

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Language and Literacy

The Russian Federation has one official state language: Russian.¹ According to statistics from 2016, Russians account for 110.8 million of the national population of 146.5 million. Republics that are members of the Russian Federation have the right to have their own official languages, and there are 37 official languages in these republics. According to Chapter 14, “Language of Education,” of the federal law *On Education in the Russian Federation*, teaching and learning of the official languages of the republics of the Russian Federation can be introduced at educational organizations, which are located in those Republics.² Teaching and learning the official languages of the republics should not be done at the expense of teaching and learning the official language of the Russian Federation. Chapter 14 also indicates that citizens of the Russian Federation have the right to receive preschool, elementary, and secondary education in their native language, which qualifies as one of the languages of the people of the Russian Federation. They also have the right to learn their native language as one of the languages of the people of the Russian Federation, within the constraints of the capabilities of the national educational system. Implementation of the above rights is executed by the creation of educational organizations, classes, and groups, as well as creation of the operational conditions for their functioning.

According to the last census in 2010, representatives of more than 180 nationalities and ethnic groups live in Russia. Russia’s population speaks 239 languages and dialects. Most students are taught in Russian; some students study one of 89 languages of national ethnic groups of the Russian Federation. In recent years, the number of schools with instruction in the native language has grown significantly in some regions.

Overview of the Education System

According to the federal law *On Education in the Russian Federation*, passed in 2012, the government guarantees citizens free general and free vocational education on a competitive basis at state and municipal educational institutions.

According to this law, federal authorities are responsible for the development and implementation of unified educational policy, regional authorities are responsible for the development and implementation of regional programs, and local authorities are responsible for the organization of education at different levels according to federal education standards. Federal education authorities

create federal policy, oversee its implementation, and develop the legislative basis for the functioning of the education system. Furthermore, federal authorities establish federal and state educational standards and develop model curricula and model programs of study for school subjects on the basis of these standards. Federal authorities also oversee expert review of textbooks and supplementary literature for schools.^a

The public system of education comprises general education at the preprimary, primary, basic, and upper secondary levels, and vocational education at the secondary, higher, and postgraduate levels. General education (Grades 1 to 11) is compulsory according to the Constitution.

Preprimary education is for children ages 3 to 6 and is not compulsory. In 2016, 49,400 preprimary institutions served 7.34 million children.³ Because of the significant increase of the birth rate in recent years and the lack of municipal kindergartens necessary for all children, new types of institutions have been established, including family kindergartens.

Primary general education comprises Grades 1 to 4 and may be provided in primary schools, in basic schools that include the primary stage, and in secondary education institutions that include all three stages. Basic general education or lower secondary education comprises Grades 5 to 9, while secondary general or upper secondary education consists of Grades 10 and 11. Because general education is compulsory, students who finish basic school and wish to attend vocational school will study general education subjects (equivalent to Grades 10 and 11, but at a basic level) as well as vocational education subjects and skills.

Approximately 98 percent of all primary, basic, and secondary schools in Russia are state-municipal, meaning the municipal budget is the schools' main source of financing and that many decisions are made at the regional level. In the school year 2015–2016 there were 42,600 state-municipal schools with 14,666 students.^{4,5} This reflected a decrease in the number of educational organizations reported in 2011, due to the tendency to combine several schools into one larger school. In 2015, nonstate general education institutions comprised 800 schools and catered to only 0.72 percent of students.⁶

In the last decade, the main innovations in general education included the following:

- Federal State Educational Standards were introduced in 2011 for primary schools and in 2015 for basic schools, emphasizing requirements that pertain to curriculum structure; student achievement in personal, metacognitive, and academic subject domains; and conditions for curriculum implementation. The requirements that pertain to student achievement can be considered competence based.
- A national system of independent national examinations was created in 2009, known as the Unified State Examination.
- An independent system for evaluating the quality of education was introduced, aiming to facilitate independent school assessment by allowing any independent organization (i.e., public organizations, parents, schools, educational authorities, etc.) to initiate the evaluation process.

^a The federal law on the new education standards, *Law No. 309*, was introduced on December 1, 2007.



