
All-Russian Primary Education (1894–1917): Developmental Milestones

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ABSTRACT

Basing on large statistical material, the article considers all-Russian primary education dynamic development during Emperor Nikolay II's reign. Special attention is attached to prognosis of illiteracy abolition terms in Russia in conditions of pre-revolutionary power preservation.

At the turn of the 19th century the problem of the introduction of all-Russian primary education was the most crucial. Different organizations had many reasons to criticize monarchy, but no other problem raised so heated debates as high illiteracy rate of Russia's population. After the State Duma had been formed and a large-scale program of country's reforming was adopted under Pyotr A. Stolypin, the introduction of all-Russian primary education speeded up. In the given article we will touch upon the subject if this acceleration helped to eliminate illiteracy.

During the Soviet period the researchers virtually did not examine the pre-revolutionary primary education system efficiency. At that time the detraction of pre-revolutionary primary education system achievements was the priority. It was the result of a negative attitude toward all pre-revolutionary period in the country with the ideological policy 'Russian monarchy anti-popular politics in the primary education'.

At the post-Soviet stage the interest toward pre-revolutionary public education history and in this context to primary education has greatly increased. There appeared researches considering different aspects of the role of Ministry of Public Education (Myat-

nikov 2005; Appoeva 2008; Zhegul'skaya 2008), State Duma (Ovchinnikov 2006) and Holy Synod (*Idem* 2009) in the introduction of all-Russian primary education. Special attention is attached to the regional development of primary education system and teaching staff maintaining this process (Kazakova 2009). The authors of these researches have introduced significant statistic materials, reports, census results, executive summaries and, finally, pre-revolutionary historiography (Andreev 1916) for scientific use and this is the distinguishing feature of these researches. Summarizing the collected data, from our point of view, we can attempt to estimate the efficiency of pre-revolutionary government agencies work as regards the introduction of all-Russian primary education.

In 1894, when Nikolay II succeeded to the throne after his father's, Alexander III, death, he inherited the Russian Empire with the population of 120 million people. As agriculture was at that time the main branch of Russia's industry, peasants constituted the major part of population. In the late 19th century the peasant class was uneducated. According to the 1897 all-Russian census more than 125 million (125, 640, 021) people lived in the Russian Empire, of which educated (able to write and count) constituted 26.5 million (26,569,585) people (All-Russian First Census Data 1905: 39–40), 21 per cent of the population.

According to the public education system data in the late 19th century, by 1897, 14.3 thousand students studied in nine Russian universities; which together with professional higher educational establishments (technical, military, art, *etc.*) constituted 25–30 thousand people. Some 224 thousand people studied in 900 secondary educational institutions (75 thousand out of them in women's). More than 3.3 million people studied in primary educational institutions of all kinds (about 72 thousand). At that time those who studied constituted about 3 per cent of Russia's population. To compare, in countries with compulsory education those who studied constituted about 10 per cent of population (Oldenburg 1992: 24).

Having succeeded to the throne, Nikolay II ordered to inspect the state of education in the country, which was fulfilled in 1894 by Literacy Committee. The inspection showed that at that time primary training schools and literacy schools numbered 60,592 with 2,970,066 students.

Describing Russian primary school, the training system should also be mentioned. The primary schools worked 26 hours per week, the subjects varied depending on the departmental affiliation of a school. Thus, *zemsy* school weekly curriculum included: 2 hours of Bible chairs, 2 hours of Old Slavonic texts reading, 6 hours of writing, 6 hours of reading, 6 hours of arithmetic, 2 hours of penmanship, an hour of singing and an hour of needlework. Parochial schools curriculum included the following subjects: Bible chairs – 4 hours, Old Slavonic texts reading – 2 hours, calculation – 6 hours, civil press reading – 6 hours, penmanship – 2 hours and writing – 6 hours.

Writing and penmanship training was based on calligraphy rules and some elements of grammar learning. Arithmetic was reduced to learning of four operations with whole numbers within a thousand.

At schools there studied children aging from 8 to 11.

Reading used to be explanatory. This subject was taught daily and included elements of history, geography and natural science. The textbook *Veshnie Vskhody* (Spring Sprouts) for class reading and discussion, oral and written exercises both at school and at home, which was worked out by Dmitri I. Tikhomirov serves an example. *Veshnie Vskhody* was published in 4 volumes and had several dozens of re-editions. The textbook was admitted for primary public training schools by a special department of Scientific Committee of Ministry of Public Education.

Pre-revolutionary textbooks put the greatest emphasis in youth's upbringing to labour. Thus, the first page of *Veshnie Vskhody* first textbook, oriented at primary schoolchildren, read:

May God speed you! Ploughman works in the field, earns his daily bread. – God, grow bread for the whole world!

Teacher works at school, teaches children kindness and sense. – Help him, God! When children grow up, they will be grateful to him.

Children study at school; kids are striving with might and main. – May God speed you, dear kids! Study and grow to your father and mother's joy and for other people's good!

May God speed every business, which is for worker and for other people's good! – God speeds every good cause.

