

Universities of Kyrgyzstan are Poor Copy of Humboldt's Model

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Thesis submitted to the department of International and Comparative Politics
of the American University of Central Asia in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

Abstract

Bishkek 2015

After seeing the changes that were made in the early years of Kyrgyzstan's independence, starting from the constitution changes and ending with policy changes in education there is enough evidence that shows this shift from the higher education being completely dependent from the government and becoming more dependent on tuition fees and enjoying some form of academic freedom. Logically it might seem normal for the universities to become completely private and not depend at all from the government. However, it has not been the case within twenty five years of independence. Rather, the government maintained some form of patronage over the state run universities, and some were renamed under a title "presidential" or "national", indicating their value for the government. Moreover, the state enjoys the right to obligate private universities or co-owned universities like the Kyrgyz-Slavic one to teach such subjects: Kyrgyz language, Kyrgyz History, Manas Studies and in addition to that it requires the students pass the state exam on history of Kyrgyzstan. There might be many ways to explain the reason why we have such situation, such as control over the universities means security for the government, the university administrations trying to hold on their status quo, impact of the west and developed countries were not effective enough to cover the university sphere, and influence of international organizations to promote free education idea and keep developing states responsible for providing it in all levels, at least the primary ones. All of these reasons can have its own role, however the recent work of Bill Readings, an Associate Professor in Comparative Literature at the Universite de Montreal explains clearly the situation of universities around the world in his book called "The University in Ruins" and it will be argued that his work can be also applied into the context of both independent and soviet Kyrgyzstan with consideration of different actors trying to pursue their interests .

Introduction

The early years of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan was famous for rapid transition of the socialist economy towards market oriented - capitalism. Massive privatization, liberalization of institutions, introduction of the national currency, and land distribution. Such quick changes towards capitalism were also called “shock therapy”, which led into financial cuts in health care and pensions. Interestingly enough, in the education sector the new course of reforms did not bring substantial changes. Specifically, the state run universities were not privatized, rather new universities, co-owned between Kyrgyzstan and other friendly countries, were opened. More to that, many institutes were restructured and turned into universities. Only a few private universities were opened and the state dominated the sphere anyway. Why the logic of market, turning the state universities into private ones, did not work in this case as it should supposedly work in developing countries who have implemented the same course of reforms?

1. Research Question

For the purpose of the thesis work the above mentioned question can be paraphrased in a different way: *Despite massive neoliberal reforms why the higher education sector in Kyrgyzstan remains largely under the state control?* In Kyrgyzstan, according to the research finding the contract between the state and the higher education institutions, primarily universities, is still more or less active. The state finds important to keep promoting the higher education in order to sustain research in cultural development, the main objects of which are “Manas” epic and in a lesser degree works of Chyngyz Aitmatov. The state have hopes that through such university research activities the nation building process will keep growing. At the same time, there is a conflicting dimension to it or an obstacle, which is the fruits of the liberal reforms done by Akaev’s government. On the one hand, it wants to

sustain ties with the universities in order to keep raising national culture, and as a result become a strong nation state. On the other hand, due to lack of financial backing and the market oriented decisions, the state finds itself trapped by that and it cannot obligate the universities work for itself as it might want to. Whereas the university administrations have learned to manipulate around and gain advantage from both sides. First, from liberalization, they have been able to achieve substantial autonomy from the government and the ministry of education in terms of being able to define its internal structure, goals and budget expenditures. Second, the state demands such as to research epic “Manas” and works of Chyngyz Aitmatov, and produce governmental workers have secured position of the universities for stable financial supply from it. More to that such requests, allows them to open new departments and research works, which mean more students who can be admitted, as a result there is an additional input into their budget.

1.1 Hypothesis

As it was pointed out above, the market logic should have brought greater privatization of the state owned the higher education institutions (the HEI). The assumption is based on the fact that the very nature of neoliberal reforms turns education into business. If this is true then all universities in Kyrgyzstan should have become business corporations. At least majority of universities should have become private universities. If this was fully realized those private universities would have pursued “selling” the high education. Thus, they would have been more interested in promoting their university image and in staying competitive with other universities of Kyrgyzstan and even Central Asia. Consequently, as any normal business corporation they would have been less interested in providing free higher education. Therefore, making the HEI expensive to get into and elitist as a result. However and fortunately, “full privatization of universities” scenario have not turned into the reality. Only

a few universities were established as private ones and even there the government was able to preserve some of its cultural aspects.

2. Limitations

Before formulating final research question and hypothesis there were various attempts to ask research questions with differing focus. Due to the advice of my supervisor Medet Tiulegenov, I realized that those questions were leaning into presumed research questions, less objective, such as 1) *why the neoliberal idea of decentralization of education system didn't bring positive impact on quality of higher education in Bishkek?* In the beginning, in pursuit to answer to the initial question, obviously, clarifying the main terms were important. The literature available helped to understand the most confusing terms - 1) “neoliberalism” and how neoliberalism can be understood in education and 2) “quality education” or ideology of “excellence” in education. Given the fact that no similar research with the specific question has been done this work will have a descriptive approach with mixed-method analysis that combines some qualitative with some quantitative data. In the research both primary and secondary data was applied. Primary data consists of mainly the constitutions of Soviet and independent Kyrgyzstan, the Law on Education in 2003 which regulates current educational activities in the country, direct data from the National Statistical Committee and external organizations and institutions, and last, direct data from AUCA's, the Kyrgyz National University's, the Arbaev University's websites, which is related to its history, academic courses and the mission. Secondary data are built primarily on the book of Bill Readings “The University in Ruins”, the book of Askar Akaev “Memorable Ten Years”, reports that include statistical data on the higher education of Kyrgyzstan collected by

Gulnara Chokusheva,¹² then on articles about impact of neoliberalism in education and the experience of Latin American countries, and on literature that defines neoliberalism.

Secondary data will contribute toward the formation of background information, needed by both the researcher in order to build constructively the project and the reader to perceive more thoroughly the outcomes of the research paper.

