

Educational policies for ethnic and cultural groups in Russia

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Ethnic groups

In the course of historical development Russia has taken shape as a multinational and multi-cultural state with a vast territory. The presence of a large number of different ethnic groups within the boundaries of present-day Russia represents a complicated history of migrations, wars, and revolutions. According to the 2002 census, Russia's territory is inhabited by more than 140 ethnic groups (Goskomstat RF, 2002). The ethnic diversity in Russia has significantly influenced the nature of its development and has had a strong influence on public education policy. These factors determine educational opportunities for different ethnic groups in Russia: (a) political status of an ethnic group, (b) demographic characteristics, and (c) level of development of an ethnic language.

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 Russian Federation (RF). Based on its territorial arrangement, Russia is an asymmetric state. Of the 83 regions of the Russian Federation, 26 are entities named for one or two ethnic groups. These ethnic groups are called *titular* for the particular region. Under the 1993 Russian Constitution (Konstituciya Rossiskoi Federacii), all citizens of the country enjoy equal rights regardless of their ethnic identity (para. 1–2, art. 19). 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 Russian Federation (e.g. Greeks, Germans, Ukrainians, and other ethnic groups). 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 Russian Federation (Kurds, Lapps, Roma, and others), and some others live predominantly in Russia (Vepsians, Kets, Siberian Tatars, and others).

Thus ethnic groups have different positions in the Russian political landscape and dissimilar possibilities of influencing an educational strategy.

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 (Kastelajm, Ornelis, Veni, Verbek, & Vlamink, 2003). In 2002, the population of the Russian Federation was 145,167,000 (hereinafter we use the data of National Census 2002 [Goskomstat RF, 2002]). Russians are the most numerous group, constituting 79.8% of the population (115,889,107). Six ethnic groups have 1 million to 6 million people; 33 ethnic groups have 100,000 to 1 million people; 74 ethnic groups have 1,000 to 100,000 people; and 27 ethnic groups have fewer than 1,000 people.

Indigenous minorities of the North, Siberia, and the Far East deserve special mention. There are about 60 such groups in Russia, 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 (Stepanov, 2004).

In practice, the population density that influences the enrollment at educational institutions is more important than the total number of the population. Owing to migration, titular ethnic groups were not necessarily predominant in the territories of “their” regions. At the same time Russians – who constitute a majority of the population in the country – are a minority in some ethnic regions. According to the 2002 census, the share of the titular population in the regions of the Russian Federation constitutes less than 30% in 7 regions; from 30% to 50% in 5 regions; and over 50% in 14 regions, including Chechnya (93.5%), Ingushetia (77.3%), Tuva (77.0%), Chuvashia (67.7%), and others.

Each titular ethnic group has a diaspora in other parts of Russia. There exist a few main types of settlement patterns of ethnic groups, which create an important context for educational policy: compact settlements in the titular territory, compact settlements in other parts of Russia, and dispersed settlements. These settlement patterns set forth a wide range of tasks in the area of educational policy at both national and regional levels, from meeting the educational needs of ethnic groups populating a region to supporting the interests of titular ethnic groups in places of their compact settlement outside that region. At present, settlement patterns of ethnic groups have become more complicated because of the increased internal mobility and migration. Russia has become one of the world leaders in the inflow of labor migrants.

Political status and development of the language. About 150 languages are spoken in the territory of Russia (Drofa, 1998). The Russian Constitution 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 Russian Federation (para. 1, art. 68). Some ethnic regions (the so-called ethnic republics) have the right to establish their own official languages (Konstituciya, 1993, para. 2, art. 68). In schools these languages are the languages of instruction or are separate compulsory subjects. However, options 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. Over 98% (98.2) of Russia’s entire population and 92.1% of its non-Russian population speak Russian. Only 3.1% of ethnic Russians speak other languages of the Russian Federation (Goskomstat RF, 2002). A considerable number of languages have fewer than 30,000 speakers. About 60 of them are disappearing languages and have fewer than 3,000 speakers (Woodard, 1996).

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 written forms of the languages of most ethnic groups in Russia were developed hundreds of years ago. But more than 50 groups got their written language in the 1920s and 1930s, and some at the end of the 20th century. About

20 languages remain oral (Mikhalchenko & Trushkova, 2003). Languages that have no alphabet cannot be used as a language of instruction even at the elementary school level. Only a few languages in Russia can be used for teaching science and mathematics.