The Ministry of Education and Science developed recommendations for conducting independent evaluations and using the results.

In accordance with the new law on education, two main documents were developed to regulate general education at all stages (preprimary, primary, basic, and secondary): the Federal State Educational Standards and the Model Basic Educational Program. They include three types of requirements:^b

- The structure of main curricula and programs
- Requirements for the conditions of program realization
- Requirements for achievement results

The idea of inclusive education is actively being developed in the Russian Federation. Typically, students with special needs were educated at specialized schools. Many parents prefer to send children with special needs to regular public schools. This tendency requires intensive retraining of teachers of primary schools.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

In primary education there are seven models for the subject of literary reading and nine models for the subject of Russian language, each with its own set of textbooks and supplementary materials. Although these models are based on the education standards, each model has its own conceptual framework.

The contemporary approach to reading instruction may be characterized as “literary reading” and is implemented through the philology course, which includes learning to read and write Russian. The literary reading course became possible with an increase in the use of different kinds of texts (e.g., official or scientific) in the main subject areas of the surrounding world, mathematics, Russian, and history. Literary reading is part of the continuous literary education from Grades 1 to 11. A broad goal of literary reading in primary school is to introduce students to literature as the art of writing and expose them to the world of human relations and moral values. Literary reading aims to develop students’ skills of conscious reading and understanding texts, as well as skills in oral and written speech. Reading also aims to foster students’ creative abilities and personal development.

The method widely used now to teach reading was developed by the famous psychologist Daniil Elkonin in the 1960s. The method is based on the premise that before studying the letters of the Russian alphabet, preparatory work is necessary whereby children are taught to orient themselves in the phonetic system of the Russian language. Students learn to define the sequence of sounds in a word and characterize each sound, such as vowel/consonant or hardness/softness of consonants. By acquiring the knowledge of the phonetic system at an early stage, it is believed that children become better familiarized with the skills of reading.

^b The federal law on the new education standards, *Law No. 309*, was introduced on December 1, 2007.



Summary of National Curriculum

PIRLS 2016 students learned literary reading according to the Federal State Education Standard (FSES) of primary education issued in 2009 and entered into practice in 2011. The program of literary reading taught in all primary schools includes the following components:

- The techniques of reading and understanding texts, including reading of literary and scientific texts silently and aloud, understanding the content and main idea of texts, answering questions regarding the content of texts, and making a simple outline from which to retell texts
- A reader's view and orientation to the world of books, including folklore, fairy tales, myths, and legends of the people of Russia and the world; Russian classics (from the list of children's books recommended for reading) and modern Russian literature; foreign literature; children's newspapers and magazines; bibliographic information (e.g., author, title, annotation, contents); and dictionaries and reference books
- Special literature knowledge, such genres of works (e.g., story or fairy tale, fable, poem or rhyme, novel, play), the specific forms of folklore (e.g., riddles, patterns, songs, proverbs), the topic of texts (e.g., main idea, subject, the character and behavior of the hero), and means of expression in texts (e.g., epithets, comparisons, sound and rhyme in poetry)
- Language development, including activities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing; knowledge of text purposes (e.g., narration, description, reasoning); etymology of the Russian language; emotional and stylistic coloring of speech (e.g., expressive reading and storytelling, speech etiquette); and demonstrating understanding by retelling, creating a connected story about the main characters, and summarizing students' impressions of texts

Within the area of literary reading, the new FSES have four sections of objectives: types of speech and reading activities, terminology of children's literature, introduction to literary texts (literary propaedeutics), and creative activity (for literary texts). The new standards pay more attention to reading to acquire information.