Initially, it was planned to conduct a questionnaire and in depth interviews with professors, relevant ministers, selected students of Bishkek universities, grouped according to a private owned and state owned criteria, and a random sample. Specifically, these universities were planned to be the primary focus starting from the American University, the Slavic University, the Kyrgyz State National University and the Manas University, and then analyze that entire data. Sampling design for the student interview will be in a form of random probability sampling. This sample means that each student of Bishkek will have more or less equal opportunity to be chosen. The research's sample size was aimed at 100 students. However due to mismanagement of priorities, and thus allocation of time, I decided to rely on the above mentioned primary and secondary data.

2.0 Neoliberalism

As a general term, neoliberalism is related to a series of measures towards opening and deregulating the economy, deregulating the labor market, restricting union activities, and allowing a more inflexible use of the labor force; within a competitive arena. Such a term has been widely and generally applied when describing the last two decades of education reforms in Latin America. In the education arena, most reforms in Latin America have tended towards

¹ Gulnara Chokusheva. *Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan*. The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Tempus Office and the Authorities of the Country Concerned. July 2012.

² *Ibids* 19. October 2010.

decentralization of education, because it became a normal and accepted concept of an international trend.³

Political scholars such as Welsh & McGinn define decentralization in education as giving authority and responsibility over education sphere to private owners and university administration to define financial supply, university organization, hiring personnel, curriculum and instruction, monitoring and evaluation, and student admission on their own.⁴

Additionally, the authors pointed out three major positions in the conflict about who should govern education: political legitimacy, professional expertise and market efficiency.

According to Welsh & McGinn the fundamental difference between these three is in terms of the justification for holding authority. Political legitimacy is about governance of education being legitimated by individuals who have been selected through a political process; professional expertise in governance refers to authority being assigned primarily to those with technical expertise; and the market efficiency position recognizes the market as the best allocation mechanism.⁵ The fact of recognizing the market as the best allocation mechanism can clearly show this shift towards neoliberalism in education.

2.1 Neoliberalism in Latin America, the US and the Developing World

Following neoliberal ideas might seem normal, given the fact that it became widely known and acceptable around the world, however in such developing countries like Argentina and Chile implementation of neoliberal principles in higher education sphere did not bring fruitful

³ Mariano Narodowski and Milagros Nores. *Searching for "neoliberal" Education Policies. A Comparative Analysis of Argentina and Chile*. June 2002.

⁴ Welsh T. and McGinn N.F. *Decentralization of education: what and how*. Draft. Cambridge, Harvard University, 1998.

⁵ Mariano Narodowski and Milagros Nores. *Searching for "neoliberal" Education Policies. A Comparative Analysis of Argentina and Chile*. June 2002.

results. The existing literature on the impact of neoliberalism to higher education in Latin America can be mainly divided into three points of views. The first are those who portray this impact as negative and who see higher education as a public good rather than a private property. The second, those who portray this impact as positive, because neoliberalist principles applied in higher education lead to efficiency, independence and for staying competitive in the global market. The third are those who are neutral. The third group tries to show both good and bad sides of the impact, not taking any position. Robertson Susan in his article “Remaking the World: Neo-liberalism and the Transformation of Education and Teachers’ Labour” emphasizes that that the years 1978-80 were a revolutionary turning point in the world’s social and economic history. During those years four significant events acted like epicenters of the transformation of the post war order. 1) In 1978, Deng Xiaoping took the first steps toward liberalising the Chinese economy; 2) in 1979, Paul Volcker took command of the US Federal Reserve and changed monetary policy. 3) In that same year Margaret Thatcher took on the power of the unions and have taken neoliberal measures to end inflationary stagnation. 4) In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected President of the USA, and armed with Volcker’s policies, set about implementing a set of reforms that were aimed at deregulating industry, and creating more liberal conditions for finance to operate on the national and the global stage. The author continues claiming that neoliberal promoters have remade the world, including the world of education. They have taken out such things as the collective and welfare, and they emphasized the individual and freedom. The author thinks that this tectonic shift has transformed how we talk about education, teachers and learners, unions, parents’ groups and professional associations. In her opinion even conditions for knowledge production, along with the spaces and sites for claims-making around education have changed. The author supposes that due to those changes universities around the world are mandated to create the new types of entrepreneurs and innovators; the value-driven minds

who will stay competitive in the battle for global markets and consumers. The last, the author explains that the mobilisation of neoliberal ideas for reorganising societies and social relations, including the key institutions involved in social reproduction, is a class project with three key aims: the (i) redistribution of wealth upward to the ruling elites through new structures of governance; (ii) transformation of education systems so that the production of workers for the economy is the primary mandate; and (iii) breaking down of education as a public sector monopoly, opening it up to strategic investment for profit firms.

The second author, Dave Hill, in his collective book “Routledge Studies in Education and Neoliberalism” presuppose that the collapse of neoliberal financial systems globally and in most countries has happened already. This book critically examines neoliberal policy impacts on schooling/education in the developing world—and promotes resistance against neoliberal expansion. The contributing authors from left and progressive academics and labor organization/social movements analyze developments in Latin America, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Pakistan, India, Burkina Faso, South Africa, Mozambique, Turkey and China. Chapters in this volume critically examine neoliberal impacts on equality, equal opportunities and access to schooling and education experienced by groups differentiated by social class, race/ethnicity/language, gender, rural/urban differentiation; impacts on democracy/democratic control of schools and education; impacts on critical thinking, and analytical skills among students; and impacts on the rights/pay and condition of education workers. The same position is taken by Armando Alcántara, Silvia Llomovatte & José Eustaquio Romão in their writing, “Resisting neoliberal common sense in higher education: experiences from Latin America”. This article illustrates the way in which neoliberalism and the creation of a common sense are associated. They present in this study a number of institutional and social experiences that have occurred in Latin America during the last 30

years. First, they explore the situation in Argentina, where the relationship between the university and society is being redefined. A new form of knowledge transfer to society, focused especially on social movements, is currently being carried out by different programmes at public universities. Second, they present Brazilian experience, which is characterised by the creation of a number of new universities that are attempting to transform the social role of the traditional model of extension programmes to serve local, regional and international development. Moreover, since traditional university approaches to its 1000th anniversary they think that it urgently requires a radical transformation. The origins and expansion of neoliberal policies of higher education in Mexico constitute the third case. There they argue that the role of international agencies is a key element in the creation and consolidation of the common sense associated with neoliberalism in higher education policies. The experiences and processes discussed in this article constitute important aspects that show the way in which universities and various actors within them can take part in the struggle to resist the consolidation of neoliberal policies in Latin American higher education. Susan L. Groenke and J. Amos Hatch Editors in their book “Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education in the Neoliberal Era. Small Openings” tend to cover more pedagogical impact of the ideology of excellence. This book shows that there are lots of reasons to “bother” with critical pedagogy in teacher education, because current neoliberal educational policies in the US increasingly do not have education for the public good in mind. This book encourages teacher educators taking risks and seeking out what political theorist James Scott has called the “small openings” for resistance in the contexts that mark teacher education in the early twenty-first century. The book is divided into two parts. Part I, “Contexts for Critical Pedagogies in Teacher Education,” describes and critiques the neoliberal and neoconservative forces that impact higher education and aim to commodify teacher education and standardize the experiences of teacher educators and the beginning teachers they prepare. Part II,

