

New times – new education



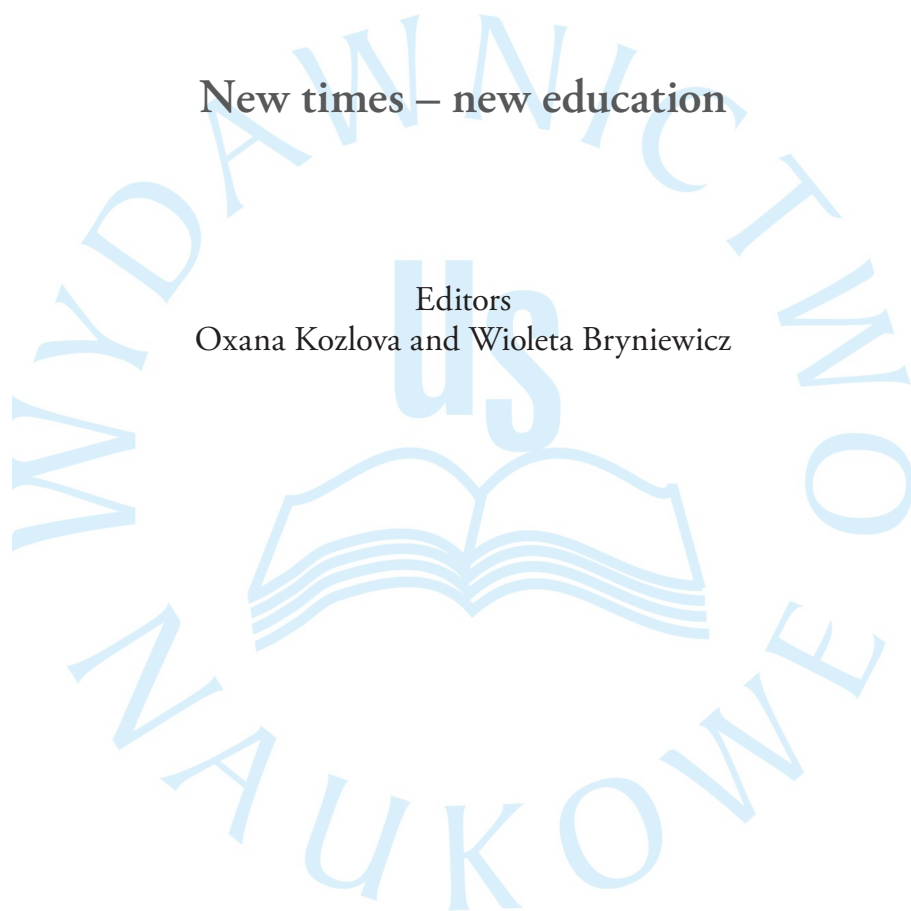


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**New times – new education**