According to the FSES, school subject achievement after the completion of the reading curriculum for primary general education should reflect:

- Understanding literature as a phenomenon of national and world culture and as a means of preservation and transmission of moral values and traditions
- Recognizing the importance of reading for personal development, for the formation of ideas about the world of Russian history and culture, original ethical ideas, concepts of good and evil, morality, successful learning in all academic subjects, and the need for systematic reading
- Understanding the role of the reader and the use of different types of reading (e.g., introduction, studying, sampling, searching) to be able to perceive consciously and evaluate the content and specificity of various texts, to participate in discussions, and to give and justify moral assessment of characters

- Achieving required continuing education for the reader’s level of competence in common speech development (i.e., to master the reading analysis and transformation of artistic, scientific, and popular and academic texts using basic concepts of literary criticism)
- Being able to choose interesting books and use reference sources to understand and obtain more information

The FSES also specifies the requirements for intersubject results, which should reflect the acquisition of skills to read for meaning in texts of different styles and genres in accordance with goals and objectives; to build verbal expression consciously in accordance with the objectives of the communication; and to prepare texts in oral and written forms.

In the course of primary education, the FSES allows for learning the intersubject program Development of Universal Learning Skills, including through the program “Reading. Working with a Text.”

When working with a text, the following areas are emphasized: searching for information and reading comprehension, transformation and interpretation of information, and evaluation and application of information.

Teachers, Teacher Education, and Professional Development

In accordance with the professional standards of the teacher, approved in 2013 by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Russian Federation, primary school teachers must have completed higher education or secondary professional education in education and pedagogy. Teachers can obtain bachelor’s and then master’s degrees in pedagogical education with the specialization of primary education. The length of a four year bachelor program is 8,540 hours and includes theoretical, practical, and research work; teaching in school takes 10 percent to 15 percent of instructional time. Pedagogical colleges offer a two year program following graduation from secondary school or a four year program following graduation from basic school.

In recent years, earning a diploma from a higher education institution has become more popular among primary teacher candidates. Even those who received their primary teacher qualification from a pedagogical college typically will continue their training in a higher education institution. To receive a higher education diploma, a student must complete the program of study specified in the curriculum, prepare and defend his or her graduate qualification work, and pass the state examination. The teacher training curriculum for each higher education institution is developed on the basis of the Federal State Education Standards for higher professional education and includes the study plan, programs of study for all subjects and courses, and programs for teaching practice in school. The curriculum includes federal, regional or institutional, and student components. The federal component, covering 70 percent of training time, ensures that all students across the country studying the same specialization at higher education institutions will have 70 percent of the content of education in common. The distribution of time between the institutional and student components is decided by the individual institutions.

There are four cycles in training. The first includes general humanitarian and social-economic subjects and is relatively the same for all higher education institutions, regardless of the specialization. The following subjects, only four of which are compulsory for all higher education institutions, are included in the first cycle: foreign language, physical education, history of the fatherland, philosophy, culture, politics, jurisprudence, Russian language and the culture of speech, sociology, philosophy, and economics. The second cycle consists of general mathematics and general science subjects. The third cycle comprises general professional subjects for primary education and includes psychology, pedagogy, age anatomy, physiology and hygiene, and the basics of medicine. Finally, the professional cycle accounts for the largest block of time and includes Russian language, children's literature, introduction to the history of literature, methodology and instruction in teaching Russian language and literature, mathematics, science, technology, fine arts, and music. Elective courses represent the smallest proportion in the curriculum.

New professional standards for teachers will be introduced in 2017.

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

There is no specialization in teaching reading. Training in the teaching of reading is included in methodology and instruction in teaching Russian language and literature.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development In Reading for Teachers

There is no specific requirement for ongoing professional development in reading. Primary teachers take part in in-service training every three years, but this is no longer compulsory and is in the process of changing its orientation to align with the new goals of education. Retraining of teachers is conducted at the regional level. Regional systems of training for primary school teachers include express courses and long term courses. Teachers explore active forms of organization of educational process; a variety of ways and means of obtaining, storing, and processing information; the semantic strategies of reading; and the basics of professional speech culture. The emphasis has switched from subject content to student development, so teachers will receive more training in active learning strategies and child development. According to the state education policy, teachers' work will be evaluated not by knowledge level but by the main developmental indicators of their students. Accordingly, some in-service training focuses on new ways of assessing student achievement and development. The results of regional independent assessments, including reading literacy, are taken into account when the training programs are developed. Primary school teachers' certification includes assessments of professional competence in developing interdisciplinary skills (reading literacy, logic skills, and abilities to solve problems).