“Enacting Critical Pedagogies in Teacher Education,” shares hopeful accounts of the “small openings” critical pedagogues working in teacher education programs in places as diverse as Kentucky, Oregon, and Wyoming find to resist and counter the discourses about neoliberal policies in education.

2.2 Quality Education or Ideology of “Excellence”

The implementation of neoliberalism in education have brought the major changes. 1) Bringing an ideology of “excellence” as a substitute to universities who have lost their historical mission. 2) The central figure of the contemporary university education is not professor anymore, rather administrator. Bill Readings in his grand book “the University in Ruins” brings a quote that describes well the current situation “the adventure of a liberal education has no longer a hero neither professor nor student”. 3) Such administrator’s purpose is “excellence” in education and profit-making. Bill Readings argues that the term "excellence" as a qualifier for administrative decision-making has no specific meaning. An example would be a university which declares that their parking space was increased hence more students can park their car safely. This change is an indicator of excellence. Or the university says the opposite that their parking space was decreased hence their university is environmentally sustainable and they encourage greater usage of bikes. This is also can be considered as an indicator of excellence. In both ways, they justify through the logic of excellence. The term is not a criterion for judgment, but an empty qualifier. It can be used rhetorically in any situation to provide justification for any decision. Since universities have no purpose, every managerial decision is an arbitrary exercise of power – the power of the administrator or of market capitalism. Such administrators obligate both students and professors to pursue academic success or "excellence". Job advertisements in universities of the United Kingdom can be considered as a sign of pursuit for “excellence”. Statistics that

Readings have found show that alumni donations are decreasing, which show that students are thinking about themselves as consumers rather than part of a community. Readings comes to the point where he boldly states about the western and American university education, “Students in the University of Excellence are not *like* customers, they *are* customers. The University isn’t *like* a corporation, it *is* a corporation”. What gets taught is getting less and less important, rather how excellently it is taught is becoming the focus. The general university “excellence” rating criterias in the United States can be more or less applied to any university in the world. 1) High incoming grades of students, 2) the high level of GPA, 3) the number of “out of province” students, 4) and graduation rates within standard time limits. 5) High amount of PhD professors and their ability to obtain grants from the state and other external donors. 6) A good condition of the budget for its current expenses, student services and scholarships. 7) And last, the number of library holdings and budget dedicated for it. This is an approximate ratio for each indicator: 20% for students, 18 % for class size, 20% for faculty, 10% for finances, 12% for libraries, and 20% for “reputation”.

2.3 Alternative Answers to the Research Question

After making these most confusing terms clear it will be important to elaborate other alternative answers to the research question first. Again, why would the logic of market fail to work in terms of dominating the higher education sector? First option is the strong rectors or administrators of universities in terms of the power holding, not giving up their position. It is evident that they were able to maneuver around the state decision to privatize and promote cultural development. They were able to acquire the beneficial sides of neoliberalism, in terms of getting greater freedom from the government and having more direct control as administrators. However, this possible answer fits very well in a bigger theoretical perspective built up by Bill Readings, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, to the fact that the state

wants the universities to promote the culture and bring up faithful citizens who would continue strengthening nation-state. It is rather beneficial for the government to have the stronger state universities, though less loyal, as long as it does what the state wants.

Another possible explanation is that the state wants to preserve its power and security through having the strong universities who would not allow deviating, radical islamic and anarchist ideologies to flourish. If such ideologies would capture minds of the youth then it is certainly undermines the very existence of the state. What are the possible ways to make sure that such ideologies will not spring out? It seems more effective and beneficial to have some form of the state ideology, which is trilogy of “Manas”, “Seitek”, and “Semetei” epics. In that case the state is able to hit two goals at the same time: preserving security and power, and promoting the national culture.

Third alternative is that the western countries mainly European and the US, the international financial institutions (the IFIs), the international non-governmental and governmental organizations (the INGOs and the IGOs) were not effective enough to make sure that neoliberal ideology of “excellence” will turn the universities into corporations. Mark Olssen and Michael A. Peters in their article “Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism” point out that actually with rise of importance of knowledge in economy the states around the world are more interested in promoting university education. They argue that the international institutions and organizations were greatly influential in promoting “knowledge economy”. Their work traces the links between neoliberalism and globalization on the one hand, and neoliberalism and the knowledge economy on the other. It maintains that in a global neoliberal environment, the role of higher education for the economy is seen by governments as having greater importance to the extent that higher education has become the new star ship in the policy fleet

for governments around the world. Universities are seen as a key driver in the knowledge economy and as a consequence higher education institutions have been encouraged to develop links with industry and business in a series of new venture partnerships. The recognition of economic importance of higher education and the necessity for economic viability has seen initiatives to promote greater entrepreneurial skills as well as the development of new performative measures to enhance output and to establish and achieve targets. This paper attempts to document these trends at the level of both political philosophy and economic theory.

