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M.A. Pinskaya, E.A. Lenskaya, A.A. Ponomareva, I.V. Brun, S.G. Kosaretsky & M.B. Savelyeva

To cite this article: M.A. Pinskaya, E.A. Lenskaya, A.A. Ponomareva, I.V. Brun, S.G. Kosaretsky & M.B. Savelyeva (2016) What Did We Learn About Our Teachers and Principals? Results of the TALIS-2013 International Comparative Study, *Russian Education & Society*, 58:7-8, 491-510, DOI: [10.1080/10609393.2016.1298372](https://doi.org/10.1080/10609393.2016.1298372)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10609393.2016.1298372>



Published online: 11 May 2017.



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M.A. PINSKAYA, E.A. LENSKAYA, A.A. PONOMAREVA,
I.V. BRUN, S.G. KOSARETSKY, AND M.B. SAVELYEVA

What Did We Learn About Our Teachers and Principals? Results of the TALIS-2013 International Comparative Study

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) is a large-scale and authoritative international study of teachers. It is conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to collect and compare information about teachers and principals in different countries in such key areas as the training and professional development of teachers, performance appraisals, school management and educational goals and practices, job satisfaction, and confidence in one's professional abilities.

English translation © 2016 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, from the Russian text © 2015 “Narodnoe obrazovaniie.” “Chto my uznali o nashikh uchiteliakh i direktorakh? Rezul'taty mezhdunarodnogo sravnitel'nogo issledovaniia TALIS-2013,” *Narodnoe obrazovaniie*, 2015, no. 6, pp. 34–47.

Marina Aleksandrovna Pinskaya, candidate of pedagogical sciences, is a lead researcher at the Center for Social and Economic Development of Schools, Institute of Education, National Research University Higher School of Economics; Email: m-pinskaya@yandex.ru.

Elena Anatolievna Lenskaya, candidate of pedagogical sciences, is dean of the Department of Management in Education, Moscow Higher School of Social and Economic Sciences; Email: lenskaya@universitas.ru.

Alena Aleksandrovna Ponomareva is a junior researcher at the Center for Monitoring the Quality of Education, Institute of Education, National Research University Higher School of Economics; Email: aponomareva@hse.ru.

Although the TALIS does not seek to explain the academic achievements of schoolchildren, the study makes it possible to uncover factors that can be directly connected to educational results. In 2013, a total of 37 countries, including Russia, participated in the study.

The study was conducted by the Institute of Education of the National Research University Higher School of Economics with support from the Russian Ministry of Education and Science. It involved 4,000 teachers and 198 principals in 200 schools and 14 regions of the Russian Federation. These studies permit inter-country comparisons of pedagogical personnel and an in-depth analysis of the state of the domestic teaching corps.

Participation in the TALIS is vital for Russia because it is being conducted during a period of substantial changes: higher teacher salaries, introduction of professional standards for teachers, transition to the KPI-based ('effective') contract, and modernization of teacher education. For effective policymaking, it is extremely important to have a reliable information base, because it permits well-founded solutions and timely and comprehensive feedback on previously implemented measures.

Russian teachers in the TALIS study

General characteristics

Women comprise 85 percent of teachers in Russia. This, however, is substantially different from the study sample, where women comprised 68 percent of teachers.

Irina Viktorovna Brun is a doctoral researcher at the Center for Monitoring the Quality of Education, National Research University Higher School of Economics; Email: ibrun@hse.ru.

Sergey Gennadievich Kosaretsky, candidate of pedagogical sciences, is director of the Center for Social and Economic Development of Schools, Institute of Education, National Research University Higher School of Economics; Email: skosaretski@hse.ru.

Maya Borisovna Savelyeva is a chief analyst of the Center for Social and Economic Development of Schools, Institute of Education, National Research University Higher School of Economics; Email: msaveleva@hse.ru.

Translated by John Riedl.

As seen in Figure 1, almost half of Russia’s teachers, 48 percent, are middle-aged (30 to 49 years). There are as many young teachers (up to 30) as the national average. This number remains small, 12.3 percent, but the share of teachers under 25 years of age is twice as much as the average. Since the first study, the share of young teachers has risen somewhat from its 2009 value of 11 percent. The share of teachers of near-retirement and retirement age (from 50 to 59 years old) is 30 percent, nearly one-third. This is more than the study average. In addition, 10 percent of teachers working in schools were over 59. Thus, it may be said that Russia is experiencing a renewal of its teaching corps. This renewal testifies to the increased attractiveness of the teaching profession. At the same time, the imbalance between wages and pensions keeps a high share of older teachers in the profession.