Cultural (religious) groups

Russian ethnic groups historically belong to different religious traditions – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and some others. The confessional pattern of the country has greatly changed in post-Soviet times. The number of religious organizations has increased. In 2007, 22,956 religious organizations were registered in the Russian Federation. Of this number, 54.4% belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, 1.1% (250) belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and 16.5% belong to Islam (Federal Registration Service, 2007). Other religious groups constitute an insignificant share in the total number of religious organizations. The share of those who consider themselves religious increased from 57% in 1991 to 74% in 2000, and to 82% in 2007 (Federal Registration Service).

Some Russian researchers conclude that, despite an increase in numbers, it would be premature to speak of a religious revival in Russia. Garadzha (2005) states that people often call themselves Orthodox or Muslims, and view these religions as a substantial part of the cultural tradition of their ethnic group. Christianity is more widespread among Indo-European nations, Islam among Turkish and Iberian-Caucasian peoples, and Buddhism among Buryats and Kalmyks, while Tungusic-Manchurian and Finno-Ugric ethnic groups have retained their traditional beliefs (Anikanov, Stepanov, & Susokolov, 1999). Therefore, often the barriers between the religious groups reinforce those between ethnic groups.

Conclusion

A complicated ethnic composition of Russia's population and its multi-confessional nature cause the educational system to fulfill the following functions:

- *Educational function*: 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.

When formulating its educational policies, Russia has to take into consideration the existing contradiction (as noted by Kuz'min & Artemenko, 2006) between the values embedded in cultures and resulting in multi-directional cultural and educational interests of ethnic groups and a difference in the objectives they can set forth as actors in the educational area.

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, that is, the bicultural and bilingual nature of education (Baker & Jones, 1998). Seeking the balance between various functions of the schooling system for ethnic and cultural minorities, Russian educational policy has experienced multiple changes in its priorities.

Ethnicity and educational policy: Historical perspective

During the pre-Soviet period the public education policy with respect to ethnic minorities was mostly oriented towards the consolidating function. That was prompted by the peculiarities of colonialism. As Grachev (2000) states, expansion of Russia's boundaries in the 16th through the 19th century was objectively of an "incorporating" nature, for its objective was not simply to annex new territories but to incorporate the traditional populations organically into a single supranational community.

The first projects for establishing schools for Oriental non-Russians date back to the beginning of the 18th century when instruction was combined with the teaching of Russian and religious education – conversion to Christianity (Kirzhaeva & Osovskii, 2005). An achievement of the reforms by Alexander I (1804) was the introduction of the native tongue as a language of instruction (Piskunov, 2001). The industrialization of Russia in the mid-19th century made the need for establishing universal primary education an imperative for the nation-state. As a consequence, the educational policy became oriented towards Russification and the assimilation of ethnic groups (Fal'bork & Harnoluskij, 1903).

The above measures were of great practical importance for raising literacy rates. However, an attempt to create a single identity for all ethnic groups that populated the empire failed. The Soviet state used different and contradictory approaches to address the ethnic issue. It proclaimed the right of nations to self-determination, but declared that national differences were of secondary importance to class differences, while at the same time deserving respect and recognition.

In 1926, there were 169 ethnic groups in the Russian Federation (Krasovickaja, 1992). For their education, a new type of public education institution, the so-called ethnic school, was established in 1918. According to the definition of the State Committee on Education, this type of school was oriented towards "population minorities" differing from Russians in "their languages and grassroots specifics" (Krasovickaja, p. 64). Apart from general educational subjects, the content of education included the literature and history of the given ethnic group. But the main criterion of ethnic education throughout the Soviet period was that of the language of instruction, which was supposed to be the native tongue of students (Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, 1980).

Because many ethnic groups did not have written languages, it was the duty of the state to ensure the development of their alphabets. Alphabets for more than 40 ethnic languages were developed between the 1920s and the 1930s. According to 1929 data, 117 colleges in the Russian Federation trained teachers for ethnic schools, and textbooks were published in 56 ethnic languages (Bacyn & Kuz'min, 1995). Instruction in native languages was viewed as an instrument of a universal Communist education rather than one for creating an ethnic and cultural identity. The content of school textbooks was based on Communist ideology and was the same at different ethnic schools.

The establishment of ethnic schools did not conform fully to the tasks of the country's modernization and industrialization goals, which required a good knowledge of Russian. Gradually, the industrialization and unification needs began to prevail. The educational system was re-oriented towards Russian as the language of instruction in the mid-1930s (Kuz'min, 1997). That process was accompanied by reprisals against "ethnic" intellectuals (writers, teachers, and linguists), who were accused of not supporting Russian nationalism.