More to that these authors Minzee Kim and Elizabeth Heger Boyle in their work, “Neoliberalism, Transnational Education Norms, and Education Spending in the Developing World” show that the INGOs and IGOs actually took the key role to encourage the greater involvement of the state in education sphere. The authors point out on how global cultural and economic forces affect national education spending policies. Their analysis include both an historical analysis of the construction and transformation of ideas about education at the global level and a statistical assessment of the implementation of conflicting approaches to state education funding within countries. In the historical analysis, they show how the idea of free education, although institutionalized in international law, was subject to powerful challenges from international financial institutions, which advocated user fees for public services, including education. Ultimately, neoliberal attempts of international financial institutions to stop the principle of free education failed and so the principle got internationally accepted. Using data from poor- and middle-income countries from 1983 to 2004, they also show that the presence of the INGOs advocating child rights was linked to an increase in the levels of state funding for education. This suggests that cooperation between INGOs and the states help making government accountable for supporting ideas where

governmental institutions take governing responsibility in education sphere. Even Askar Akaev clearly states in his book “Memorable Ten Years” that his decisions during the early reforms were all followed by works of Y. Schumpeter, F. Hayek, J. Keynes, L. Erhard, and M. Fridman. Those are the people who actually founded neoliberal ideas. Akaev often refers to the International Monetary Fund for its contribution in implementing neoliberal programs, one of most notable ones is the macroeconomic program for stabilization implemented in May 1993. From these two works it is evident that the international institutions and the organizations were heavily impactful in encouraging the developing countries, including Kyrgyzstan’s president Askar Akaev, to bring into force neoliberal policies into full realization.

Still there is another point of view to the research question, which is more profound one and which includes into their system all three above mentioned alternatives. This view is struggle between the state, the university and the external actors. Mariano Narodowski and Milagros Nores in their research paper, “Searching for “Neoliberal” Education Policies. A Comparative Analysis of Argentina and Chile” claim that two fundamental issues must be taken into account when thinking and analyzing education policies in Argentina and Chile. First of all, what is the definition of a “neoliberal” education policy, and secondly, that such definition needs to be different from what is known as “neoliberal” economic reforms. The authors found fundamental to recognize that the introduction of neoliberal economic policies does not necessarily bring about neoliberal education policies. This recognition means that the state and other actors still has a big role to play in terms of choosing which points of neoliberal policies to abandon and which ones to accept. Christopher Colclough in his article, “Education and the Market: Which Parts of the Neoliberal Solution are Correct?” stresses *two conflicting* points, the first that the state should take the major responsibility for both

financing and supplying of educational services and the second, the state decentralizing its responsibilities. It is trapped in terms of having to decide which way to choose. If choosing solely market strategy, they have to gradually abandon education sphere to private hands and universities, but this would undermine the state's security. Although for economically poor countries education system being financed more directly by private households, lifts the burden, but only under specific context. If following government domination strategy in the sector then it is a big economic burden. According to the author, usually the developing states choose an equilibrium, having two maneuver around different actors and political stakeholders.

2.4 Theoretical and Historical Framework

The “struggle” structure can be better understood under a theoretical and historical framework built by just an Associate Professor in Comparative Literature at the Universite de Montreal Bill Readings, who explains really well why universities in European countries, Canada and the USA were turned into business corporations. He calls the contemporary University as “post historical” rather than “postmodern”. By “post historical”, he means that the university is still build primary on the historical structure, though they are no longer pursuing the old mission. Readings starts the explanation by going two hundreds years back to Prussia (modern Germany), where the roots of nowadays university foundation were laid down. The modern University has had three ideas: the Kantian concept of reason, the Humboldtian idea of culture, and now techno-bureaucratic notion of excellence. Philosophical foundation of the current western university education is “reason” based thinking which Immanuel Kant have initiated. These were the core principles of learning. A) Teaching people to search for knowledge, where learners are not going to become servants, but rather independent subjects. B) Professor doesn't give knowledge, for that purpose there are books available. Through

books you can learn better. Professor's function is to share: 1) about searching knowledge, specifically explains how this kind of knowledge came to existence. 2) Then professor shows how this kind of knowledge can be applied in practice. Overall, the university was functioning just for the sake of reasoning and knowledge, which would enlighten people. There was no clear subject, whom they would serve.

Later on Wilhelm von Humboldt in 19th century have developed even further those above mention university principles and then developed a new concept of university, which turned the Prussian university into an institution that would strengthen national culture. In his idea the University was a glue for national integration. This means that learning through research and organization of common laboratory (professors and students), where they produce new knowledge has higher purpose - serving the state and strengthening national culture.

Consequently in the process of research students get "culture" focused knowledge. Bill Readings summarized Humboldt's work in pointing out the mission of the University: 1) identity building and development of culture, thus unifying the country, and 2) raising the prestige of the country. Identity building starts through research, where people get to know their culture and they start making it important for their society. Development of culture comes through sharing of experience. When teachers pass their experience to next generation, thus we have development of society. Readings compares the University with a national air company. Almost in each country, there is an air company which is mainly government sponsored. These companies do not pursue financial gains. Such air companies have two functions. 2) Internal function: a national air company allows access to different places of the state. Thus, connecting different parts of the state preserving the wholeness and unity. 2) External function: to demonstrate to other countries that their country is developed. It raises prestige of the country. If market economy will be fully applied to such national air

companies, they will simply collapse. If these two functions will be no longer important then it will be no longer beneficial to do that kind of activity or they will become just an ordinary business air company with no higher purpose.

Through the example of a national air company the University functions can be similarly understood in Europe and America starting from 18th up to the middle of 20th century. In those years Prussia, France, the United Kingdom, all were pursuing to build a unified country with the same identity and values through having the same culture. In Prussia, they used works of Gete, and in the UK writings of Shakespeare was the cornerstone. The external function of European universities in those times was to show to neighboring states and international community that their country is developed and progressive. Countries in those years used to compete with each other on who had the biggest university, progressive, industrious and the most prestigious.

It can be clearly seen that the University is a unique German project, where education (development of culture) and research (identity building) are coming together. The University functions are clearly different from high school, academy or any other educational institutions. There is a contract between government and the University. They have one mission - development of their society through development of culture and identity building.

The third stage of the university, where ideology of “excellence” dominates is highly vibrant these days according to Readings and other scholars mention earlier. Due to this tectonic change the production of knowledge in universities is uncertain and no longer mission oriented. The university is no longer participating in the historical project of culture. Another philosopher and academician that Readings follows is Bloom Allan, who in his work “Closing of the the American Mind” claims that the autonomy of knowledge is threatened, because there is no longer subject (like culture), so many things that are going on in the

University are irrelevant and unintelligible. Despite some thoughts that the nation-state is expanding, in the reality it is declining based on Readings' findings. The primary evidence is 1) the "Americanization" of universities around the world as a sign of the end of nation culture, 2) the end of the cold war, 3) the student revolts in France in 1968 and 4) the very analysis of Canadian and the US universities current academic activities. Nowadays, "reason" concept is preserved only under the faculty of humanities, it has no effect on the university mission and system overall. Decrease of the American Studies class in the US universities point out that the culture is no longer the key role. Thus, the author concludes that, "The University is a ruined institution, one that has lost its *historical raison d'être*".