Among Russian teachers, 94.6 percent have had teacher education. This is greater than the study average (90.6 percent). Domestic teachers with professional education have had significantly more frequent training in practically all subjects but teach more than one subject less frequently than the average for study participants from other countries. In Russia, 53 percent of teachers teach several subjects, whereas the average for all countries is 73 percent. Russian teachers are more experienced than most others, with over 20 years of work experience in schools. In addition, they have not changed schools in over 15 years. The average time that they have worked in their school

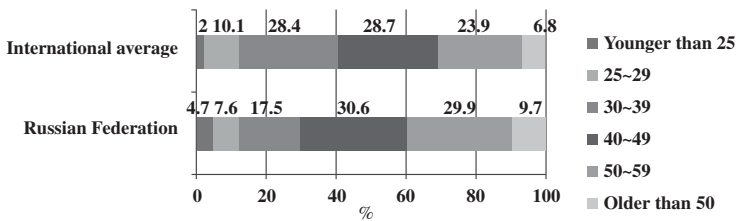


Figure 1. Age Distribution of Teaching Personnel, %

and their average work experience in schools are 10 and 16 years, respectively.

Work conditions

Russian teachers work more than the average for all countries. Their work week exceeds 46 hours, whereas the average for participant countries is no more than 38 hours. Russian teachers spend only half the time, 23.5 hours, on teaching, whereas the average for all countries was a little more than half, 20 hours. Despite the general similarity in the distribution of working hours, our teachers spend noticeably more time (by a third, a total of more than four hours versus a three-hour average for all countries) on general administrative work, mainly on reports. Russian teachers have a heavy load, and the share of time spent on administrative activities is not optimal (see Figure 2).

Russian teachers have an average class size of 19–20 students as compared to an all other countries average of 24. According to

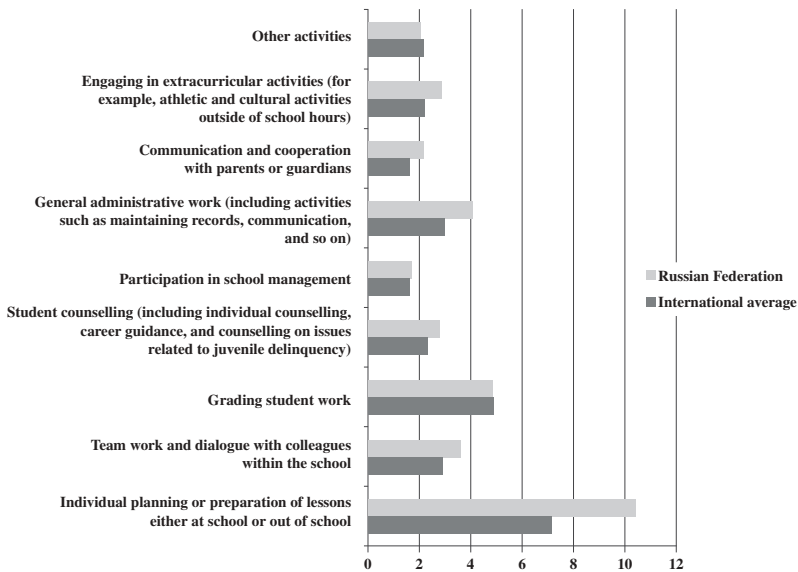


Figure 2. Distribution of Teachers' Working Hours

our teachers, their schools have substantially fewer special needs children than the average for the study, and also substantially fewer students who could be assigned to one or another problem group. The composition of classes is thus more favorable from the viewpoint of educational problems and social environment. Possible reasons for these assessments and for the fact that schools, like teachers, do not “see” the disadvantaged population is that they do not receive financing or methodological support for work with such children. The characteristic features of that group are not considered when evaluating the work of the school.