"Russification" of schooling was the fastest and cheapest means of reforming mass education so that it would promote industrial development. In 1927, as in 1956, instruction in the Russian Federation was carried out in 47 languages, while in 1970–1971 it was conducted in

27 languages, and in 1987–1988 in 22 languages (Bacyn & Kuz'min, 1995). As a result, in 1989, 27.6% of ethnic non-Russians considered Russian to be their native tongue (versus 24.2% in 1970) (Goskomstat RSFSR, 1990).

Communist ideology continued to provide a cultural basis for the integration of the population into a political nation. In the 1970s, it was further developed into the idea of creating an unprecedented “new community – the Soviet people” (an analogue of a political nation). There had to be no real difference between the different nations which formed the Union of Soviet Republics and even between different ethnic groups within the Russian Federation. The role of ethnic culture was officially reduced to the “form” filled with the ideological “content,” the same for the entire country. One example is the Tallinn directive announced in 1987, which strictly instructed representatives of Union republics and autonomous republics to view their own history as no more than an illustrative supplement to the state curriculum on the history of the USSR in the ratio of 1 to 10 (Bacyn & Kuz'min, 1995). Since the curriculum at all schools in the Russian Federation was the same, it played a negative rather than a positive role in developing an ethno-cultural identity in ethnic minority children.

Despite the federal system and the declared internationalist ideology, the educational policy in the USSR supported ethnic cultures only to a certain level, restricting its development after that level had been achieved and focusing on the development of a single community described as the “Soviet people.” Soviet ideologists proved incapable of rising to the idea of a multiple identity and tried to replace the idea of ethnic identity with that of a political identity.

Nonetheless, as a result of such policies the educational function of schools achieved its peak during the Soviet period; in 2000, literacy among adults reached 99.6% (Bell, 2002). At the same time, the disintegration of the Soviet Union proved the failure of the ambitious policy of assimilation. The Russian Federation was sustained. However, different ethnic groups in Russia (including ethnic Russians) entered a stage of ethnic revival.

Ethnic groups and educational policy in post-Soviet times

The process of democratization, which began in the second half of the 1980s, led to a reform of the educational system that continued through the next decade. The reform involved a number of aspects discussed in this chapter.

Role of ethnic groups in the educational policy

The Constitution of the Russian Federation (Konstituciya, 1993) guarantees the rights of “native minorities” (art. 69) and “minor ethnic communities” (para. 1m, art. 72). Therefore, ethnic groups are viewed as collective subjects possessing needs and rights. The Constitution also grants individuals equal human rights and liberties regardless of race, ethnicity, and language (para. 2, art. 19), and declares such rights as the right to a free choice of the language of education and instruction (art. 26). Rights granted by the new democratic Constitution led to the further revival of ethnic identities, increasing self-organization of ethnic groups, and a growing demand for an education supporting ethnic identity.

In response to this demand, the Law on Education (1992, 1996, and 2007) proclaimed that ethnic groups could be independent actors in the development and implementation of educational policy (Dneprov, 1996). 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.

The Law on Education (Ministerstvo Obrazovaniya i Nauki RF, 2007) also made it possible for “titular” ethnic groups to influence educational policy at the regional level. This sometimes led to unequal opportunities, in which “titular” ethnic groups enjoyed preferences in satisfying their ethno-cultural interests through education. The situation was changed by the Law on Ethnic and Cultural Autonomy of 1996, which granted all ethnic communities – united into organized institutions – the right to submit proposals to executive authorities of all levels to establish public educational institutions with an in-depth instruction of the native language and ethnic culture (Pravitelstvo RF, 1996, art. 11). This mechanism has not been fully used because civil society structures, into which ethno-cultural communities are organized, are weak.

Curriculum policy

The first version of the Law on Education (Ministerstvo Obrazovaniya i Nauki RF, 2007) legalized the structure (federal, regional [ethnic-regional], and school-level components) of the state educational standards (para. 1, art. 7). Each component included certain disciplines, for example the federal component included math, physics, biology, and the Russian language; the regional (or ethno-regional) component included local history and geography, and certain other disciplines determined by the regional authorities; and the school components included optional subjects.

There are different assessments of the problems related to this structure of the school curriculum, from recognition of its positive influence on the democratization of education to evidence of its harmful influence on the quality of education (Froumin, 2005). This approach in a number of ethnic republics gave an impetus to defining the objectives and the content of education based on an understanding of the ethnic culture as something that had taken its final shape in the past and was static, and required special measures for its conservation in the present.