This theoretical and historical framework was applied in this thesis work in terms of viewing the relationship of Kyrgyzstan's government and the universities. Viewing the constitutional and political developments in Soviet and post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan through the paradigm of Bill Readings helps to understand why the Kyrgyz government was able to preserve education sector, including universities, under its control. Having said that, it can be concluded that this research's methodology is an attempt to apply above mentioned both theoretical and historical framework.

3. Why the Universities Have Not Become Private?



Source: File:SovietCentralAsia1922.svg

This contract between the state and the University is not a new phenomenon for independent Kyrgyzstan. While looking at the history of higher educational institutions it is possible to see the correlation between raise of national identity building process and raise of higher educational institutions. When there was no higher educational institutions, the current territory of Kyrgyzstan was part of Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Turkistan ASSR). The starting point for formation of Kyrgyz people as one state comes with initiative of an educated man in history of Kyrgyz people Zhusup Abdrahmanov and with assistance of Abdykerim Sydykov and Ishenaly Arabaev. In 1920s, they took an active part in division process of the Turkistan ASSR into smaller autonomous regions for about four years. Particularly, they proposed creating the Kara-Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast (Kara-Kirghiz AO) and it was officially created in 14th of October 1924. Later in 30th of March 1925 high officials of the Kara-Kirghiz AO organized a congress where they discussed opening the first higher education institute in its territory. As a result of the congress in October the same year

the institute was founded under the title the Kyrgyz Institute of Enlightenment. The reasoning behind was to enlighten the general population with the communist ideals and strengthen formation of the autonomous republic. Then Zhusup Abdrahmanov's team was able to push further turning the status of the country from autonomous *oblast* to autonomous *republic*. So he served as a chairman of a new republic called the Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic from 1927 till 1933. Under his chairmanship in 1932 the Kyrgyz Institute of Enlightenment received a title, the Kyrgyz State Pedagogical Institute, which had only 4 faculties, 2 of them were focused on literature, language and history studies and at the same they were raising potential teachers who would research history of Kyrgyz people and pass on the formed ideology and findings about the people. In 1933 Zhusup Abdrahmanov was accused for "nationalism", meaning that he was trying to build Kyrgyz state ideology, which is different from the Soviet ideals of communism, and ultimately in 1938 was sentenced with death penalty. Despite being killed, Zhusup Abdrahmanov was able to leave a certain tie between the government of autonomous republic and the higher institution. These are the achievements: 1) in December 5th 1936 the government of the Kirghiz ASSR received a higher status equal to all other republics of the Soviet Union called the Kirghiz SSR. 2) Second achievement is that the first Kyrgyz institute produced its first famous graduates and professors from the department of literature and language who contributed in the early enlightenment process of the Kyrgyz state formation. These names are Kasym Tynystanov, Tokchoro Zholdoshev, Satybaldy Naamatov, Bazarkul Daniarov and E.D. Polivanov who translated epic "Manas" into Russian language.

Later on the government of Kyrgyz Soviet Republic sent a request to the Soviet Ministries of the USSR to transform the institute into university. The request was approved in 24th of May 1951 and symbolically the first university in Kyrgyzstan's history was officially opened in 31

of August. It was named the Kyrgyz State University. This university considers this event as a crucial event and as a sign of development in cultural life of Kyrgyzstan. Further it mentions that “university” title gives them an opportunity to prepare more qualified workers for the society, but most importantly it mentions that it prepares for the governmental bodies. As an evidence to its main mission, the university provides a big list of famous names of the state leaders, socio-political actors, people of science and culture who worked in the university or graduated from it. Here are the names of the most well known ones: one of the first high officials of the KSSR and presidents/prime-ministers Kyrgyzstan - T.U. Usubaliev, K.N. Kulmatov, K. Otorbaev, and R.I. Otunbaeva, one of the active deputies and ministers - K.M. Moldobaev, T.A. Sariev, A. Salyanova, T. Bakir uulu, R. Zhenbekov, A. Kalmatov, O. Ch. Tekebaev, and many well known academicians and scientists - K. Karasaev, B. Unusaliev, and M. Imanaliev. Above mentioned names are just the most well known ones, and there are many more who took part in the state bodies. Here is a direct quote on how the university describes its achievements, “Most importantly the university was able to fulfill the expectations given to it, specifically it had a tremendous impact into development of intellectual potential, socio-economic and *cultural development* of the country, and spread of science and knowledge within the population”. When Kyrgyzstan was in the Soviet Union higher education was completely free. The evidence for that can be clearly seen in the 1978 constitution of the Kyrgyz Socialist Soviet Republic, specifically in chapter 6 article 43. It states that the citizens of the KSSR enjoy the right for education and this right is provided through having free education in all levels. Starting from mandatory primary and secondary education, and increasing chances of access to higher education. In addition, it also states that the state will make sure to create good conditions for personal development of the citizens. This action of making the university education completely free in all sectors, allowed the state to promote its national interest, making sure that the Kyrgyz culture is developing. In

order to bring that into the reality the big educational commitment the KSSR heavily relied on the Moscow administration, which financed all major expenditures in that sphere. This meant that, still the KSSR was not fully free to do promote solely nationalist policies, they were required to promote communist teaching in the universities. By the time when the KSSR achieved its independence with a new name the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, the Kyrgyz State University has already produces lots of governmental workers for it and it was in full range ready to continue serving it. Obviously, when the KSSR declared its independence, it lost its major donor. The dissolution of the Soviet Union had a big economic impact on newly emerged Kyrgyzstan, leaving it completely desparate. Sudden cut of financial supply meant for the president of the new country Askar Akaev searching for new donors, who could help to rehabilitate its dying economy and help the country keep its social expenditures on a normal pace, including education.