Professional development

This factor may be connected to the professional development actively given to Russian teachers, who do not see substantial barriers to their development. Unlike their colleagues in other countries, our teachers are hindered much less frequently by circumstances at work than by family obligations. The most popular courses were those connected with subject knowledge, teaching methodologies, and new pedagogical and information technologies. A little less frequently, teachers increased their qualifications in assessment and classroom management, and even less frequently, in methods for individual instruction and counseling and instruction in various types of key competencies. They very rarely chose courses like *teaching students with special needs and teaching in a multicultural and multilingual environment*. Their professional priorities are far from the inclusive policies and requirements of the FSES [Federal State Educational Standards] and professional standards.

A profile of the needs of Russian teachers differs from the profile characteristic of most participant countries. The professional priorities of our teachers lie in the sphere of teacher-centered teaching. The international trend fully conforms to domestic FSES—student-centered teaching.

This can also be said about the system of student assessment. Our teachers are oriented toward standardized tests, whereas the

general trend is toward more flexible assessment methods. Almost 28 percent of Russian teachers have never developed their own assessment system, whereas the study average is only 6 percent. Conversely, only 4 percent never use standardized tests, while this is approximately a quarter for the all-country average.

Russia has established favorable conditions for increasing the qualifications and improving the professional development of its teachers. In this case, the program content and professional needs of teachers are not fully oriented toward FSES requirements and professional standards, which stipulate the individualization of the educational process and prioritize the development of inclusive education and work with children from socially disadvantaged families. It remains an urgent objective to overcome the gap between the professional-development system and professional standards for teachers and the systemic appraisal of their performance.

Russian teachers give more weight than their colleagues to the consequences of performance appraisals.

Eighteen percent of our teachers (8 percent average) mentioned that significant raises were given for positive appraisals, while 38 percent agree that a teacher who produces consistently low-quality work will be fired (33 percent average).

Russian teachers and principals are positively disposed to their professions and workplaces, and these assessments are close to the international averages.

The second stage is an analysis of the study data grouped by the characteristics of the students and age characteristics of the teachers.

Differentiation by social context (characteristics of the students) and teacher age

Groups were based on the following student characteristics:

- students whose native language is different from the language(s) of instruction;
- students with low academic achievement;
- students with special needs;

- students with behavioral problems;
- students living in unfavorable social conditions.

Factor analysis resulted in a single factor that incorporated all the above points. Three groups of teachers were identified: groups with a low index (share) of difficult students (0–10 percent of the class consists of challenging students), a medium index (10–30 percent), and a high index (more than 30 percent of the class consists of challenging students).

Further analysis showed a substantial differentiation in the assessments and opinion of the teachers belonging to the different groups. There are also differences in the level of their professional training.

More teachers without higher education work with the most challenging classes (see [Table 1](#)).

This also pertains to the youngest group of teachers, in which fewer teachers, 84 percent, have higher education.

Teachers in the third group working in the most challenging classes, just like younger teachers, have a lower assessment of their professional training. They consider their training “very good” significantly less often than their colleagues in other groups.

Even though the group teaching more challenging students has a higher share of young teachers and a lower average age (41.5 years), the teachers in this group participate less often in induction programs. It must be noted that the youngest teachers also participate less often in professional development programs, trailing all remaining age groups (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 1

Levels of Education by Difficulty Index Group

Education	Low index	Medium index	High index
General and primary education	1.16	1.06	6.67
Secondary vocational education	9.03	5.64	9.90
Higher education	89.17	92.79	83.27

Table 2

Participation in Induction Programs

Induction programs	Low index	Medium index	High index	Less than 29 years	30–39 years	40–59 years
I participated/am participating in an induction program	62.69	55.96	46.78	43.67	50.77	64.36
I participated/am participating in unofficial induction activities, which are not part of a program	48.50	48.53	39.22	38.37	42.67	50.89
I participated/am participating in a general and/or official school orientation	64.52	63.08	55.47	58.96	57.68	66.53

This situation, in part, can be compensated by the fact that 30 percent of teachers younger than 29 have official mentors.

Without a doubt, however, one negative aspect is that the youngest teachers are the least likely to be included in a system of professional development. As indicated in the diagram (see [Figure 3](#)), they participated less frequently than their older more experienced colleagues in all types of professional development, including the most active and modern forms such as various types of collaboration and joint activities.

These studies indicated that specifically young teachers and those who work with the most challenging children more often than others run into barriers to professional development (see [Figure 3](#)). In this case, it must be taken into account that teachers in these groups more frequently than others said that the administration gave them material support and help (but not scheduled time) for their professional development.

