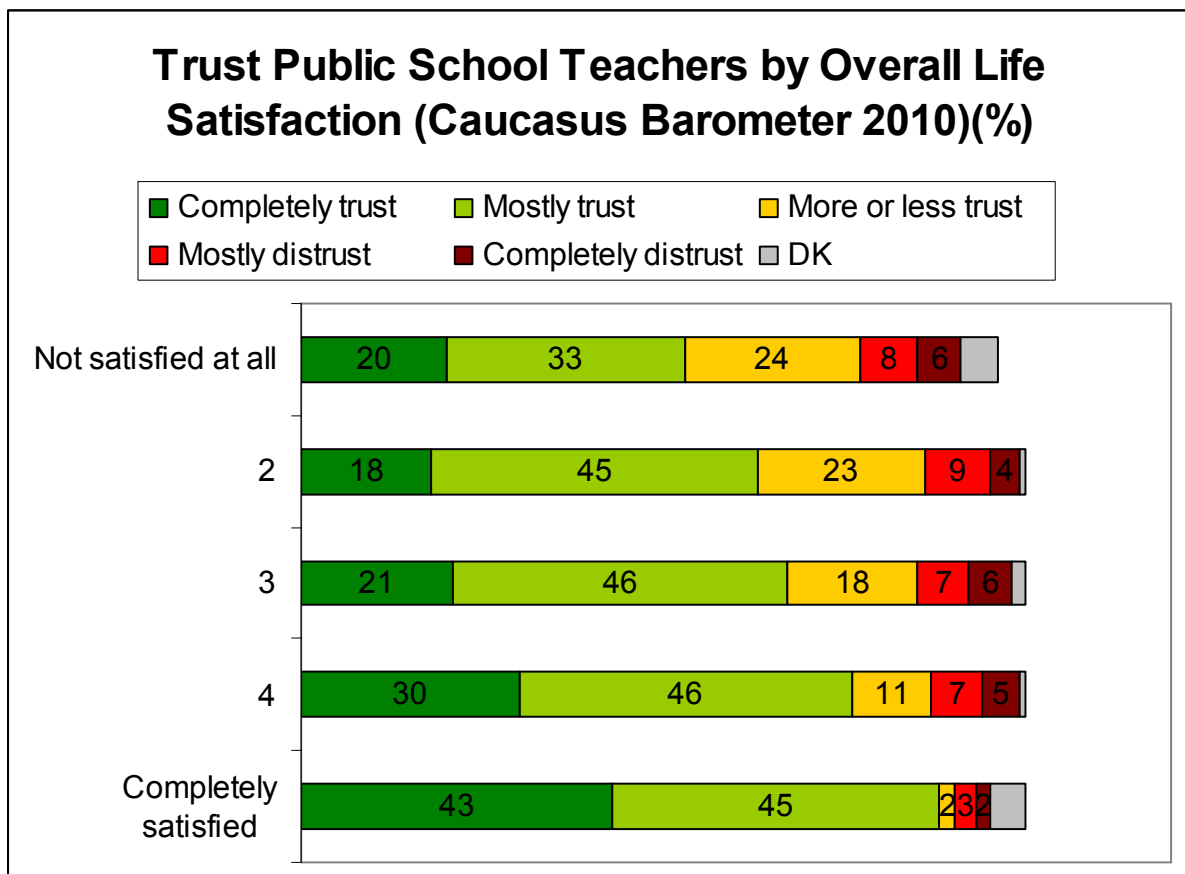
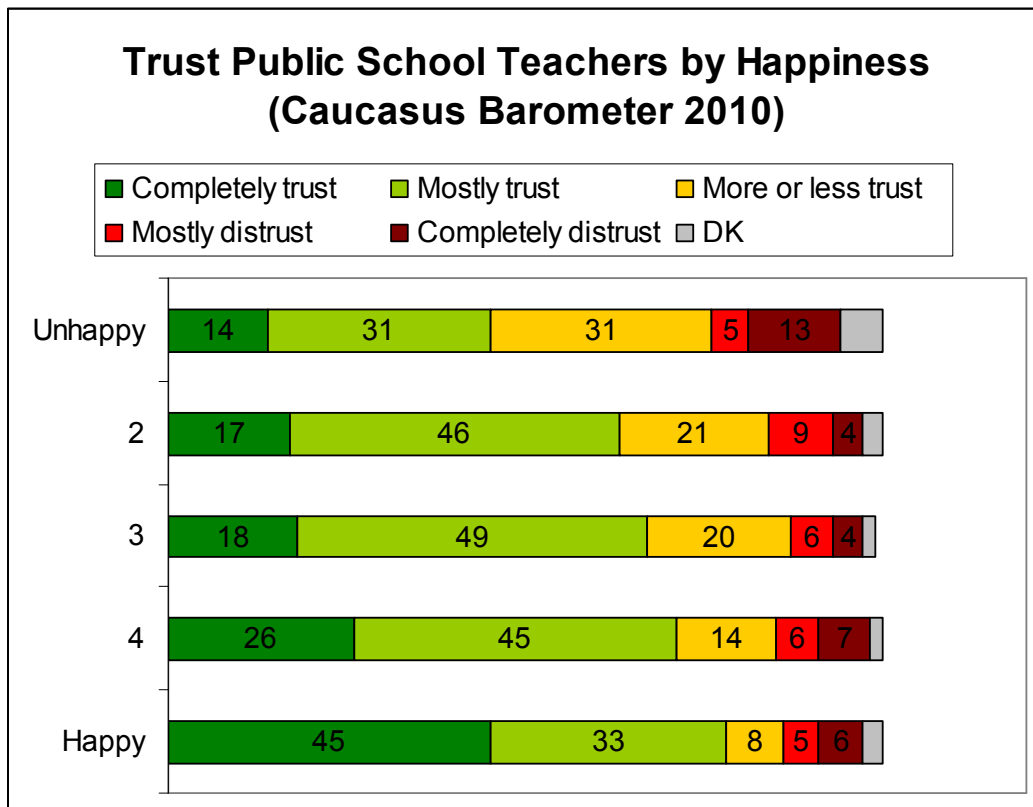
harder and to improve the quality of their lessons. Salaries must be increased gradually in five years period. If we want teachers not to take bribes, we have to take away the reason for that. If we want them to show better performance, we have to give them additional stimuli. So, all this options combined would help to reduce teachers' need in tutoring and additional payments. They would have more time to prepare for the lessons.

Another thing is that most teachers in Azerbaijan do tutoring illegally, so this has a bad impact on country's economy. The reform would help to reduce this impact, to stimulate the economy, and to introduce transparency in public schools. Teachers' better performance would make students and enrollees show better results. The government would reduce its expenses on new curricula and pivotal renewals of the textbooks.