An analysis of concepts of the regional (national-regional) component in different regions of Russia (Zakharov, 2007) has shown that there were two main approaches: *mono-ethnic* (or *ethno-centrist*) and *poly-ethnic*. Mono-ethnic approaches are used in some ethnic regions and in the ethnic Russian 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.

Decisions taken at the regional level often turned out to actualize the cultural monopoly of the titular ethnic group. That trend resulted in the strengthening of ethno-cultural identity but at the same time led to a decreasing tolerance (and even cases of extremism) and a threat of the disintegration of Russian society. That was proved by tragic inter-ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus.

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 Russian Federation. However, in most 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 – have indicated the need for a change in who determines the standards of education. Between 1993 and 1996, the Ministry of Education reformed the basic academic curriculum to ensure “the integration of interests of the federation, the regions, the schools, and the individuals” (Tkachenko, 1994, p. 2). The curriculum

reform attempted to find a “balance of ethnic and regional interests and the interests of educational institutions” (Tkachenko, 1996, p. 34). The share of the regional component of educational standards decreased to 10%.

To reinforce control of the federal center over the content of education, the June 2002 amendments to the Law on Education introduced annual appraisal and approval of the federal lists of textbooks recommended (permitted) for use in the educational process (Filippov, 2003). The Federal Ministry of Education justified this move also by the increasing risk of ethnocentrism and nationalism. The final move in the same direction was the abolition of the regional and school components of educational standards. Regions (including ethnic regions) found themselves prohibited from making decisions on these issues. However, such a solution only aggravated the problem.

This structure of the state education standards that ignores ethnic aspects is reinforced by the lack of attention to different ethnic perspectives in traditional school subjects such as history, literature, and geography. The authors of these subject textbooks avoid multiple ethnic perspectives. The government must offer approaches to meet the requirements of ethnic groups related to the content of education. Under the current circumstances, the policy of central government is characterized by duality and ambiguity. A trend towards centralization of education management and the unification of its content was launched in the late 1990s. However, there have also been attempts by the government to find alternative solutions to the problem by applying a multicultural approach to the curriculum. It is not clear which trend will prevail in the state educational policy of the Russian Federation.

Ethnic languages

The Constitution of the Russian Federation 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 (in this section we use data received from the Center of Educational Statistics of the Higher School of Economics in Moscow).

Between 1990 and 2006, the total number of people learning their native (non-Russian) languages increased by 59.5%. 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 (in the total number of general educational institutions) has risen from 12.9% to 18.2%.

The number of languages of instruction and people studying in their native (non-Russian) languages manifested a different dynamic. The number of languages used for instruction decreased slightly from 33 to 32 between 1990 and 2006. The number of schools with instruction in native (non-Russian) languages manifests a persistent trend towards reduction. It dropped by 16.2% from 1990 to 2006. Possibly the reason for these trends is the transition of schools from instruction in native (non-Russian) languages to instruction in the Russian language while retaining native (non-Russian) languages as separate subjects. This is confirmed by a significant increase in the number of teachers of native (non-Russian) languages from 11,700 in 1990 to 26,000 in 2006.

The educational policy in the Russian Federation has created conditions for the study of native (non-Russian) languages in the educational process. This policy indicates the revival of the national languages and the strengthening of ethnic identity. The best opportunities (regulatory, legal, and organizational) in the regions of Russia exist for the languages of titular ethnic

groups. The status of official language of a region allows it to be taught as a mandatory course in the ethnic region regardless of the fact that the given ethnic group might not constitute the majority of the population. An increasing number of citizens contact government authorities of the Russian Federation asking the authorities to permit their children who do not belong to the titular ethnic group to avoid study of the titular ethnic language.

The situation resulted in a resolution of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation confirming: (a) the status of the Russian language as the universal official language of the Russian Federation; (b) the need to teach the official languages of the Russian Federation without harm to the study of the Russian language; and (c) the need for a differentiated approach in addressing the issues related to the study of languages of titular ethnic groups, with the goal of preventing any abuse of citizens' other rights and liberties (Constitutional Court of the RF, 2004). However, the responses of the regional authorities to language problems in education remain slow; no amendments have been made to relevant regulatory acts of the regions.

In post-Soviet times, ethnic revival is manifested in the expansion of the study of ethnic languages in schools, mostly as separate subjects. This process has so far failed to overcome the Russian national bilingualism policy because of the languages of "titular" ethnic groups.