3.1 Independent Kyrgyzstan with Akaev

Akaev found a good solution for the problem, which is turning for help, 1) first of all to the western and developed countries, 2) then, to the international financial institutions (IFIs), 3) third, to international governmental organizations (IGOs) and to 4) the international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). At a first glance it seems everything is smooth: money is available, now it is possible to supply the government's social expenditures. Things turned out to be more complicated. It was no longer possible to promote national identity building solely relying on the country's small budget, and he had to go for compromise within different actors. The western and developed countries such as Switzerland, the USA, the European Union demanded in exchange for financial assistance democratization of the country. By democratization, they meant a) increasing transparency of electoral system in order to increase political representation of the citizens, b) strengthening civil society

organizations and c) privatization of the state owned industries, institutions and land. The last demand on privatization meant fewer involvement of the state into social and economic affairs of its citizens. In our case it includes the government allowing its citizens to obtain all levels of education on a commercial bases as well. As for the IFIs, they demanded implementation of principles of the Washington Consensus, in education sphere, it meant decentralization of education. In other words, a) the government will be no longer fully responsible in providing in all levels free education, which means partial privatization of education sphere and b) educational institutions will enjoy academic freedom. As for INGOs and IGOs, they wanted Kyrgyzstan to improve its position on human rights related spheres. In education sphere, they wanted Kyrgyzstan to stay accountable in providing at least free primary and secondary education. The above mentioned four actors constitute the external pressure on Akaev's government. In addition to that, there was an internal pressure, which is the legendary parliament. The parliament held strong on socialistic principles, viewing Akaev's initiative to cooperate with the western actors and international organizations as betrayal to the communist ideals. The president Akaev tried to find consensus and the constitution established in 1993 and the governmental policies reflects that consensus.

3.2 Akaev's Decision The 1993 Constitution

The main key difference in terms of education was the fact that the government took responsibility in providing free general education only and as for higher education it stays silent. In the end of the article 32 of the 1993 constitution it states that each citizen has the right to obtain both commercial and free education. It also states that the government will build up a good condition for its citizens to know the state language and two international languages. Overall, it can be clear that the government diversified the education sector, allowing to have private education institutions. Later on the constitution was changed for 7

times and in 2010 the new parliament approved the new constitution after the referendum. However those changes did not bring any substantial changes in education sphere. There were minor changes added into the 1993 constitution in education part. 1) In addition to free general and primary education, the state took the obligation for free secondary basic education. 2) The state obligated itself to create conditions in order to develop municipal, public and private educational establishments. So under the second obligation private educational establishments have a strong legal basis to develop in the country. It can be observed that the compromise meant for Akaev's government lesser control over the higher education sector. However, Akaev managed to keep the ties with universities as close as possible in order to preserve the government's impact over there. To do that in 1993 it is possible to observe a symbolic connection between the country being renamed into the Kyrgyz Republic and the Kyrgyz State University acquiring a status "national" with a special decree of the president Akaev. The decree states the reason of renaming which is to develop the current education system and to raise it to the level of world standard. In the web site of the KNU it explains the reason why it received such an honorary title. First, one of the most progressive universities in times of crisis during the early independence time and second, it finds itself playing "the worthy role in socio-political life of the country".

3.3 Impact of the IFIs

The struggle did not stop there for the government, just in allowing the higher education sector to become student tuition financed. Interestingly enough, under the impact of the World Bank and the IMF further changes continued. In detail, a new concept of neoliberalism called "decentralization of education" has been implemented in Kyrgyzstan, where the key

guiding lines of the reforms were quality, efficiency, and accessibility.⁶ In order to achieve efficiency in education, the government made universities in many sense autonomous and at the same time highly dependent on student fees. Largely up to 80% of high education institutions (HEI) sustain their living through payments of their students.⁷ According to the OECD [Education at a Glance 2008] and other sources, it appears that the Kyrgyz Republic has one of the largest private funding sources in higher education in the world.⁸ Still, Akaev's government did not give up the education sector, including the higher education into private hands. Although little, compare to the student tuition raised money, according to the National Statistics Committee, the dynamics of those early years and up to nowadays demonstrate that the proportion of education expenditure in the national budget is significant, accounting for 20% in average. Whereas, for the higher education sector the state has been providing from 2 to 5.9% of its budget, and this allocated money is at least enough to pay for salaries of the teachers.⁹ The influence of the IFIs' has not stopped even there, it reached its culmination after the approval of a single law, the Law on Education dated 30 April 2003, which governed the activities of higher educational institutions. According to this law, the education system pointed out five principles:

- 1) The possibility of receiving education on a commercial basis, including in state educational institutions
- 2) Academic freedom of educational organizations and academic integrity

⁶ Gulnara Chokusheva. *Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan*. The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Tempus Office and the Authorities of the Country Concerned. October 2010.

⁷ Ibid 15

⁸ Gulnara Chokusheva. *Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan*. The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Tempus Office and the Authorities of the Country Concerned. July 2012.

⁹ Ibid 4

3) Free access to elementary, secondary and higher education in public institutions within the limits set by the state educational standards

4) The humanistic character of education

5) Independence of education from political and religious institutions and the secular character of education

The two of these principles directly come from the IFIs push. These two principles clearly point out that decentralization of education has happened. Other three principles seem to be coming from the INGOs and the IGOs, who advocate human rights, secularism, and free access to education. Here the state was able to preserve some form of control in wording, “within the limits set by the state”. I have made a table, where private HEIs have a high level of autonomy and state-owned HEIs enjoy partial independence (table 1). The similarities between the two are based on defining their academic programmes (within the framework of the state educational standards), forms and methods of teaching, and for developing international collaboration. “Yes” in the table means fully independent from the government in deciding that matter and “NO” means fully dependent from the government. Similarly following the logic, “partially dependent” means being in some degree dependent from the government and ministry of education in defining that issue and “partially *independent*” is the opposite of the former.