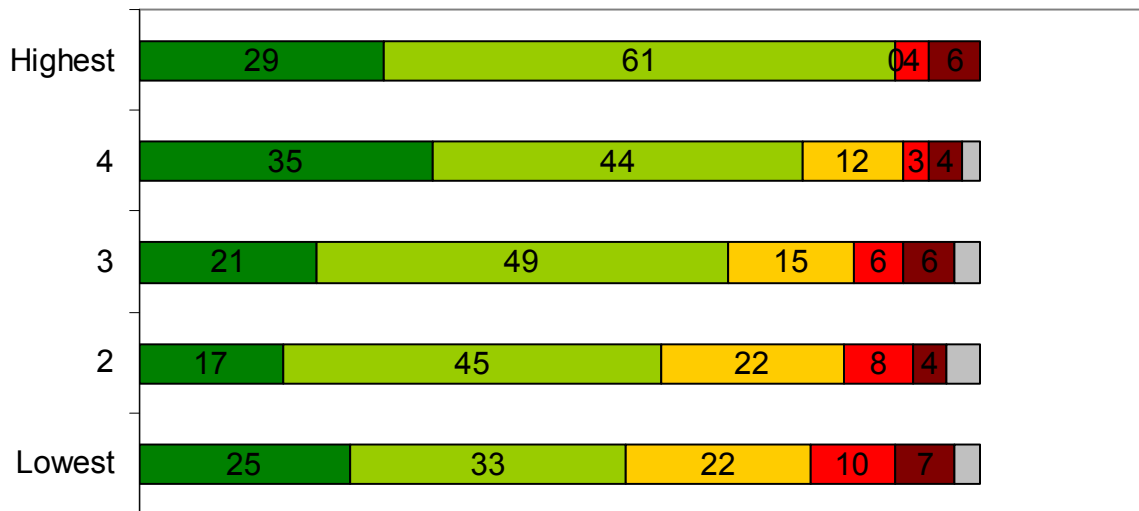
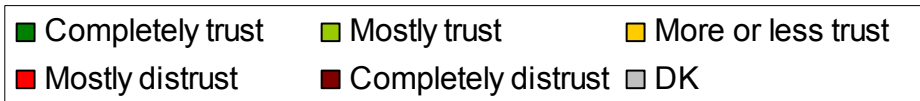
The country's economy cannot depend mostly on oil industry. The service industry must be developed. It means that the government has to pay attention to the education of human resources. Thus, investment in people education would help to develop service industry which would stimulate country's economic growth.