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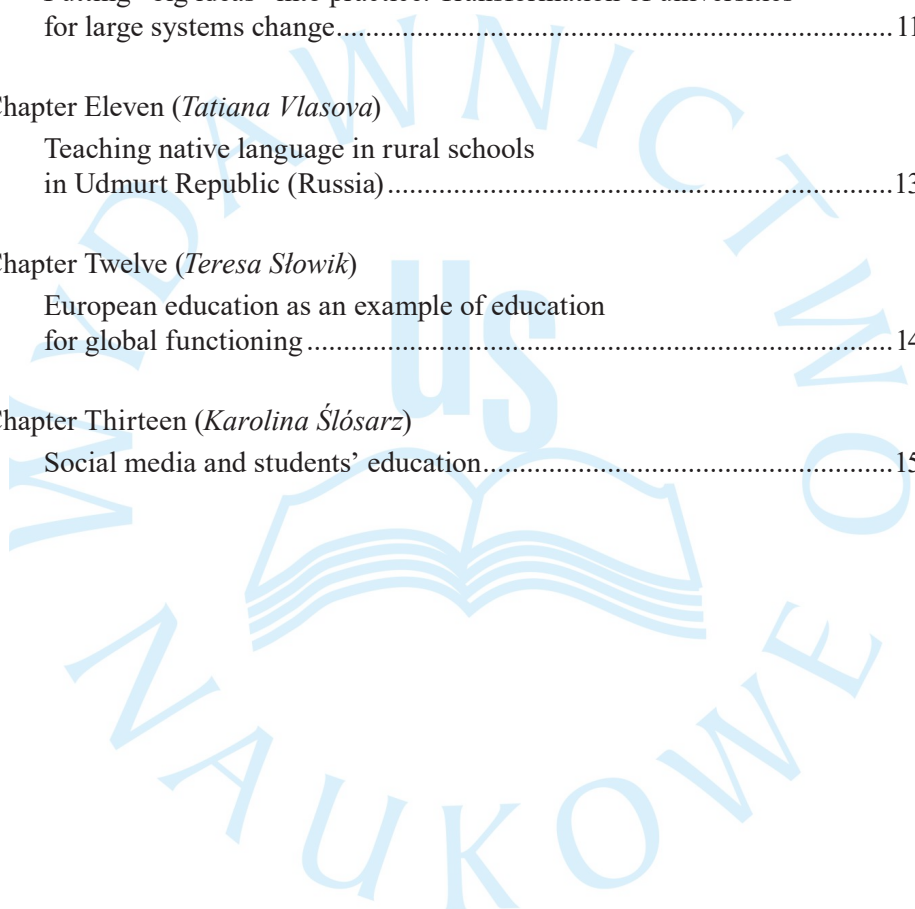
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## Chapter Eleven

TATIANA VLASOVA

### Teaching native language in rural schools in Udmurt Republic (Russia)

Problems of revival of ethnic languages, identity and traditions have been discussed in Russian regions since early 1990s. Intermittently, proposals to introduce compulsory training of the Udmurt language, as it is done in the neighbouring regions (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Komi Republic) are put forward by local politicians. But such initiatives do not take support neither from teachers nor from parents and students. The introduction of mandatory programmes requires financial support, as well as the revision of curricula and improvement of ethnic languages teaching methods. In addition, the introduction of obligatory teaching of native languages needs large-scale promotion of the Udmurt language, as an educational course and cultural potential. A concept of ethnic education includes educational programmes for learning native language, ethnic culture and local history, being taught to children from ethnic minorities in the regions of Russia. The purpose of this study was to establish how parents evaluate the progress of the children who were educated within ethnic programs.

## Ethnic education and regional autonomy

In the study of ethnic groups in current Russia the cultural similarity due to common Soviet heritage should be considered. The cultural diversity is often not obvious in the European part of Russia because of the dominant Russian language and universal everyday lifestyle.

The experience of ethnic relations in different regions varies, depending on the configuration of the ethnic composition. Sociological study of ethnic education was primarily conducted on materials survey of the population in the Republic of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Firstly, large-scale surveys were conducted in these regions, and secondly, local government has promoted political reforms of the regional schools there. In all these regions in the 1990s, Local Language Law introduced ethnic languages as an obligatory subject in the school curriculum. These reforms during 1990s began as part of a general policy based on empowering regional powers of sovereignty.

The results of the introduction of the compulsory study of one of the languages in the regions are variously estimated. On the one hand, cultural diversity gives mutual benefits to ethnic groups in the region. But on the other hand, Valery Tishkov believes that the principle of compulsion violates the freedom of choice of parents and students. These authors also express their concern that children are taught history and culture from the ethnocentric viewpoint (Tishkov, 2001, p. 68).

Katherine Graney offers another assessment. Analysing the reform of education in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, she defines them as components of the “Sovereignty project.” The main point of the reform was the task of forming the budget of the local education on the level of region. Then regional authority received the right of autonomy (Graney, 1999, p. 613). The reforms in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan covered higher and secondary education. In both regions, compulsory study of the Tatar language was introduced to all students, regardless of their ethnic identity. While in the neighbouring regions, including Udmurt Republic, teaching of the ethnic language was based on a traditional Soviet type second or third language, the study of Tatar language was oriented by European reforms.