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

In primary schools, there is no specialized reading teacher. The classroom teacher usually teaches all subjects except music and an experienced teacher, such as the deputy principal, is responsible for providing instructional help to other teachers in all subjects including literary reading. The class size in the primary school, according to Ministry recommendations, should not exceed 25 students.



Teachers typically work with the whole class during reading instruction. Students or the teacher read aloud to the class, and the teacher organizes class discussion about what was read. Currently, group and pair work is becoming more common. In Grade 1, when not all students can read, instruction may focus on individual or group activities. Sometimes students who can read when they begin Grade 1 are grouped together for advanced learning.

Instructional Time

The school year begins on the first of September and has 170 or 204 instructional days, depending on whether the school has a five day or six day week. The duration of the holidays during the school year is no fewer than 30 calendar days; for students in Grade 1, an additional week of vacation is established during the year.

The Model Basic Educational Program of primary education contains the basic primary education plan. In the plan there is an indication of the total academic hours for the entirety of primary school (Grades 1 to 4). Each academic hour equals 45 minutes except for Grade 1, when the lessons are shorter (35 minutes). The academic hours for four academic years cannot be fewer than 2,904 or exceed 3,345. The number of academic hours for four years in language instruction (Russian language and literary reading) are equal to 1,215 (675 for Russian language and 540 for literary reading), which cannot be less than 36 percent of the total instructional time. The time spent on literary reading cannot be less than 16 percent of the total time.

Instructional Materials

The Ministry of Education and Science annually approves the Federal List of Textbooks, including textbooks recommended for use in primary education. The Ministry releases this list to help teachers to select the program of study and accompanying instructional materials. The textbooks and instructional materials take into account regional and ethnocultural characteristics of the subjects of the Russian Federation. In 2016, special books designed for children with disabilities expanded the list. Teachers choose instructional materials from the list in accordance with their professional preferences, recommendations of the regional authorities, children's characteristics and interests, and parental opinion.

The Ministry has developed and approved sets of programs and instructional materials for use in primary education. The materials are intended to develop the core learning skills necessary for studying all school subjects. Each set consists of a reader with a collection of texts, a textbook that supplements the reader, student work booklets for answering oral and written questions, a collection of guides for analyzing the texts, books for family reading, and a teacher's guide. All sets of instructional materials for literary reading include Russian classical literature, foreign children's classics, children's literature of different ethnic groups in Russia, and modern children's literature and are aimed at developing reading competency. Materials for family reading reflect the integrated goals of reading inside and outside school. All sets have a common core of classical literature as well as authors.



The textbooks are available in print and electronic format, contain electronic format adapted visual materials, multimedia elements, and interactive links that extend and complement the textbook content. The Ministry has conducted a comprehensive review of the materials.

Many classrooms in Russian primary schools have a class library with enough books and magazines to accommodate independent reading according to children’s interests during lessons and for home use.

Use of Technology

In the last decade, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was introduced into general education. Federal and regional projects such as the Development of Common Educational Information Environment, Electronic Russia, and the Informatization of the Educational System were aimed at developing technology infrastructure, developing electronic educational resources, providing professional development for teachers in technology, and introducing ICT into the learning process and school management. Some results of these activities included a national Internet portal, electronic textbooks, and a nationally distributed electronic library of information resources. As a result, all schools in Russia have ICT for use in the classroom and access to the Internet.

Due to the introduction of the new Federal State Educational Standards, the role of ICT is changing considerably from the means of communication and getting information to the means of learning and personal development. The standards determine three levels of requirements for ICT in general education: ICT in the curriculum and the school resources, teacher practice, and student achievement in ICT use in learning. There are three models of the use of ICT in primary school:

- Use of ICT without transforming, illustrating, or manipulating text and objects (e.g., working with the text, sorting, grouping words, drawings, photo, comparing video with the models)
- Use of the technical facilities of ICT as the means of problem solving for increasing the effectiveness of the learning process (e.g., searching for information, modeling transformation of objects, presenting results)
- Use of ICT for creation of new products (e.g., new text such as fairy tales with hypermedia support, multimedia presentations, products of art such as simple melodies, construction of objects like robots, interactive games)

At present, all print textbooks should have a parallel electronic form—structured educational content, ready to run on interactive classroom boards and students’ tablets. Electronic content of the lesson may be displayed on the board, students’ gadgets, and teachers’ tablets.

