

RUSSIA COUNTRY REPORT: MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCE IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The Russian Federation (RF) is a large country with the total area of 17,075,400 sq km. The RF has the world's ninth-largest population of 146,600,000 people. According to the 2010 census, ethnic Russian people constitute up to 81% of the total population. In total, over 185 different ethnic groups live within the RF borders. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism are Russia's traditional religions. Russia is a multinational and multicultural state.

The large number of different ethnic groups represents the result of a complicated history of migrations, wars and revolutions. The ethnic diversity of Russia has significantly influenced the nature of its development and has had a strong influence on the state education policy. The article gives a detailed analysis of the key factors determining educational opportunities for different RF ethnic groups. A complicated ethnic composition of Russia's population and its multi-confessional nature cause the educational system to fulfill educational, ethno-cultural and consolidating functions by enriching the educational content with ethnic peculiarities and at the same time providing students with an opportunity to study both in native (non-Russian) and non-native (Russian) languages.

The paper provides clear and thorough description of Russian educational system emphasizing positive features like high literacy and educational rates especially in technical areas that are due to the results of the educational system functioning nowadays. Teacher education is provided in different types of educational institutions allowing their graduates to start working as teachers immediately after graduating. Ethnic groups can influence educational policy of the state but mainly in the area of non-formal education. In terms of curriculum policy there has lately been a tendency of reinforcing the federal control in terms of educational content due to numerous influencing factors. Despite these centralizing tendencies multicultural approach has been applied to the curriculum thus emphasizing the contradictions of Russian educational policy concerning ethnic issues.

Keywords: Ethnic groups, ethnic languages, educational system, teacher education, curriculum policy.

1 DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION, COUNTRY'S ETHNIC GROUPS AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

The Russian Federation (RF) is a large country extending over much of Northern Eurasia; the total area is 17,075,400 sq km. The RF has the world's ninth-largest population. According to an official estimate for January 1st 2016, the population is about 144,221,341 people without Crimea, or 146,600,000 with it [1].

Russia's population density is 8.4 people per square kilometer, making it one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. The population is most dense in the European part of the country, with milder climate, centering on Moscow and St. Petersburg. 74% of the population is urban, making Russia a highly urbanized country [2].

According to the 2010 census, ethnic Russian people make up 81% of the total population. This share remained steady over the last few decades. In total, over 185 different ethnic groups live within the Russian Federation's borders.

The RF comprises 85 federal subjects, namely: 47 provinces; 21 republics which have a high degree of autonomy on most issues and which correspond to some of Russia's numerous ethnic minorities; 8 territories; 6 autonomous districts; 2 federal cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg); the Jewish Autonomous Oblast (Fig. 1.) [2].



Figure 1: Map of subdivisions of RF.

Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism are Russia's traditional religions. Estimates of believers widely fluctuate; some reports put the number of non-believers in Russia as high as 24-48% of the population.

The ancestors of today's Russians adopted Orthodox Christianity in the 10th century. 80% of ethnic Russians and the majority of Russian citizens (e.g. Chuvash, Yakut, Mordvinians, Mari, some Tatars) self-identify as Russian Orthodox [3]. The church is widely respected by both believers and non-believers, who see it as a symbol of Russian heritage and culture.

The number of Roman Catholics is estimated to be approximately 400,000 to 500,000; Armenian Gregorian, about 1,200,000; and Protestants, about 1,000,000.

Today there are no reliable statistics about the number of Muslims in Russia, because the latest RF census questionnaires don't ask a citizen about his or her religion. The number of Russian Muslims is usually calculated adding members of all ethnic groups in the country, which are traditionally Muslims, like Tatars, Bashkirs and Chechens. Thus, according to the latest data, there are about 16,000,000 to 20,000,000 "ethnic Muslims", that is 12-15% of the RF's population constituting the largest religious minority. Most Muslims live in the Volga-Ural region (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan Republics), as well as in the North Caucasus, Moscow, St. Petersburg and Western Siberia. In Russia nowadays there are more than 6,000 mosques. A particularly large number of Muslims live in rural areas, mainly in the Caucasus. The RF is also hosts an estimated 3,000,000 Muslim migrants from former Soviet states – roughly 2,000,000 Azeris, 1,000,000 Kazakhs and several hundred thousand Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz.

According to data of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, the number of Jews in Russia is about 1,500,000. There are about 70 synagogues.

Buddhism is traditional for 3 regions of the RF: Buryatia, Tuva, Kalmykia, and those practicing Buddhism number 1,500,000.

Some residents of the Siberian and Far Eastern regions, including Yakutia and Chukotka, practice pantheistic and pagan rites, along with major religions.

Induction into religion takes place primarily along ethnic lines. Ethnic Russians are mainly Orthodox whereas most Turkic origin people are Sunni Muslims [3].

2 SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STATUS OF THE POPULATION OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC AND CULTURE

In the process of historical development, Russia has taken shape as a multinational and multicultural state. The large number of different ethnic groups which are living within the boundaries of the RF represents the result of a complicated history of migrations, wars and revolutions. The ethnic diversity of Russia has significantly influenced the nature of its development and has had a strong influence on the state education policy.