Most of bilingual schools are located in rural areas. As a rule, parents in different Russian regions support the existence of ethnic schools (Abramova, Goncharova, 2009; Dobrushina, 2009; Namrueva, 2010; Khodjaeva, 2011). A positive attitude may be explained by the fact that the school is understood as



a reproduction channel of cultural and ethnic traditions. Communication in the mother tongue exists within the borders of the school, but it maintains ethnic identity and serves as unifying symbol for ethnic population.

Because of the lack of financial support for native languages programmes, teachers use domestic forms of creating communicative environment. For example, grandparents speak their native language with grandchildren, helping them to prepare homework (Fedorova, Baranova, 2012, p. 89). The main problem with teaching native languages is that there is a discrepancy between the dialects and literary norms in textbooks. In addition, rural schools experience difficulties with textbooks and qualified teachers. Furthermore, researches of educational strategies for kids from indigenous ethnic and migrant families show the dependence of opportunities for children to get a quality secondary and higher education on the incomes and education of their parents.

## The methodology of the study

Parents from rural areas cannot choose school for their children. Continuation of education in universities or colleges depends on final exams evaluation. Most of the parents are interested in kids' success. Research project was focused on parents' attitudes toward the ethnic programs in rural schools.

The survey was conducted in rural schools of the Udmurt Republic from October till December 2014. Two-stage sampling was used: in the first phase, clusters of regions of the Udmurt Republic were identified, which later participated in the second stage. First, districts selection was made on the basis of census data, which provided a possibility to consider ethnic composition in different areas. Three clusters were formed from the 25 districts of the Udmurt Republic. Each cluster includes three districts according to the proportions of the ethnic composition of the population. Udmurt population dominates in Sharkan, Alnashi, and Debessy; an equal share of Russian and Udmurt populations is found in Zavyalovo, Uva and Kizner; the smallest proportion of the Udmurt is in Sarapul, Karakulino and Kambarka. Within the first cluster of the districts, 788 worksheets were collected, in the second cluster – 767, and in the third cluster – 701. 2256 respondents were involved in total.

Secondly, the formation sampling statistics was used. In the academic year 2014–2015 in rural schools of the Udmurt Republic the number of students was

61, 312. This amount is unevenly distributed in selected areas. The lowest number of students is in Debessy district (1399) and the largest number is in Zavyalovo district (6517). Likewise, the distribution of ethnic schools is uneven: there are no ethnic schools in Kambarka district but in Alnashi and Sharkan districts 75% students study in ethnic schools. To ensure equal representation of complex sample was used, combining elements of the cluster approach and random sampling. The questionnaires were distributed by regional Education Offices. 400 worksheets were sent in each district. From 200 to 300 worksheets were coming back.

## The use of the Russian and Udmurt languages in everyday communication

According to the 2010 census data, the ethnic composition in the Udmurt Republic includes 62.2% of Russian population, 28% of Udmurt population, and 6.7% of the Tatars. The ethnic identity of people who participated in research corresponds to the census data. The question was articulated in such a way that the respondents had to choose from a position that marked major ethnic groups living in the Udmurt Republic: Udmurt, Russian, or Tatar. Constructivism shows that many people in urban environments exhibit “drift identity.” Thus, we left the opportunity to give one’s answer or choose the option “difficult to answer.”

The ethnic composition of the rural area consists of Udmurt population (52.4%), Russian population (37.7%), and Tatar population (2%). Some respondents identified themselves as ethnic groups such as the Chuvash, Kalmyks, Ukrainians, Belarussians, or Armenians. In Karakulino district, the study involved parents of Mari ethnic school, and thus the sample represented a significant number of Mari population. Eight respondents indicated a complex ethnic identity: a combination of Russian and Tatar, as well as Russian and Udmurt ethnicity.