The reform would also help make teaching profession more attractive, which in its turn would have a positive effect on human capital in the country through improving quality of teaching, and therefore would boost the country's economic growth potential.

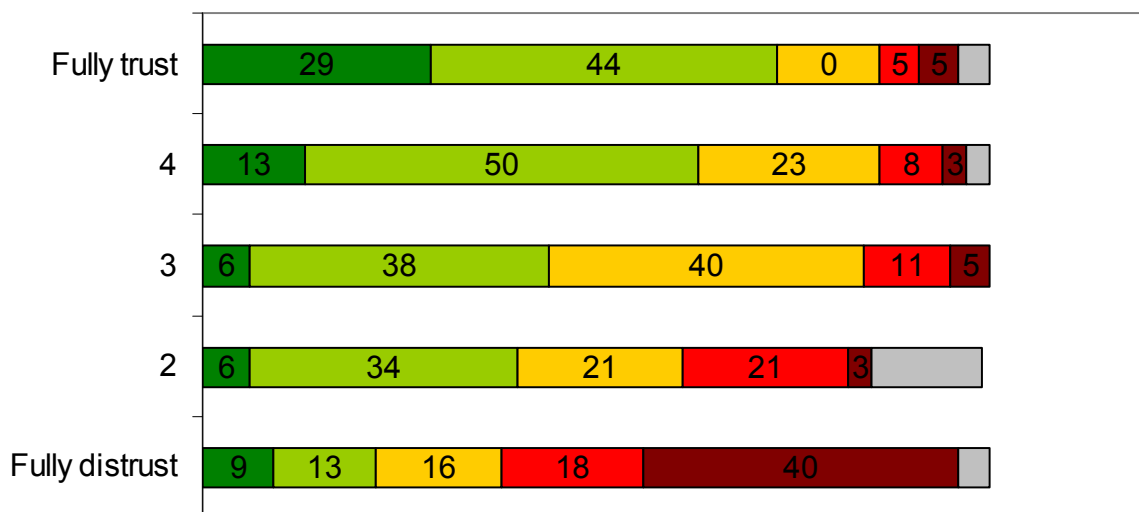
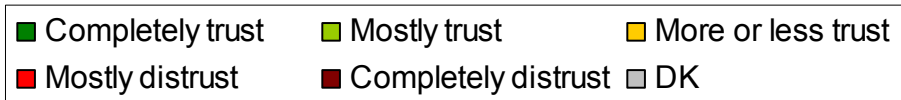
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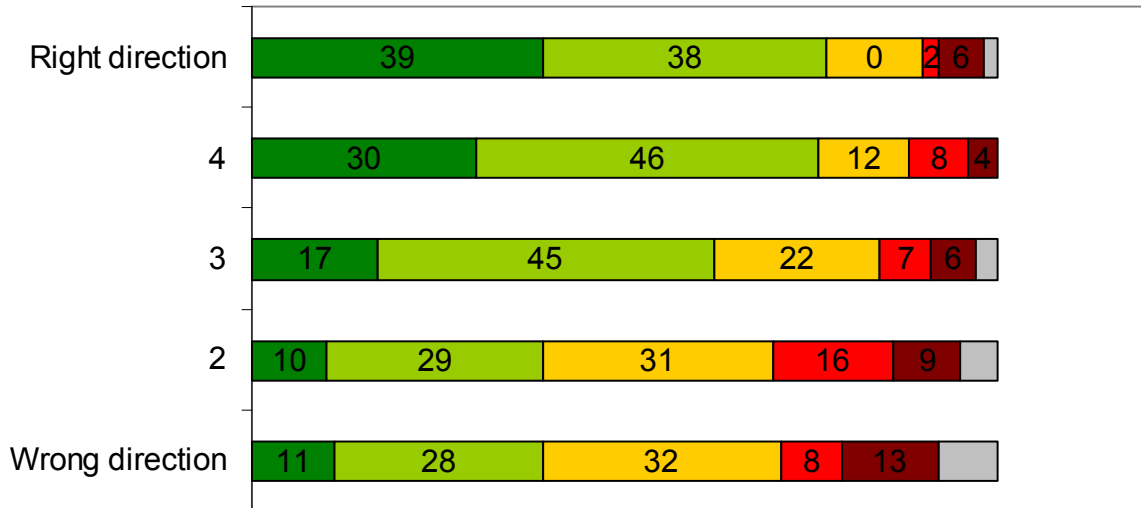