As seen in [Figure 3.1](#), teachers working with the most disadvantaged children are also affected by problems with professional development.

These teachers also lag behind with respect to the format and direction of their professional development. Above all, this

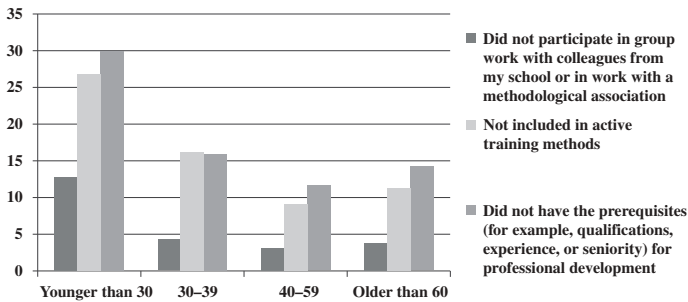


Figure 3. Barriers to Professional Development of Young Teachers, %

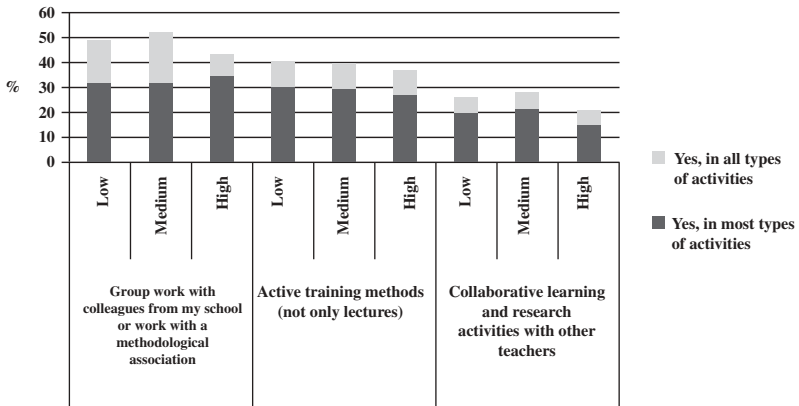


Figure 3.1. Professional Development Activities over the Past 12 Months by Difficulty Index Group, %

concerns professional teaching skills and work practices that meet FSES requirements, such as *teaching cross-curricular skills and methods for development of competencies needed for future work or study*. In this case, one must note an important positive aspect. The teachers in this group more frequently than other teachers have professional development in their “target” areas: *work with special needs children or teaching in a multicultural and multi-lingual setting*. However, as in the case of young teachers, there is a systemic lag in modern active and cooperative forms of professional development.

Together with this lag, there is a more pronounced need to develop the professional potential of younger teachers and those that work with more challenging classes. Specifically, these teachers, as the data show, have higher assessments of their professional deficiencies. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show acute and moderate needs for certain types of professional development among different groups of teachers.

We will look at the needs of young teachers in more detail. One can explain the lack of classroom management skills exhibited by those who have recently come into a school, just as one can understand their advantages with respect to information and communications technologies [ICT]. However, there are indicators of serious problems in teacher education. Specifically, young teachers who have just completed their professional training lack pedagogical techniques and teaching skills that satisfy FSES requirements and professional standards. These techniques and skills include *methods of individualized learning and teaching of special needs students*.

Research provides other evidence that young teachers as compared to others have more acute deficits in their professional skills. This is indicated by how they organize classwork during lessons.

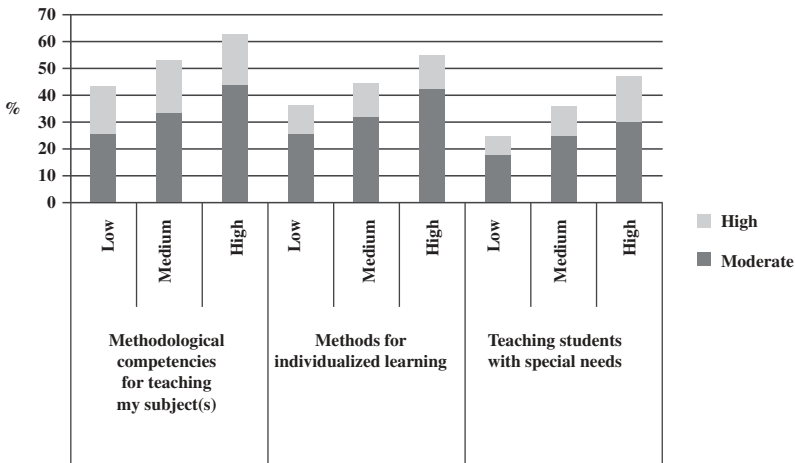


Figure 4.1. Acute and Moderate Needs for Professional Development by Difficulty Index Group, %