From the perspective of the constructivism the interest was not to measure the index of ethnicity, and to confirm the stability of the reproduction of ethnic indicator in surveys of different levels. More important was to identify the degree of use of the Udmurt language, or a combination of everyday communication in Russian and Udmurt languages. The Russian language is dominant in the urban space: the total sample of 78% of respondents use only Russian. However, in rural areas the main part of Udmurt population is bilingual. According to this

survey, approximately half of the respondents (51%) reported using only Russian in everyday communication. A significant proportion of respondents (39.8%) combine Udmurt and Russian languages. Other participants use Russian and ethnic languages: Tatar, Mari, Armenian, Tajik, and Chechen.

In rural areas the majority of parents who identified themselves as Udmurt (70.7%) indicated that the family used Udmurt as a home language. Only 23.9% of Udmurts reported that the family uses only the Russian language.

### Ethnic programs in rural schools in Udmurt Republic

Parents interviewed in rural schools generally have a positive view on the ethnic programmes. To the question “Would you like your child to study the national language?” 56.9% of respondents replied positively, while 21.3% – negatively. Parents also support the study of ethnic languages because they give general educational opportunities for students in the whole region. Majority of the respondents answered, “I accept” (41.4%) or “positive” (27.6%). Negative evaluation gave 12.6% of respondents.

Among those who support the existence of ethnic programs in the whole region or in particular schools, Udmurt parents dominate. 59% of Udmurt parents would like their children to learn the ethnic language and 85.6% agree that it is necessary to preserve ethnic schools. Parents with another ethnic identity, including Tatars, also recognize the need. But they are more critical. Supportive opinion was manifested by 48.9% of Tatar and 49.6% Russian parents. It is important to note that they do not express their disagreement directly (14.9% – rather disagree, 7.9% – completely disagree), while Russian parents choose the option “difficult to answer” (27.6%).

The number of supportive respondents correlates with the amount of the Udmurt population in different districts. In districts from the first cluster, the number of respondents supporting the preservation of ethnic education reaches 85.4% in Sharkan, 89.9% in Alnashy and 77.5% in Debesy. In the districts with equal parts of Udmurt and Russian population, ethnic programmes are accepted by 69% respondents in Uva, 71.6% in Kizner and 78.9% in Zavyalovo. Zavyalovo district was an interesting case in this study. Zavyalovo is a suburb of Izhevsk and

widely involved in various cultural and folklore events. Therefore, the majority of parents are interested in knowing the ethnic language and traditions, which are perceived as a resource for the development of children and adolescents. Finally, in districts of the third cluster the number of parents who support the ethnic programs decreases: 48.2% (Kambarka), 46.9% (Sarapul), 51.5% (Karakulino), 52.4% (Votkinsk).

A possible explanation for the position of the respondents of different ethnic identity can lie in the way the question was formulated. The question in the worksheet was verbalized from the perspective of an ethnic programme with its linguistic component. Thus, if a family does not speak the ethnic language in everyday life, the value of the whole complex of ethnic programmes is small.

The survey demonstrates that the ethnic programs in rural schools exist in such conditions re the ethnic language is taught to all student of the school (in the district of the first cluster), or not taught at school (in the district of the third cluster). 34.4% of respondents reported that their child goes to school where all the children learn the Udmurt language. 16.4% of respondents said that the ethnic language is not only taught at school, but also used in everyday life. 28.4% of parents indicated that the ethnic language is not taught at school. 9.3% respondents described the situation where the school recruited separate classes with Udmurt or another ethnic language. This case is characteristic for large schools with a large number of students, which are typical for the regional centres. Interestingly, 14% of respondents could not answer this question, which may be indicative of an insufficient level of awareness about the content of school programmes.

The type of organization of the Udmurt language education depends on the proportion of Udmurt population in the districts. In the districts with a high proportion of Udmurt population (Alnashi, Debessy and Sharkan) respondents reported that their children are enrolled in schools where the national language is obligatory. This answer was given by 68.4% of respondents in Sharkan, 54.9% in Alnashi, and 57.8% in Debessy. A significant number of parents in Alnashy District (51.4%) said that their family used Udmurt in everyday life. In Sharkan and Debessy districts, the percentage was lower: 29.1% and 20.9%.