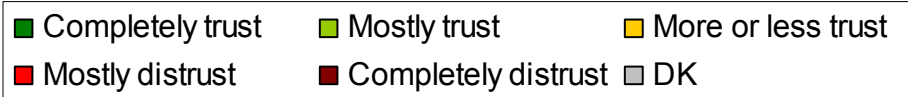
### Trust Public School Teachers by Current Perceived Economic Rung (Caucasus Barometer 2010)(%)



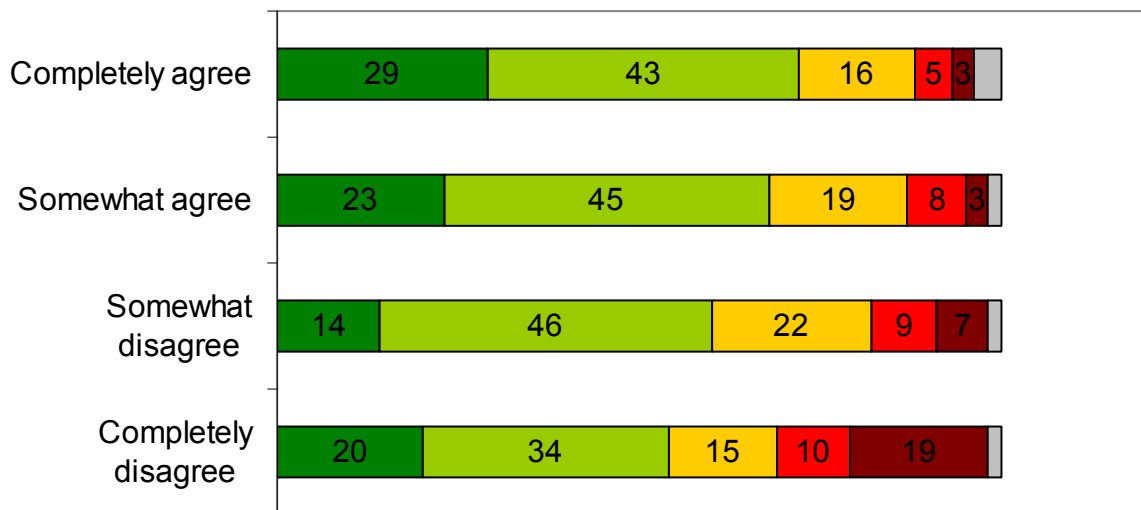
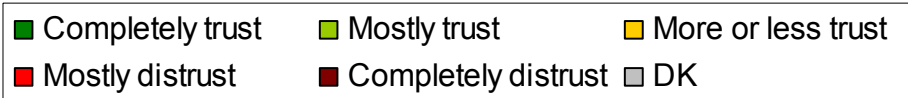
### Trust Public School Teachers by Trust towards President (Caucasus Barometer 2010)(%)



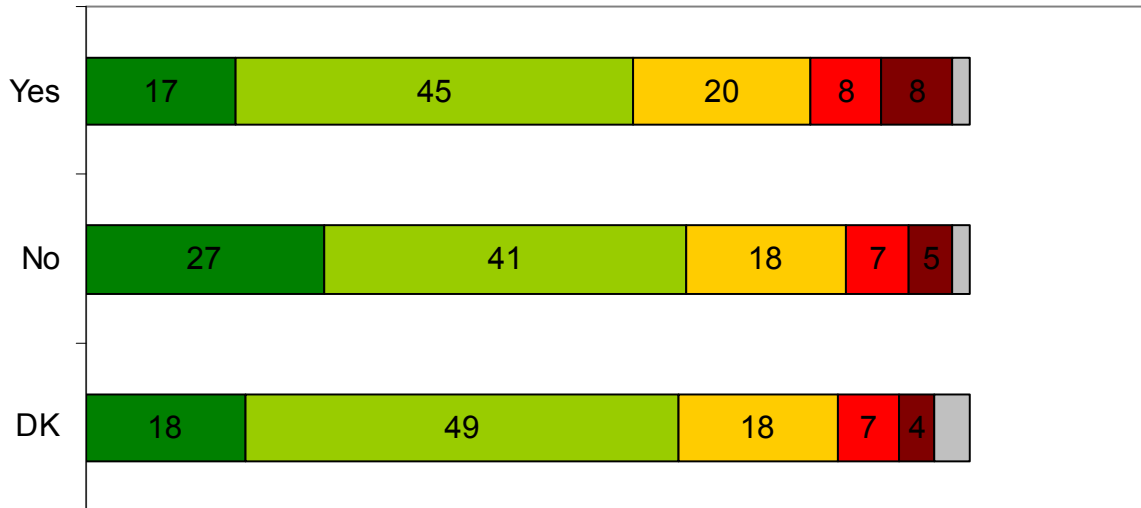