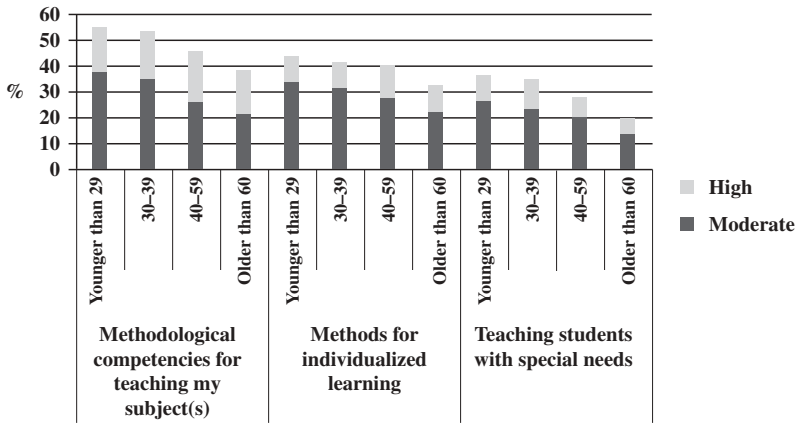


Figure 4.2. **Acute and Moderate Needs for Professional Development by Age Group, %**

Young teachers significantly less frequently give students the opportunity to work actively and independently, for example, in groups and on projects. Even their undoubted advantages in ICT are not converted to appropriate forms of student work. Their students use ICT even less frequently than those taught by older teachers who have fewer information skills. ICT is never used by 21 percent of young teachers and 18.6 percent of teachers older than 60 years.

Young teachers as well as teachers working with disadvantaged classes must solve complex problems with respect to classroom management and the organization of lessons. For young teachers, 72.6 percent lesson time is left over for teaching and learning. For teachers with challenging classes, 72.3 percent of time is left over, and their older colleagues or those working with nondisadvantaged classes have 88 percent of their time left over for teaching and learning. In essence, maintaining discipline and order during lessons is the most difficult task for inexperienced teachers in any classroom. Therefore, an important signal is information about how young teachers assess their position in the school and how satisfied they are with their job and the profession as a whole. In the meantime, the situation is ambiguous. Young teachers assess the profession’s prestige more highly than their older colleagues; 58.7 percent

of young teachers and only 41 percent of older teachers believe that *the teaching profession is valued in society*. When evaluating their schools, however, young teachers are more critical than more senior colleagues. The following should also be considered an alarming signal: 32–33 percent of teachers under 29 and from 30 to 39 believe that *it might have been better to choose another profession*. Among middle-aged teachers, 18 percent think this way.

Teachers working with disadvantaged students are the most critical. Of these, 38 percent have doubts about their choice of profession, whereas only 18.5 percent of their colleagues in more advantaged classes have these doubts. Young teachers and teachers working with challenging classes, on the whole, have lower assessments of the school climate.

Thus, it can be concluded that young teachers and teachers teaching disadvantaged contingents need expanded opportunities for professional development. Above all, they need opportunities for active and group forms of development and other means of support.

A period for introduction to teaching activities can increase young teachers' chances for successful adaptation to the demands of school practice, especially in classes with problem contingents.

The pedagogical education of young teachers does not enable them to teach in accordance with modern requirements for active teaching and does not provide them with skills that meet the FSES and professional standards for teaching activities. This confirms the need for its restructuring.

Young teachers, however, consider their profession and work in general more prestigious than other teachers do (see [Figure 5](#)).