In the districts with equal parts of Russian and Udmurt population, teaching ethnic languages is organized differently. Less number of the children is enrolled in schools where the Udmurt language is obligatory (29.9% in Zavyalovo, 27.6% in Kizner, and only 18% in Uva). Therefore, the school administrations organize ethnic education to open separate classes with Udmurt language teaching. This was reported by 23.4% of respondents in Zavyalovo area, 13.8% in Kizner, and

4.1% in Uva. In the districts of the second cluster there is a large difference in the number of children who attend schools which do not teach the Udmurt language: 23.8% in Zavyalovo, 26% in Kizner, but 52% in Uva.

In areas of the third cluster, with a predominance of the Russian population, only a small proportion of parents indicated that their children learned at schools with the Udmurt language. In the Sarapul district, this answer was given by 6.9% of respondents, in Kambarka by 5.2%, and in Votkinsk district by 3.7%. The reply saying that their children do not learn Udmurt language was chose by 60.5% of the parents in Sarapul district, 62.2% in Kambarka and 73.2% in Votkinsk district. It should be noted that in all three districts, about one-fifth of parents found it difficult to answer this question.

An interesting case is presented by Karakulino district. The main part of worksheets was collected in the Mari ethnic school. The data show that a large proportion of children learn their native language as a compulsory part of the program (45.7%). Parents reported using Mari tongue in everyday communication too (24.3%).

## The problem of obligatory study of the Udmurt language in schools

The majority of parents from the rural areas are enthusiastic about native language teaching. Their opinion is that the opportunity to study the Udmurt language should be in every school of the Udmurt Republic. The respondents were almost equally divided into two basic positions: 39.8% of respondents believed that the study of the native language should be optional in the programme, while 31.5% were the proponents of an obligatory course. 12.2% of the parents thought that ethnic schools have to organize classes only in the rural area, where Udmurt population predominates. Only 4.6% of respondents believed it was necessary to completely abandon ethnic programmes in schools.

Supporters of the obligatory study of native languages were Udmurt parents. Among the respondents who chose this answer, 87.4% were parents of the Udmurt identity, while Russian parents constituted only 10%. Supporters of the optional teaching were Russian parents. Thus, 63.5% of Russian respondents

choose the answer “ethnic schools should be located only in villages with the majority of Udmurt population.”

Ethnic composition in the different districts influences the number of supporters and opponents of obligatory studying of the Udmurt language in schools. The largest number of supporters of the idea of obligatory ethnic language study in schools is observed in Alnashy District (75.5%). 16.1% of parents in the area tend to choose an optional course. Only 2.8% of respondents chose the answer that is associated with the rejection of the Udmurt language study in schools. In two other districts from the first cluster there are two interrelated trends. Firstly, the research findings show a decrease in the number of respondents who believe that the study of the Udmurt language should be obligatory. The percentage of parents, who support the idea that the course should be optional, appears to be low. Thus, in Sharkan district obligatory studying of the native language was supported by 61.8% of respondents, and in Debessy by 51.6%. Proponents of an optional course in Sharkan area totalled at 33.3%, and in Debesskom – 38.2%. In three districts, the number of responses offering to abandon the Udmurt language in schools was 2.8% in Alnashy District, 0.5% in Debessy and 1% in Sharkan.

In districts of the second cluster the supporters of optional teaching of the Udmurt language increased. In Zavyalovo District, a course for the native language was required by 29.7% of respondents, 29.9% in Kizner, and Uva even less – 19.4%. 46.5% of parents in Kizner district, 55.2% in Zavyalovo and 59.5% in Uva preferred an optional course.