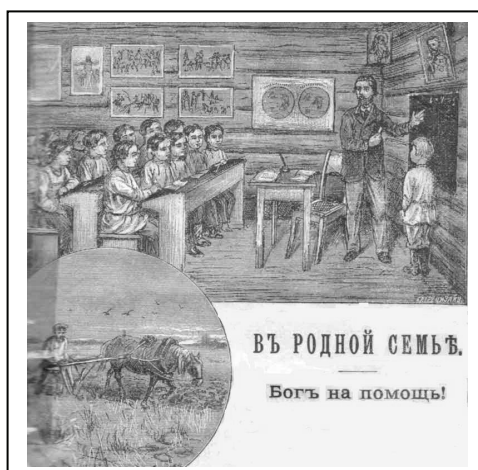


Fig. 'Ploughman works. Teacher works. Children work. – Labour is a good cause' (*Veshnie Vskhody* n.d.: 1)

Bible, *Kniga Svyashchennogo Chtenia* (Book of Holy Reading), *Detsky Mir* (Children's World) and *Rodnoe Slovo* (Native Word) by Konstantin D. Ushinsky were frequently used in teaching activity.

Academic year in primary schools started from 1 to 15 September. Academic year duration in parochial schools complied from 109 to 160 school days and in *zemsky* schools – from 130 to 163 days. The school days number was often less due to local weather conditions, namely, snowstorms and spring floods when schoolchildren were unable to get to school.

In 1903, according to the data, published by the Ministry of Public Education, the number of primary schools of different types and administration increased up to 87,973, the number of students raised up to 5,088,029 (Explanatory Note 1912: 185). On the one hand, the number of primary schools increased by 25 thousand units and the number of students by 1.8 million people. On the other hand, we should not forget the demographic explosion concurred with the reign of Nikolay II. If consider the fact that Russia's population annual increase was 3.6 million people (in the period from 1894 to 1911 the population increased by 44 million people, excluding Finland [*Ibid.*: 190]), the governmental efforts in respect of public education in the first decade of the 20th century were insufficient.

In 1906, during the Russian Revolution, Ministry of Public Education drafted a project of the introduction of all-Russian primary education and on May 3, 1908, during the period of relative political stability, the government passed the law ‘On allocation of 6.9 million roubles for primary education needs’. From that time the large-scale funding of public education and systematic opening of schools started. For example, in 1903 treasury allocated 15 million roubles (Explanatory Note 1912: 185), in 1912 – 117 million roubles, in 1913 – 147 million roubles (*Ibid.*: 283) for education in Russia. Many researchers associate the introduction of all-Russian primary education with the bill dated May 3, 1908. The given program was designed for ten years (Public Education 1912: 180) and by 1917 all-Russian primary education was meant to become a reality.

To provide a more objective view of public education, we will cite the statistics.

Table 1

Schools opening dynamics 1901–1910

in 1901	2478
in 1902	2810
in 1903	2873
in 1904	2632
in 1905	2407
in 1906	2526
in 1907	3193
in 1908	4050
in 1909	5036
in 1910	5650

Source: Andreev 1916: 311.

On June 22, 1909 the Emperor approved the bill on schools construction fund with a full title ‘Law on schools construction fund, attached to Ministry of Public Education opening and on setting rules of primary training schools of the same Ministry construction needs funding by state treasury’ drafted by State Duma. The lawmakers also offered to increase schools construction funding by 2 million roubles annually and bring the total sum of funding to 300 million roubles in 15 years. But in reality the Duma allocated about 50 million roubles for public education needs, including allocations of 1912 (Ovchinnikov 2006).

As a result of legislation, funding of all-Russian primary education projects in the following years had increased. In 1910 the State Duma increased the loan, offered by Ministry of Public Education from 7 million up to 10 million roubles.

Table 2

**Loans, allocated by treasury for primary education needs
according to Ministry of Public Education estimates
(in million roubles)**

Year	For permanent appropriation into all-Russian primary education introduction and related needs	Into schools construction fund replenishment and schools construction grants awarding
1908	6.9	–
1909	6	1
1910	10	4
1911	7	10
1912	9	10
1913	10	14
Total	48.9	39

Source: All-Russian education 1915: 49.

On January 18, 1911, three years after the introduction of law dated May 3, 1908, all-Russian one-day school census was carried out. Its aim was to show the real state of affairs in Russian primary schools.

The census resulting document was the report dated January 18, 1911, which consisted of 16 big notebooks, filled with significant statistics. 15 notebooks contained countries' educational districts executive summary and only the 16th one contained all-Russian executive summary.

All the primary one and two-class training schools, including abecedarian schools were subject to census. The higher primary, secondary schools and so-called unstructured schools: Jewish heders, Islamic *mektebes etc.* were excluded from the census. The census counted 100,749 *zemskey*, city, rural-public, ministerial, church, private *etc.* primary schools (among them 4397 abecedarian schools) (Andreev 1916: 309).