Russian principals in the TALIS study

General characteristics

Of the 250 school principals participating in the TALIS study, 77.57 percent are women. This percentage is substantially higher than the average for countries participating in the study, where female principals comprise only 48.84 percent. With respect to the age profile, the average age of Russian principals is about 51 years, which is just

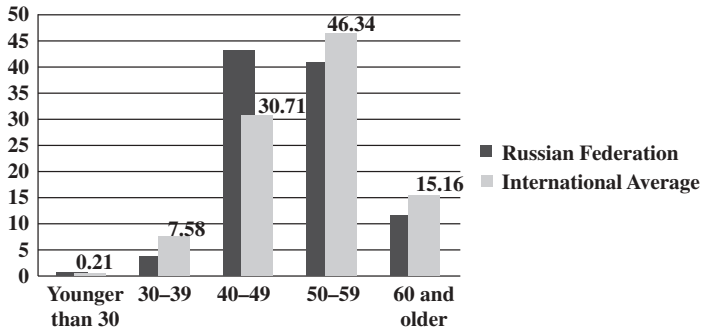


Figure 5. Age Distribution of Principals in Russia and the World, %

lower than the average for countries participating in the study (52 years). In addition, we have fewer principals over 60 than the average for other countries of the world, but we have significantly more principals aged 40–49 years, who comprised almost 43 per cent. This was the largest age group. This, perhaps, is a positive difference with respect to some leading countries.

It is interesting that Russian villages and small schools have the youngest principals, and cities with over a million people have the oldest.

Practically all principals have higher education, just like their colleagues abroad.

The study showed that Russian principals most often combine their work as a principal with their teaching load. The percentage of principals who teach and have a full load as a school principal is a little more than two times higher than the OECD average.

These studies show that this indicator should be considered positive, because principals who continue teaching, even if the teaching load is not very large, do not lose their ties with the teaching process and have a better understanding of the problems and needs of their teacher colleagues (see Figure 6).

Load

The TALIS data indicate that Russian principals as compared to their colleagues abroad carry out more administrative and

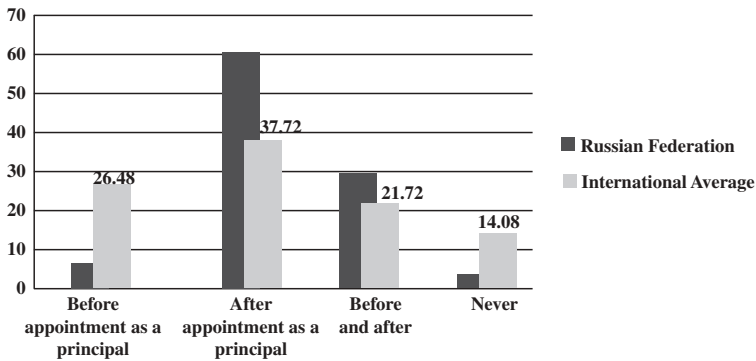


Figure 6. **Education of Principals: Principal Training or School Administration Courses or Programs, %**

management activities, which, in this study, include various gatherings and meetings devoted to school management. On average, the school principals of the countries participating in the study spend 41 percent of their time on administrative activities. The TALIS researchers consider this administrative load high and are afraid that principals do not have time for other important tasks. Russian principals, however, spend 53 percent of their time on administrative work, and only 16 percent of their time is devoted to instructional leadership, including their own teaching activities. This percentage of administrative burden was the highest among all participant countries.

Training

The number of Russian principals who had the opportunity for training in school management before they took their position was significantly lower than on average for the countries participating in TALIS. Before a school principal was appointed, such a program was only accessible for 6.45 percent of principals, whereas this average was 26.48 percent in the other countries. Training of reserve personnel in small population centers was the most favorable. In these places, there is a significantly higher percentage of those that had been trained in school management before starting their jobs, about 30 percent.

Instructional leadership training is insufficient here and in other countries, but the percentage of Russian principals who have undergone such training is lower. This means that a large number of principals start working at a school without the necessary training and learn “on the fly.”

In Singapore, for example, 65 percent of future principals have had training in school management before starting the job. In the United States, this value is 68.5 percent. Japan, Korea, and Singapore pay a lot of attention to training in instructional leadership directly connected to management of educational outcomes. In these countries, no less than 50 percent of principals had training before starting the job. In addition, in Japan and Korea, training in instructional leadership is given even more attention than training in school management.