In the third cluster of districts, only a small proportion of respondents chose an obligatory course: 6.5% in Kambarka, 6.3% in Karakulino and 4.3% in Sarapul, 11% in Votkinsk. The number of those who advocated an elective course is less than in the second cluster of districts: in Karakulino 24.6%, in Kambarka 36.6%, and in Votkinsk 56.1%, in Sarapul 56.5%. On the contrary, the percentage of respondents believed that the Udmurt language should be taught where ethnic groups live compactly. Parents who chose this answer are in Votkinsk 12.2%, in Sarapul 21.7%, in Kambarka 30.1%, and in Karakulino 41.3%.

What is more, parents were asked to rate the importance of various components of the ethnic programs. As a rule, the cycle of ethnic education includes native language ethnography, local history and local geography. In addition, the teaching of ethnic and cultural objects may be accompanied by an emphasis on ethnic, regional or civic identity. The question was formulated in such a way that parents should choose what they consider most important for children during learning in the ethnic school.

A survey in rural areas showed that the answers are distributed almost equally in all respects. Learning the mother tongue was considered as most important by 20.7% of respondents. But this number is only slightly greater than that of those who claimed that the value lies in knowledge of the local history (19.6%) and culture (18.9%) of the region. A slightly smaller number of respondents recognized the importance of the formation of ethnic (16%) and regional (17.7%) identity.

For Udmurt parents the most important are: mother tongue (25.6%) and the formation of ethnic identity (21.2%) and regional identity (21.1%). These figures are higher than in the total sample. At the same time, less than the average figures represent the respondents who recognize superior value of teaching local history courses on ethnic culture (17.2%) and regional history (15%).

Tatars parents attached great importance to the teaching of the mother tongue, for 29.5% indicated that answer in this ethnic group. They also emphasize the need to know the culture of the region (29.5%). However, significantly fewer respondents in a sample of parents indicate Tatar ethnic (13.6%) and regional (9.1%) identity.

For Russian parents, the importance of regional studies courses is obvious. The knowledge of the culture of their native land is considered important by 23.8%, and the knowledge of history by 29.2%, whereas knowledge of the ethnic language was chosen only by 17.5% respondents, and ethnic identity by 10.9%.

Thus, of all the selected options, importance to learn the native language was chose by 61.2% of Udmurt parents and 29.3% of Russian parents. Even more clearly the proportion demonstrates the importance of ethnic identity. Among the respondents who attached importance to ethnic identity were 65.8% of Udmurt parents and 23.6% of Russian parents. The importance of knowledge of the ethnic culture is maintained by 45.1% of Udmurt parents and 43.7% Russian parents. The need for knowledge of local history is maintained by 37.9% of Udmurt and 51.5% of the Russian parents.

In our view, the percentage of responses reflects not only the priorities of the cultural values of the respondents, but a hierarchy of subjects in the national school, due to the degree of elaboration of methodological courses of the native (Udmurt) language and regional studies. Having methodically less developed and unreliable textbooks, local history courses, which include knowledge of the history of his native land, are valued by parents as being less important than the study of the Udmurt language.

Keeping in mind that the question of the significance of different ethnic and cultural components of the programme is important, parents answered taking into account the peculiarities of teaching different subjects at schools where their children study.

## Conclusion

The survey results suggest that there is a high degree of resistance patterns of ethnic identity, expressed in matching the census data and the figures obtained in the survey. It is also proved by previous findings of sociological studies on the active use of the Udmurt language as a means of communication in the districts where this population constitutes the ethnic majority. The widespread use of Udmurt language in everyday life promotes support for the ethnic programmes in schools. Therefore, they are demanded in the rural area. Yet, the attitudes of the parents depend on how tightly they and their children are related to the network which communicates in Udmurt.

It is a debatable question whether to introduce compulsory study of the Udmurt language in the region or not. Proponents of a compulsory course are rural parents, who live in districts where the Udmurt language is used. However, most parents support the optional course because they are concerned about final exams score. Ethnic programs should not be linked only to teaching ethnic languages. Cultural studies courses can become a resource for students' success in the prestigious junior high school in cities.

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