Role of Reading Specialists

There is no specialized reading teacher in primary schools.

Second Language Instruction

As a rule, students whose mother tongue is not Russian receive instruction in Russian as a state language. Some children whose native language is not Russian come to school without speaking Russian, creating problems; these include Indigenous children and those from immigrant families. The



number of immigrants in Russia has sharply increased, and many children from those families do not speak Russian. The organization of instruction in Russian for students who do not speak Russian is under consideration.

Two lines of textbooks were developed covering the Russian language and literary reading, and will provide training in the subjects of the philological cycle of immigrants' children in Grades 1 to 4 of general education institutions. These textbooks are aimed at training immigrant children in the Russian language, reading in Russian, and adapting to a new sociocultural environment. There are many forms of use: in polyethnic schools and classes, these textbooks are used as basics in lessons of Russian language and literature; in mixed classes where there are more Russian students, they are used either in the implementation of the individual educational route of a child or in additional lessons. The issue of paying teachers for additional lessons is the responsibility of the heads of education, including at the level of the school's management. It has become obvious to most teachers that special textbooks are needed for immigrant children, especially at the primary level, or they do not learn the material and fall behind every day on the school curriculum. Some schools hold special lessons with such children, but only by the initiative of schools. There are no government programs to work with immigrant children. For children who come to school and do not speak Russian, special classes are conducted to develop the skills of oral speech.

Accommodation Policies for Instruction and Testing

Inclusive education has actively been developing in Russia over the past few years. Children with health problems can attend regular classes in ordinary schools. To educate these students, an individual learning trajectory is being developed. In one of the largest Russian publishing houses, textbooks were published for visually impaired children who receive education under the Federal State Education Standard. The content of these textbooks fully corresponds with that of textbooks for ordinary children, but the font size is significantly larger. For children with serious intellectual disabilities, the special standard was developed. The instruction and assessment of these children's achievements will be conducted in accordance with the special standard. This practice has just been introduced.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

To identify students in need of special instruction, a speech therapist uses diagnostic techniques; most are qualitative and are not supported by statistical evidence.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

There are no reading specialists in schools to assist students who have difficulty with reading. Regular classroom teachers use different materials with students at different reading levels, especially with children with reading disabilities. Some primary education sets of instructional materials include supplementary materials for use with students with reading disabilities within the regular classroom.



The school speech therapist may provide additional special lessons two to three times per week for children with reading disabilities. The speech therapist organizes lessons according to two groups: one for children with dysgraphia and dyslexia, and the second for children with general speech deficiencies. Unfortunately, over the past few years the number of schools that have speech therapists has dramatically fallen.

Special classes for students with low level readiness for education existed through the 1990s, but the creation of such classes has been abandoned and students now attend heterogeneous classes. Nevertheless, other special classes and schools exist for children with mental deficiencies, mental retardation, and severe dyslexia. Referral of students to these classes and schools is carried out only after the deliberation and decision of a medical-psychological-pedagogical commission, and with parents' consent.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

There are national examinations at Grades 9 and 11, but not in primary school. To be awarded the basic school and secondary school certificates, students must pass two compulsory national external examinations in mathematics and Russian: the State Summative Attestation for basic school (examinations are developed centrally, and results are marked and graded at the regional level), and the Unified State Examination for secondary school (examinations are developed centrally, and results are marked at the regional level and scaled centrally at the federal level). In addition to getting the basic school certificate, students have to pass two more examinations in subjects of their choice, according to their future educational plans. Tests in Russian language include text related tasks that assess different reading skills.

In addition to the national examinations, a school may set an examination on every subject at any grade of basic or secondary school. Examinations may be administered in oral or written forms, including short answer questions, essay questions, and sometimes multiple choice questions.