Education and religious groups

The revival of religious life in post-Soviet Russia led to the increasing importance of education in the formation of religious identity. The relationship between religious organizations and the state in the area of education is regulated by a number of federal legal acts. Their authors were guided by the experience of those Western countries where the church is separated from the state (Hull, 1984). Legally, education in state and municipal educational institutions is of a secular nature (Law on Education, 2007, para. 4, art. 2). Any religious activity is prohibited in schools (Ministerstvo Obrazovanija i Nauki RF, 2008, para. 5, art. 1). Nonetheless, citizens have the right to obtain religious education in the following four ways:

- 1 by attending religious services as well as classes in Sunday schools;
- 2 in the family;
- 3 at non-state educational institutions established by religious organizations;
- 4 at state and municipal educational institutions if requested in writing by parents and the children's consent is given.

According to data of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation (2008), during the 2005–2006 academic year a total of 203 religious educational institutions operated in the Russian Federation, and 61.1% of this number were general (full) secondary education institutions. These educational institutions usually enroll a few dozen students. Besides confessional education whose goal is to introduce students to religious traditions and faith, the Russian law permits religious studies that teach students knowledge about the history of various religions. This approach does not violate the principle of secular education. However, it caused heated public discussions, because purely religious courses were often offered under the guise of the "study of religious culture." In a number of cases, religious organizations participated in the development of courses, and in 20 regions they were taught by clergy (Ministerstvo Obrazovanija i Nauki RF, 2008).

The current policy of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation on the study of

religion is ambiguous – it periodically supports both multi-confessional and mono-confessional approaches. There is a possibility of the introduction of a compulsory course on World Religions: History, Culture, and Religious Doctrine in September 2008. The course authors emphasize its secular nature because they view religion as a part of culture (Pravoslavie.ru, 2007). State support has been given to the subject Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture. Textbooks for this course have become an object of close attention from both domestic and foreign authors because they do not support a multicultural perspective and often increase ethno-cultural isolation (Willems, 2006).

Interestingly, the introduction of religious subjects has been recently justified by the explanation that students need a spiritual and moral socialization (Moscow Patriarchia, 2007). This kind of approach supports the trend towards the transition from the study of religion to religious education. Under such circumstances, the ambiguous position of the Ministry of Education and Science will increase the influence of dominating religious groups and – considering the multi-confessional composition of the country's population – will be a source of possible religious conflicts.

Problems of educational policy

The above analysis indicates that Russia's current policy on education related to ethnic minorities and small religious groups contains a number of contradictions that require immediate solution:

- 1 The Law on Education lacks a mechanism for harmonizing the interests of the increased number of stakeholders who participate in the formulation of educational policy. Contradictions that arose in the orientation of the educational policies of the Russian Federation and Russian Federation regions could have been solved by the development of such a mechanism. Instead, the federal center preferred the tactics of limiting the choice of action of the regions. This resulted in an indirect abuse of the interests of the ethnic groups (mostly titular ones) populating those regions. The situation is even more complex in the context of significant differences between various ethnic regions. These differences are manifested in the interconnection between religion and ethnicity, and through the revival of ethnic traditions and language. However, the Russian Federation Constitution treats all ethnic republics equally. The current policy of "one size fits all" cannot be easily changed to a more flexible policy that reflects the different needs and interests of various ethnic groups.
- 2 The educational policy in the Russian Federation lacks a single strategic orientation. Different and sometimes contradictory tendencies coexist. In the area of the content of education, there is a tendency to deprive the regions of the ability to make decisions (since the late 1990s), while retaining the multi-subject nature of educational policy by basing the content of education on the principle of a dialogue of cultures. In the area of language policy there is a tendency to expand the possibilities for the study of native languages by representatives of titular ethnic groups at the expense of a reduction in the share of other languages – including Russian – in the content of education. In the area of education related to the study of religion there is a tendency to support both courses of a multi-confessional nature and subjects orientated towards the Christianization of students. A result of the above contradiction is that there is no mechanism for the successful simultaneous formation of ethnic and all-Russian (supra-ethnic) personal identity or for

the implementation of an ethno-cultural and consolidating function of education in a multinational society.

- 3 Education has to play a critical role in the development of values of recognition and tolerance in an intolerant society. However, declarations of an educational policy that supports tolerance are not supported in the Russian Federation by methodologies and substantive innovations in multicultural education. In general, Russian society and the nation are in search of a response to the obvious trend towards an increasing role of education in the formation of ethnic and religious values. So far, neither society nor the state is ready to offer a concept of a truly multicultural education that enables students to develop multiple identities and become tolerant citizens.

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