School structure

Russian schools are on average small and have about 350 students. Even in cities with populations over one million, the number of students does not exceed 660 persons. The largest schools, averaging about 1,000 persons, are in Southeast Asia. In European countries, as a rule, schools are on par with Russian schools.

The number of management and administrative personnel in Russian schools is not large, just like the average for participant countries. In several countries, however, the percentage of administrative and management personal is significantly higher than in Russia. Thus, for example, in Singapore, for every 100 teachers and workers in education, there are 31 administrators and managers, and this is not by accident. In Singapore, it has recently become customary to hire additional administrative staff in order to free teachers from all types of activities that are not part of their main purpose. After all, a teacher’s main objective is to teach children well and not be distracted by writing reports and tracking attendance. Similar policies have recently been initiated in England and Australia. These countries have started to focus on teachers as the main resource for improving the quality of education. This means that it is important that teachers are kept as professionals and not overburdened by administrative tasks.

In some Russian regions, the exact opposite tendency has recently been observed: a school's administrative staff is reduced, and the workload is distributed among teachers.

If we look at the number of students per person on teaching and auxiliary teaching staffs, however, Russia is leading. For every 352 students in Russia, there are 53 teachers, that is, an average of one teacher for every seven students. In Finland, for every 348 students, there are only 39 teachers, that is, one for every 12 students, and in the United States, for every 556 students, there are only 48 teachers, that is, one for every 11 students.

Russian principals note that their schools have few children for whom the language of instruction is not their native language. By their assessment, Russia has three times fewer of these students than the average for participant countries. Our schools also have significantly fewer special needs children and children who live in disadvantaged social conditions. We note that the number of the latter is, as a rule, determined approximately, unlike in countries with clear criteria as to who belongs in this group.

In response to a question about the existence of school management teams, Russian principals almost unanimously answered that they have them, and the percentage of such respondents (97 percent) was higher than the average for the countries participating in TALIS. In Russia, 84 percent of schools have governing boards, and this figure is close to the average for participating countries. As can be seen from the principals' answers, however, the role of governing boards in Russia has not been fully defined, and distributed leadership exists in most school teams only on paper. Forty percent of Russian principals stated that they make all important decisions independently, and in big-city schools this number reaches 62 percent.

The absence of collaborative leadership is more characteristic of principals older than 60. Conversely, young principals are more inclined to delegate authority: 100 percent of principals younger than 40 years have governing boards, and only 20 percent of principals aged 40–50 years said that they make important decisions independently.

Working with the teaching staff

The self-assessment of most Russian principals with respect to the support they give their teachers is higher than the corresponding self-assessment of their colleagues in other countries.

With respect to measures taken by principals after discussing and analyzing a teacher’s performance, the measures taken by Russian principals are mild. In most cases, they discuss the results of their analysis with the teacher, develop with them a plan of professional development, and sometimes name a mentor. Punitive measures (dismissal, reduction in wages, nonpayment of bonuses, and so on) are used only infrequently. Nevertheless, more people mentioned punitive measures in Russia than in European countries (see Figure 7).

School resources and climate

Despite measures adopted by schools to improve the educational results of students and performance of teachers, Russian principals note a host of problems. Forty-four percent of principals believe that schools do not have enough qualified teachers, and 10 percent believe that there is a significant deficit. In addition, in small and medium-size cities, the number of people dissatisfied with the qualifications of their teachers sometimes exceeds 60 percent. These

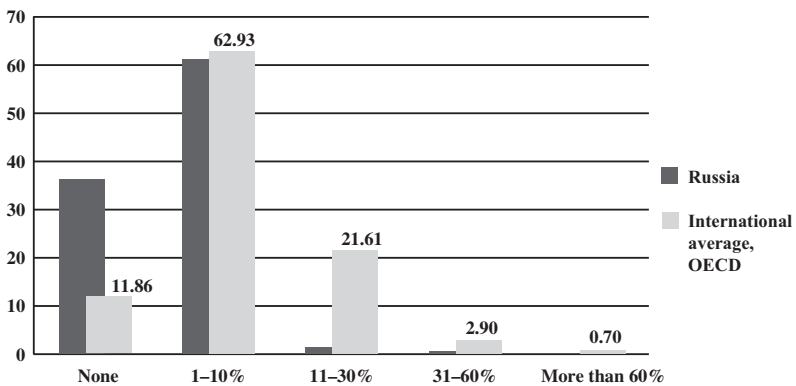


Figure 7. Share Distribution of Special Needs Students, %

figures are significantly higher than the average for TALIS participant countries. In Finland, similar answers are almost three times lower. In most other successful countries, they are 1.5–2 times lower. The only country that is more critical of the training of its teachers is Japan, where more than 78 percent of principals are unsatisfied.