In recent years, the system of knowledge control has changed. The system of educational achievement assessment provides measurement of school subject and metasubject results. The “tests and exams for the bosses” paradigm was replaced by one of “control for the benefit of schools, families, and students.” The Russian Federation began implementing assessments in education as a tool to support the learning process that focuses on achieving new educational results and is demanded by schools: intra-school assessment systems together with independent assessments allow schools to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses objectively and to make the necessary organizational and personnel decisions in time. The system of education quality evaluation serves to provide information about trends in academic achievements; ensure informed management decisions; and enable the state-public evaluation of education quality.

Currently, a regional quality assessment system is developing in all regions of the Russian Federation. This system is based on the following principles:

- Independence of assessment procedures, and reliability and validity of obtained results due to scrupulous compliance with all procedural requirements for development of assessment tools and administration of tests (e.g., obligatory presence of an independent observer)
- Uniform standards of educational results (including the compulsory component determined by federal authorities and the one determined on the regional level) specifying the content and structure of regional assessment tools

According to the State Program of Developing Education in Russia, the new complex model for the assessment of quality of education in primary school was developed from 2011 to 2013. This model included the assessment of reading abilities as a required component. Many regions (e.g., Kaliningrad *oblast*, Krasnoyarsk *kray*, Moscow, Moscow *oblast*, Tver, Yamalo-Nenetsky autonomy *okrug*) implemented assessment of reading literacy as a component of the regional monitoring system. The tests in reading for primary school (Grades 1 to 4) were developed using the PIRLS approaches in assessing the processes of reading comprehension. In several regions (Krasnoyarsk *kray*, Moscow, etc.), the programs of in-service training of teachers of primary and secondary schools on the basis of the assessment results were implemented. The interdisciplinary programs, called Development of Reading Literacy Through the Means of All Subjects, are being created at many educational organizations.

Since 2016, for the Grade 4 students nationwide assessments have been introduced in the Russian language, mathematics, and science.

Monitoring Individual Student Progress

Innovations in assessment arising from general education reform include the introduction of a qualitative system of assessment without grades or marks in primary school, and a shift in the orientation of assessment from absolute achievement to the dynamics of student achievement throughout primary school.

Formative and summative assessments are conducted to ensure compliance of student achievement with the curriculum requirements and to diagnose students' progress. The timing and form of assessment are chosen by the school. Sometimes the assessment results are used for teacher or school accreditation. Generally, the summative assessment takes place at the end of each school year in each school subject. Assessment formats include oral examinations; short answer, extended response, or essay questions; and multiple choice tests. Schools usually use individual tests made by teachers, locally developed tests, or tests developed centrally and published as special supplementary materials.

Special Reading Initiatives

Every year many scientific and pedagogical conferences devoted to the issues of reading support are held. The activity of the Society of Russian Literature has resumed. As a generalization of the work that was carried out for several years, in June 2017 the government of the Russian Federation adopted The Program of Support of Children's and Youthful Reading in the Russian Federation.



The authors of textbooks on literary reading have begun to pay more attention to the selection of texts that are of interest to boys. Previously, most of the texts were more interesting to girls (e.g., stories that have girls as the main characters, more interesting topics for girls).

Use and Impact of PIRLS

Russia participated in PIRLS 2001, PIRLS 2006, PIRLS 2011, and PIRLS 2016. Participation had a significant impact not only on teaching reading, but also on the assessment of reading literacy. Previously, in primary school the oral forms of reading literacy assessment were dominant in Russia: a child read the text, the teacher asked this child a few questions on the content, the child answered the questions orally, and the teacher made a qualitative conclusion about the awareness of reading. After Russia's participation in PIRLS 2001, written tests similar to PIRLS instruments, which allowed quantitative and qualitative assessment of reading literacy, started to be used actively at the regional and federal levels.

Analysis of the results of PIRLS 2006 revealed problems with reading informational text. As a result, the section on informational texts in the literary reading program has been strengthened. Also, the interdisciplinary program “Reading. Working with a Text” was developed as the part of the new Federal State Education Standards (2009).

Suggested Readings

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