According to Isak Froumin [4] the following key factors determine educational opportunities for different ethnic groups: political status of an ethnic group; demographic characteristics; level of development of an ethnic language. Let us discuss those factors in detail.

2.1 Political status of an ethnic group

According to their political status, ethnic groups who live in Russia can be viewed as either having or not having their own territorial autonomy within the RF.

Russia is an asymmetric state according to its territorial division. Of 85 federal subjects, 26 are entities named for one or two ethnic groups (e.g. Tatarstan, Kabardino-Balkar, Sakha (Yakutia) Republic). These ethnic groups are called titular for the particular region. Under the Russian Constitution [5], all citizens of the country have equal rights regardless of their ethnic identity (para.1-2, art 19), however, in reality titular ethnic groups have more opportunities in the area of education in the regions named for them.

Apart from titular ethnic groups, there are groups that have their own statehood outside the boundaries of the RF (e.g. Greeks, Germans, and Ukrainians). Given the availability of relevant international agreements on cooperation in education, the countries of their ethnic origin may support their educational interests and provide the necessary assistance.

A considerable number of ethnic groups in Russia have no statehood of their own. Some of them have large diasporas outside the RF (Kurds, Lapps, Roma), and some others live predominantly in Russia (Kets, Vepsians, Siberian Tatars).

2.2 Demographic characteristics

Among the demographic characteristics of an ethnic group, the most important is the number of people – a factor defining a “national minority” in international law. As it was mentioned above Russians are the most numerous group, constituting 81.8 % of the population, 3.7 % are Tatars; 1.4 % - Ukrainians; 1.1 - % Bashkirs; 1 % -Chuvashes.

Indigenous minorities of the North, Siberia and the Far East deserve special mention. There are about 60 groups in the RF with a total number of approximately 250,000 people. However, only 40 of them have been granted an official status entitling them to state guarantees of protection of their traditional way of life and education.

There are more than 2,000 national minorities' public associations and 560 national cultural autonomies; however, the Committee of Ministers has noted that in many regions the amount of state support for the preservation and development of minority cultures is still inadequate [6].

2.3 Political status and development of the language

About 150 languages are spoken on the territory of Russia. The Russian Constitution [5] guarantees all ethnic groups the right to retain their native tongues and create conditions for studying and developing them (para.3, art. 68).

Russian is the official language in the RF [5] (para.1, art.68). Some ethnic republics have the right to establish their own official languages. For example, in Tatarstan Republic there are 2 official languages – Russian and Tatar. In schools these languages are the languages of instruction or are separate compulsory subjects.

However, opportunities to use a language other than Russian are determined by the level of development of the language and the level of proficiency of the native population in it. The level of development of a written form and literary standards of a language influence its ability to be used in the educational process. The Tatar language is used for teaching almost all disciplines at schools, including math, science and informatics.

A complicated ethnic composition of Russia's population and its multi-confessional nature cause the educational system to fulfill the following functions: educational: providing the universal education to the country's population regardless of ethnic origin and religion; ethno-cultural function: disseminating and developing ethnic cultures and languages; consolidating function: integrating the ethnically heterogeneous society into a united supranational community – a political nation – with a common system of values.

The implementation of the first two functions objectively requires taking into consideration the ethnic composition of students in the educational process by partially filling the content of education with some components of ethnic culture and arranging education in native (non-Russian) and Russian (non-native) languages.

3 EDUCATION SYSTEM IN RUSSIA

Education in Russia is supervised and financed by the state. Regional authorities regulate education within their jurisdictions within the prevailing framework of federal laws [7, 8]. General education is free and available for everyone. Children are enrolled in schools at the age of six or seven and normally they leave school by the age of 17. Most schools are state, but private schools have been also established in recent years. General education in the RF comprises 3 stages: primary which lasts for 4 years (grades 1-4); basic general education lasting for 5 years (grades 5-9); secondary education which lasts for 2 years (grades 10-11).

General education is compulsory. It is aimed at the intellectual, emotional, moral and physical development of the individual. General education normally consists of 34 weeks of study per year and 27 to 36 hours of study per week. The academic year typically runs from 1 September to the final week of May, with exams in June. The school year is comprised of 4 terms with vacations in between: 1 week in November, 2 weeks in January, 1 week in March and nearly 3 months in summer. A typical class lasts 45 minutes; in primary school pupils have four 35-40 minute classes a day. A normal class consists of 20-30 students [9]. Absolute majority of children attend full programme schools providing 11-year education; schools limited to elementary or elementary and middle classes typically exist in rural areas. Of 59,260 schools in Russia, 36,248 provide full eleven-year programme, 10,833 - nine-year basic (elementary and middle) programme, and 10,198 - elementary education only. In areas where school capacity is insufficient to teach all students on a morning to afternoon schedule, authorities resort to double shift schools, where two streams of students (morning shift and evening shift) share the same facility.

The basic curriculum has some compulsory fields to study such as the Russian language, foreign languages, mathematics, history, natural sciences, music, arts, and sports. Every school designs its own curriculum which is based on the state requirements, and there can be some extra or optional disciplines.