Table 1. The Governance of Education in Kyrgyzstan by major components

Components	Private universities	State-owned universities
Governance	NO	NO

Structure	YES	NO
Ministry requirements	NO	NO
Financing	YES	partially dependent
Personnel	YES	partially dependent
Curriculum and instruction	partially dependent	partially <i>independent</i>
Monitoring and evaluation	NO	NO
Students admission	partially dependent	partially <i>independent</i>
International Cooperation	YES	partially <i>independent</i>

All of these above mentioned facts show that the government is inclined to follow and implement neoliberal ideas suggested and go for compromise with the IFIs, the INGOs and IGOs in order to meet challenges of the competitive global market. An additional evidence that shows that the state started thinking in the market logic can be the yearly announced list of most important jobs in the Kyrgyzstan's labour market and through this the state encourages the HEIs to meet that demand. Usually every year these jobs tend to be the most demanded: small business entrepreneurs, importers/exporters, managers, office managers, secretaries, farmers, hotel administrators, travel agents, the IT repair specialists, and typists with computer skills.¹⁰

3.4 Paradox of Humboldt in Kyrgyzstan

Paradox can be seen in the relationship between the University and the state according to Humboldt, the founder of the modern university model. According to Humboldt government

¹⁰ Ibid 4

should finance university, but it shouldn't get involved into internal affairs of the University. Government spends a lot of money, providing salaries of professors and building infrastructure for universities. However they have no right to define structure and activity of the University. Humboldt states that government's main function is to protect the University from external impact or threat. In the case of Kyrgyzstan the same thing is true, the state spends money from its budget to pay for salaries of professors and administration that runs different state run universities. At the same time the Law on Education allows the universities to have academic freedom to define structure and activity of their education. There is a logical question, "What is the motivation of government to finance the University?". Humboldt gives a clear answer to that, since the government of Prussia at that time was just in the process of formation, the University's mission was to help the government to be fully formed. Humboldt does not answer whether government would still need the University ones it is fully formed. It turned out to be that later the University became actually useful for further development of the nation building process. Interestingly enough Kyrgyzstan also since 1991 has been focused on nation building process and the universities mission in the country can be identical to the University that was developed by Humboldt. In the book of Askar Akaev "Memorable Ten Years", he clearly states that as president of the country he puts raising national culture practically as the key priority. He divides cultural development into two vectors. The first side is internal, bringing to life historical memories and ancient turkic culture, which is hidden in Kyrgyz genes. The second side is to be open to the East and the West, specifically to get the best out of their cultures and integrate them into Kyrgyz culture. The way cultural development can be realized is primarily as he points out can be done through education. The first vector was set to be realized through educating the people about epic "Manas" and the 1000 years anniversary celebration of it in 1995 is just a beginning of this politics. The second vector was planned to be made alive through 1) the

works of Chyngyz Aitmatov, 2) making Russian language an official language, 3) opening of co-owned universities such as these: the Kyrgyz-Slavic, the American University, the Kyrgyz-Turk, and the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and 4) sending students to study abroad. Askar Akaev clearly summarizes that the unifying part of the two vectors is giving the higher education to people and getting fruits of it in forms of having faithful governmental workers. Practically, Akaev specifies these achievements: a) within 10 years (1991 and 2001) amount of universities grew from 9 to 44, b) amount of schools grew from 1756 to 1953, c) new opened theatres, art institutions, conservatories, and d) organization of a charity fund “Meerim” which supports primarily talented youth, development of national culture and popularizing it around the world. The president admits that due to lack of financial resources development of science, national culture and art is still in need for support. In Kyrgyzstan it was also considered prestigious to show to other countries of the post-Soviet Union that their country has more and developed universities. When Kyrgyzstan achieved its sovereignty establishment of new universities on mutual ownership such as the Kyrgyz-Turk Manas University, the American University of Central Asia, and the Kyrgyz-Slavic University was viewed as a sign of development, international recognition and cooperation, and a raise of prestige for the government itself. In the same way the government raised its “bar of prestige” through renaming selected universities into “national”, “regional” or “presidential”. Such example would be the Kyrgyz National University (KNU). One more example would be the Kyrgyz Women Pedagogical Institute which was renamed in 1994 as the Kyrgyz State Pedagogical University after the name of I. Arabaev. Then on the basis of this university the Kyrgyz State University after the name of I. Arabaev was founded in spring 2005. This is an indicator of the country trying to increase amount of universities as much as possible to reinforce above mentioned two functions. As it is written in the website of the university the name Ishenaly Arabaev is connected with the Kyrgyz state formation period from 1910 till

1935. He have taken active roles in teaching and founded several schools in Ton region of Issyk-kul and fought for the right to teach in Kyrgyz language. The official website describes him as a heroic person “who went through genocide “Urkun” and ... was repressed by the Tsarist Russia”. More directly, it is stated in the mission part that the university will pursue “...to increase the worthy prestige of the KSU named after I. Arabaev as a unique historical center of pedagogical education, science and the state culture”. Below this first phrase there is a list of their goals, which can be mainly summarized that the university wants to become a research based university which would impact education and kyrgyz society to be formed into one system. Here, Humboldt’s University mission can be vividly identical to the one described in the KNU and KSU under I. Arabaev.

Internal function of the University was to form united system of values, which would build bones of national culture. In those days in Prussia works of Gete and in the United Kingdom books of Shakespeare were used to build up their national culture in order to strengthen their nation building process. In Kyrgyzstan the government is pursuing this function through requiring all universities both private and state owned to study the state language, Kyrgyz History, and recent implementation of the Manas Studies, which includes both history of Kyrgyzstan and epic “Manas”. Akaev was the first to initiate this ideology of “Manas” and achieve some form of recognition by other countries in the year 1995, when he organized “1000th Year Anniversary of “Manas” epic” in Talas. Initially, some form of studying “Manas” epic as an elective course was included only during primary education in schools starting from 2003. The change came in June 28th 2011 when the parliament passed a law on “Manas” epic. The reasoning behind the law is very much the same what Wilhelm von Humboldt proposed, it is “strengthening and development of Kyrgyz nationhood through ideological and historico-cultural education of the masses”. The law also states that to

achieve above mentioned goal the state wants to promote and preserve trilogy of “Manas” epic. Specifically, as a follow up to this law the government passed a decree in 31 of January 2012 which established *the National Program of the Kyrgyz Republic on Manas Epic* in the period of 2012-2017 in order to preserve, research and popularize epic “Manas” and *the Plan of Realization* to make this happen. To realize this goal relevant ministries have developed a study program called *Manas Studies* and they obligate the subject to be studied in all higher education institutions, including universities. More to that several republican social funds and the Kyrgyz State University named after I. Arabaev implemented the law and the decree through founding an institute of *Manas Studies* within their university. Students of this institute will research epic “Manas” and become experts of it through obtaining a speciality in *Manas Studies*. Primarily, they all will become teachers in primary/secondary schools and in any educational higher institutions. According to the national program and to the law first testing ground is higher institutions, then in grades from 9-11, third is grades from 1-8, and last kindergartens. This is a clear proof that shows how the state uses the university as the main asset through which it is going to promote its national culture of “Manas” into all levels of education thus targeting the whole nation.