Only 30 percent of principals reported a deficit in teachers capable of teaching special needs children, and only 6 percent believe that this deficit is significant. In other countries, concern about the deficit in such staff members is much higher. On average, about 48 percent of principals report this problem, and in Japan and France, 74 percent. Evidently, the objective of full inclusion is taken more seriously in these countries than in Russia, where the process has only begun. For now, however, there are no strict requirements for the standard of training provided to special needs children. Principals in small and medium-size cities where, obviously, inclusion is more intense, are most conscious of the deficit in such teachers.

In the opinion of principals, the situation regarding various kinds of student transgressions has changed significantly for the better. If in 2008, Russian principals were alarmed by the progress and discipline of their students (46 percent claimed that their students were not motivated to study, 57 percent claimed that their students had many disciplinary problems, 35 percent claimed that the educational results of students had gotten worse, and 27 percent noted that drug abuse was widespread in their schools), in 2013, the only main problem indicated by principals was cheating. With respect to all other parameters, our indicators are lower than the corresponding all-country averages. The reason for this sharp improvement is possibly the fact that the questions in the questionnaires were formulated differently in different years, and this makes it impossible to qualitatively compare these questionnaires.

With respect to the conduct of teachers, in the opinion of Russian principals, there are few problems. Fifty-seven percent of principals claimed that the teachers in their school are never late, whereas the all-country average was 20 percent, and in a number of countries, no more than 1 percent of principals gave

this answer. Russia is not the only place where absenteeism without a reasonable excuse is uncharacteristic. However, the answer “this never occurs in our school” was given by 96 percent of our principals, whereas in most countries, this value did not exceed 50 percent.

Principals of Russian schools, just like their colleagues in other countries, are satisfied with their work. Only a small percentage did not agree that the advantages of this profession outweigh its disadvantages, and almost all of them are satisfied with their work in specifically this school. Among principals of small village schools, however, the percentage of those dissatisfied is substantially higher: 28 percent do not agree that the profession’s advantages outweigh its disadvantages, 11 percent regret their decision to become a principal, and 52 percent believe that the teaching profession is little valued in society.

Main conclusions

- Russia’s corps of teachers and principals is gradually becoming younger, but the percentage of teachers older than 60 years remains high.
- Russian teachers have a higher workload than teachers in most countries. The share of administrative work, primarily paperwork, is also higher in Russia.
- Russian principals spend more time on administrative activities than their colleagues, and compared to teachers in developed countries, they have less time for work with teachers and children.
- Among Russian teachers, the most popular areas for professional development are connected with improving their subject and methodological knowledge. Both teachers and principals see less necessity for staff training in multicultural education and inclusion. This means that the policy in this area is for now not considered a priority. Both the teachers and principals of Russian schools “do not notice” children with problems in their schools. This cannot but be alarming.
- Almost all principals in Russia were trained for their position, but most of them were trained after starting their job. This situation must be improved.

- Teachers working with the most challenging contingent of students have lower educational qualifications and less training than teachers working in more comfortable conditions, and they more often note the need for additional training.
- Russian principals and teachers, as before, complain about a lack of resources, such as staff and material resources, but compared to 2008, the need for resources has substantially decreased.
- Russian principals do not fully use the potential of governing boards and almost never delegate their authority to distribute resources. They must be taught the principles of distributed leadership. Young principals tend to distribute leadership more fully.
- Russian principals believe that regular appraisal of teacher activities is an important task and believe that these appraisals materially improve performance, but in the teachers' opinion, it is not uncommon that appraisals are done to check off a box and do not lead to constructive solutions.
- In addition, Russian teachers and principals set the right priorities and strive to comply with modern concepts about the quality of their work.
- In the opinion of teachers and principals, Russian schools have a rather favorable environment. The main problem remains copying, and principals clearly need help on this area.
- Russian principals value and love their work and are satisfied with its results, although a more critical view on their performance could become a good stimulus for development.