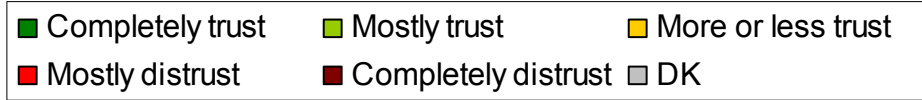
### Trust Public School Teachers by Direction of National Politics in Azerbaijan (Caucasus Barometer 2010)(%)



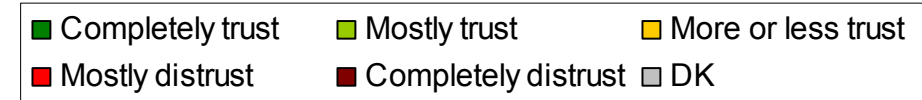
### Trust Public School Teachers by Voters Are Free from Pressure (Caucasus Barometer 2010)(%)

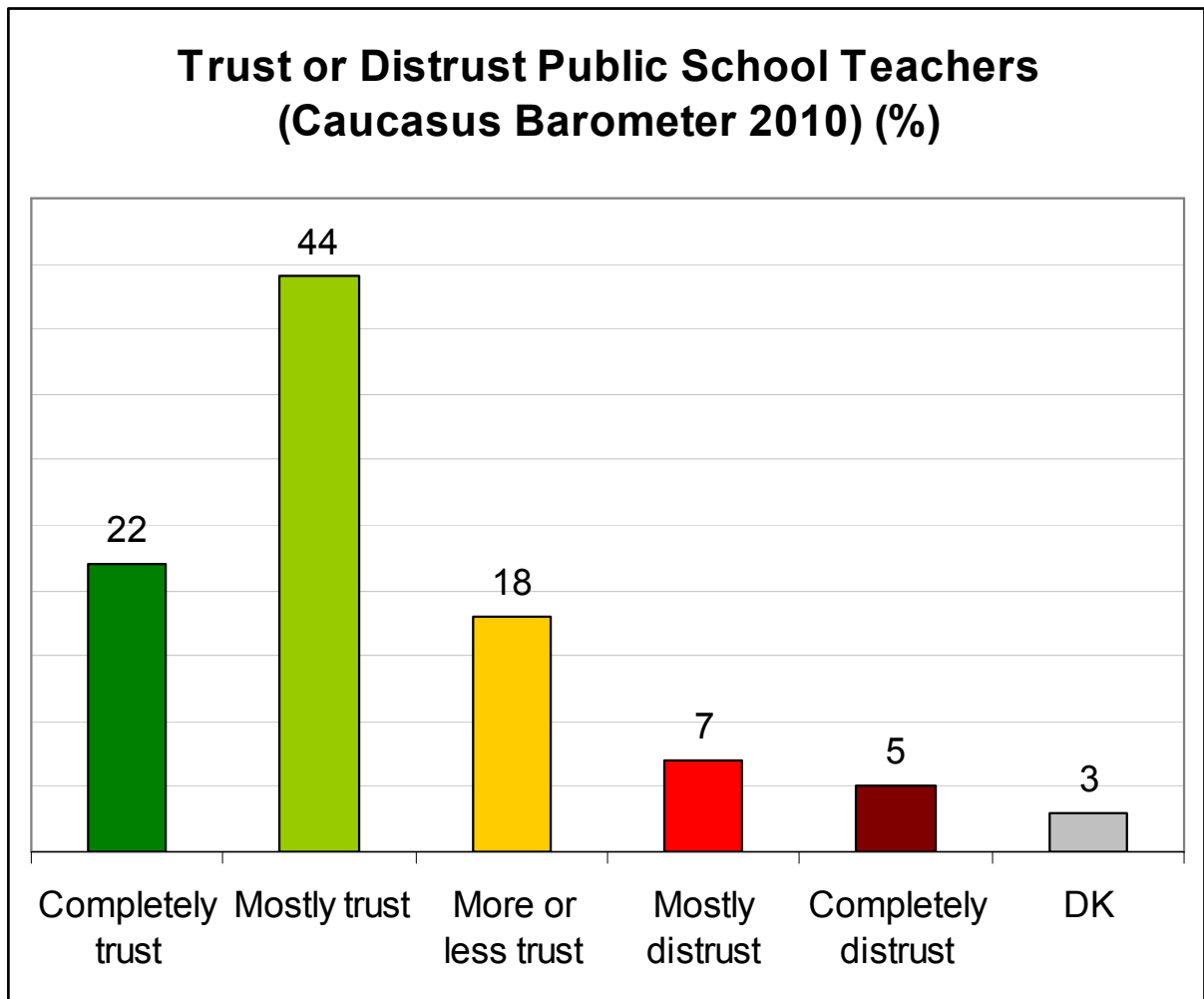


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