3.5 The Contract Between the State and the HEIs is Broken or Not?

Till the mid of 20th century this model of contract between the state and University worked well. However in 1950-s and 60-s, the model was no longer functioning properly. According to Bill Readings student strikes and protests with some professors against the government in France in May 1968 indicated this sign that university and government is breaking their contract. University no longer wants to cultivate and share ideals of national culture. There is a correlation between a) decreasing link between university and government, and b) national government declining. The functions of university in the USSR was exactly the same. 1)

Build the country to the level of western countries through increasing level of education in universities. 2) To raise citizens with the same values and culture. Unlike in Europe, in the KSSR there was no explicit national culture through heavy research of Kyrgyz identity was going on. Predominantly, the communist idea and culture dominated the country. It was national soviet culture, not based on ethnic culture. The breakdown of union meant decline of “soviet nation culture” thus the tie with university was greatly ruined. Unlike in America, Latin America and Europe where students actively protested and initiated strikes throughout mid 1950-s and 60-s indicating this breakdown of contract between the state and university, in Kyrgyzstan the university community was generally passive. The decline of “soviet nation culture” came first with the decline of the state itself, not university. All post-soviet states, including Kyrgyzstan tried to recapture its dominance over their universities through various ways. In Kyrgyzstan these were the actions: a) initiating the state exam on history of Kyrgyzstan, b) making Kyrgyz language obligatory subject, and c) recent obligation by the government to make the Manas Studies mandatory as well. Of course it is important to note that effectiveness of these attempts might not be effective enough, because students are not machines to be easily manipulated by the state ideology. They have their own interests, they might be passive about learning their culture and strengthen national identity. Rather, the majority pursue career interest, ability to earn enough and get rich. Since the government did not have enough financial resource to reinforce its tie with the HEIs, it had to give up more freedom to them through implementing neoliberal ideas.

3.6 The HEIs Caught Between the Ideology of Culture and Excellence

Here it is important to note that according to Bill Readings “culture” as a term in itself can mean anything that is why he understand “culture” as synonym to “national culture”. Both are identical and there is nothing above “nation culture”. For instance Eastern culture,

Russian culture, and Turkic culture. Bill Readings further states that when there is no national culture, money takes that role. In other words when nation state has no presence then cultural ties are changed by money ties. University becomes a mere engine that produces professionals for the market, where the state no longer plays the key role. This is a clear sign of commercialization of university. Modern activity of universities are defined as “cultural manukur”. They are providing services in order to make things look nice. For instance, knowing literature in these days are needed in higher education just for general education, whereas before, through literature people would learn about themselves, their culture and hence strengthen their identity. Teaching has no ideals anymore. Ideal of “culture” is changed by “excellence”. It is a new ideal of university and it is empty in itself. People have some kind of understanding about it, but at the same time different understandings. There are some criterias indicating “excellence” such as a) amount of professors with PhD, b) influential scholarly works that earned Nobel peace prize or other recognition, and c) overall success of students in their GPA. The author of “University in Ruins” asks three rhetorical questions to demonstrate that current universities are lost in between ideology of culture and excellence. These questions below are the ones that the author asks:

- a. Can we consider grade of a student as a criteria to describe success of university education?
- b. A person who got the highest education degree can he/she become automatically a very good professor?
- c. Can we consider the best university the one that is the richest one?

There is no longer unity in the HEIs, specifically within a) administration b) professors and c) students. Administration focused on financial side, attracting donors, forming the budget and distributing expenditures. Professors try to justify themselves before administration, students

and colleagues. They try to show that they are needed. Students are occupied with complaining. They do not understand their role in society and why they are imposed to learn certain subjects. Students chose uncertainty, in other words chose to do nothing. They stand somehow together, but there is no unity, there is no mission that binds them together. Each professor might come up with his own mission, but it does not help anyhow to improve overall mission of the university system. This tendency is true for Kyrgyzstan, especially within the AUCA community.

3.7 Consequences of the Mission Change

The major consequence of the mission change was that education became a commodity to be bought and sold. According to John McMurtry changes touched upon a) goals, b) motivation and methods, and c) standards of excellence. A) The goals of education is no longer sharing with others results of research outcomes, but rather excluding others through “private ownership” structure of appropriation of knowledge. McMurtry argues that education flourishes if it is more inclusive, free and accessible, not when its closed under private ownership. When learning is not shared to others, then it is considered as “dead” or “lost”. B) The core motivation of the market is to satisfy the wants of those who have money through the method of selling the goods of education. Whereas the true motivation of education is to develop sound understanding whether it is wanted or not and to meet the need of those who want to learn independent of their purchasing capacity. C) The measures of excellence in the market are 1) how well the product is made to sell, and 2) how problem free the product is and remains for its buyers. To sum up, the University education is no longer preparing subjects for government who would strengthen national identity and pursue further development of the country. It is mainly occupied with the idea of “excellence”, preparing simply independent thinkers to act on their own and qualified professionals on whom general

public will be dependent on to gain the products and services of education. In addition the University is preparing experts on whom majority of people will rely on to perform their thinking and doing for them, thus making the University exclusively elitist.

The Last Words

According to UNICEF document, “Education is at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realize our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and achievement of our personal aims.” So the high level of university education in Bishkek is vital for the graduates to become self-sufficient and for the universities to become an engine of ideas for positive development. Development of university education is more than simply seeing the more graduates being able to find jobs and more than keeping universities to stay competitive in the market. There is a recent trend in Kyrgyz media claiming that level of university education in Kyrgyzstan is declining. There might be various reasons to explain that problem such as high level of corruption, absence of qualified teachers, and low level of financial support from the government. For further research the above listed reasons can be analyzed and in order to to build a link between quality of education in higher education institutions of Kyrgyzstan and neoliberal idea of decentralization of education. Since majority of Kyrgyzstan’s universities is located in Bishkek, universities located in the city can be the primary focus of that research. Results of this work will hopefully bring additional perspective into higher educational problems in Bishkek institutions.

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