After completing primary and basic general education, the students pass the final examinations. They are awarded a Certificate of Basic General Education, which entitles the student to continue secondary general education, vocational education or non-university level higher education.

After completing the secondary general education, the students need to pass the State final attestation (Unified State Examinations (USE)), after which they will be awarded a Certificate of Secondary General Education. This school leaving certificate will allow students to continue to higher education: either vocational education or both non-university and university level education. In 2003 the Ministry of Education launched the USE programme. Standardized tests for high school graduates were issued uniformly throughout the country in the Russian language and rated independently of schoolmasters. The USE empowers all graduates to compete for admissions at the universities of their choice.

Education expenditures: 4.1% of GDP (gross domestic product), country comparison to the world: 110. In 2016, the spending on education amounted to 507, 58 bln roubles. The literacy rate in the RF, according to a 2015 estimate by the Central Intelligence Agency is 99.7% (99.7% men, 99.6% women) [10].

According to Joseph Stiglitz, a former chief economist of the World Bank, one of the good things that Russia inherited from the Soviet era is "a high level of education, especially in technical areas so important for the New Economy" [11].

4 TEACHER EDUCATION IN RUSSIA

Non-university level educational institutions (technikums, kolledzes) train teachers for pre-primary and primary schools. The duration of the course is two-and-a-half to four-and-a-half years. Some university level teacher training institutions train teachers for primary schools. The courses last for four-five years. Graduates of these two types of educational institutions may exercise the profession.

Training of secondary school teachers is carried out in teacher training university-level institutions. The programmes last for at least five years. Graduates may enter the profession.

University teachers must have followed post-graduate training. A scientific degree (Kandidat Nauk at least) is compulsory to obtain a lecturer's post.

5 ROLE OF ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Law on Education in the RF (1992, 1996, 2007, and 2012) [7] proclaimed that ethnic groups could be independent actors in the development and implementation of educational policy. The Law on Education made it possible for ethno-culturally oriented non-governmental organizations to act as founders of non-state educational institutions that address a number of issues related to the content and language of education (para.4, art.11). Such organizations exist today, although their influence is insignificant. They operate predominantly in the area of non-formal education - Sunday schools and cultural centers, teaching ethnic history and culture.

6 CURRICULUM POLICY

The first version of Law on Education legalized the structure of state educational standards. They consisted of federal, regional and school-level components. Each component included certain disciplines, for example, the federal component included maths, physics, biology and the Russian language; the regional component included local history and geography; and the school components included optional subjects.

An analysis of concepts of regional (national-regional) component in different regions of Russia has shown that there were 2 main approaches: mono-ethnic and poly-ethnic. Mono-ethnic approaches are used in some ethnic regions and provinces. Their goal is to integrate students into the culture of the titular ethnic group, while poly-ethnic approaches try to integrate students into the Russian culture. In the regions that embrace a poly-ethnic approach the formation of ethnic identity goes hand in hand with an individual's integration into the multicultural space of the RF. However, in some cases the implementation of such approaches did not happen successfully because of the lack of expertise and experience in multicultural education in Russia.

The increasing diversity of regional approaches to the objectives and content of education and the growing ethnic isolation in some regions has indicated the need for a change in the standards of education. To reinforce control of the federal center over content of education, the June 2002 amendments to the Law on education introduced the annual appraisal and approval of the federal lists of text books recommended (permitted) for use in the educational process. A trend towards centralization of education management and unification of its content was launched. However, there have also been attempts by the government to find alternative solutions to the problem by applying a multicultural approach to the curriculum.

7 ETHNIC LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION

The constitution of the RF [5] and a number of laws guarantee the right to retain native languages and create conditions for their study and development by all ethnic groups. The practical implementation of

such a legal framework resulted in an increase in the number of languages taught in schools from 60 in 1990 to 75 in 2006. This trend is consistent with the increase in the total number of students who are learning their native languages, which increased from 5.1 % in 1990 to 11.5 % in 2006. The share of schools where non-Russian languages are taught has risen from 12.9 % to 18.2 %.

The number of languages of instruction and people being taught in their native (non-Russian) language manifest a different dynamic. The number of schools with instruction in native (non-Russian) languages manifests a persistent trend towards reduction. It dropped by 16.2%. According to Isak Froumin [4], the reason is the transition of schools from instruction in native (non-Russian) languages to instruction in the Russian language while retaining native languages as separate subjects. This is confirmed by a significant increase in the number of teachers of native (non-Russian) languages in recent years. The educational policy in the RF has created all conditions for the study of native languages in the educational process. The best opportunities in the regions of Russia exist for the languages of titular ethnic groups, because the status of the official language of the region allows it to be taught as a mandatory course in the ethnic region.

8 CONCLUSION

The above analysis indicates that Russia's current policy on education related to ethnic minorities contains some contradictions because of its complexity and ambiguity. The Law on Education lacks a mechanism for harmonizing the interests of the federal center and ethnic regions in educational policy. The current policy of "one size fits all" [12] cannot be easily changed to a more flexible one.

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