Table 3

Schools and schoolchildren number according to January 18, 1911 census

	Schools number	Schoolchildren number
Parochial	33942	1813145
Zemsky	28365	1878208
Rural-public and Cossack village	11860	773852
Governmental primary	6070	533653
Parish	3921	371464
City public	2550	311617
Private	2683	141093
Heterodox	1608	124535
Non-Russian	1052	40760

Source: Andreev 1916: 309.

The remained nine thousand schools are, firstly, abecedarian schools, secondly, factory-plant, railroad-sponsored schools, schools sponsored by Ministry of Internal Affairs, Jewish schools, *etc.*

From the administration point, most of the primary training schools fell within the competence of either Ministry of Public Education or Holy Synod. In 1911 the former administrated 59,769 training schools, the latter – 38,339 training schools (Andreev 1916: 309).

The total number of all-Russian primary schools' schoolchildren constituted 6,629,978 people (*Ibid.*). But the Ministry of Public Education considered that only 98 per cent of all Russian educational establishments were counted (Explanatory Note 1912: 188).

If compare the percentage of children at primary schools to the total population of the Russian Empire, it did not exceed 4.04 %. The number of schoolboys was twice as big as the number of schoolgirls. In this connection the percentage of schoolboys if compared to the male population of Russia was higher – 5.48 %. Schoolgirls comprised 2.6 % of country's female population. The attitude of female population to primary education varied from region to region. Thus, the number of schoolgirls in Pribaltiysky Region comprised 5.57 % of female population and in so-called ultimate Russia – 2.8 %. The highest percentage of schoolgirls was in Tverskaya (4.8 %), Moskovskaya (4.7 %) and Petrogradskaya (4.64 %) provinces (Andreev 1916: 309).

The distribution of schools and schoolchildren throughout different regions of the Russian Empire is of concern.

Table 4

The distribution of schools and schoolchildren throughout different regions of the Russian Empire

	Schools number	School-children number	Schoolchildren number per 100 residents
In 50 Guberniya (provinces) of the European part of Russia	81,657	5,590,300	4,52
In 3 Guberniya (provinces) of Pribaltiysky Region	3,023	167,887	6,25
In Russian Poland	5,027	393,939	3,16
In the Caucasus	4,498	343,625	2,85
In Turkestan	476	29,944	0,44
In Western Siberia	3,446	179,012	2,56
In Eastern Siberia	1,951	89,171	3,16
In Priamur Region	671	36,100	4,43

Source: Andreev 1916: 309.

It is worthy saying a few words about primary education in Germany. In the early 19th century primary education in Germany became compulsory. But, nevertheless, the percentage of schoolchildren rose very slowly. For instance, in 1816, 60 % of children attended public school in Prussia, in 1846 the percentage of schoolchildren rose up to 82 %, in 1864 – up to 93 %. Germany managed to eliminate illiteracy only by the late 19th century. In other words, it took Germany about 80 years to make 100 % of children attend schools.

As of 1911, the rate of children in German primary schools was 15.9 per 100 people. Besides, all children aging from 6 to 13 (for comparison, the age limit of schoolchildren in Russian primary schools was from 8 to 11, in other words twice less) attended schools. If we carry over German's primary education to the Russian Empire's primary education with the age limit from 8 to 11, we will get the number of 8 schoolchildren per 100 people. But 1911 census did not indicate such percentage, although some *uezdy* (counties), namely Shlisselburgsky (8.96 %) and Tsarskoselsky (8.73 %) *uezdy* of Petrogradskaya Gubernia, Novotorzhsky (8.26 %) *uezd* of Tver-

skaya Guberniya and Epifansky (8.08 %) uezd of Tul'skaya Guberniya (Andreev 1916: 311) had the similar rate of schoolchildren as in Germany. Thus, in 1911 in some uyezdy of the Russian Empire 100 % children studied in primary schools. At that time it was, of course, an exceptional case.

So, was the Russian Empire still far from all-Russian primary education introduction?

According to Ministry of Public Education data, on the day the census was carried out more than 6 million schoolchildren were present in schools, which compared to the total number of the population constituted 3.85 %. As the amount of school-aged children (from 8 to 11 years old) constituted 9 % of the whole population (14 million people), it turned out that in 1911 only about 43 % of all the children attended primary school (Explanatory Note 1912: 187).

But starting from 1911 the primary education funding steadily increased and by 1914 eight million schoolchildren studied in 130 thousand primary schools, which constituted up to 60 % of school-aged children (Myatnikov 2005: 10).

But if consider the issue in details, the amount of school-aged children, studying in educational establishments significantly increased. Firstly, some of the children of the determined age group studied in comprehensive schools, in the first grades of high primary training schools and also in so-called unstructured schools (*heders*, *mektebes*, *etc.*). For example, as of 1913, 467,430 people studied in comprehensive schools of the Russian Empire (Report of Minister 1916: 38, 39, 73–75, 94–97, 119–121), 189,511 people studied in high primary training schools (*Ibid.*: 186–191). The statistics concerning some unstructured Islamic and Jewish schools is also important. Thus, as for 1913, the Russian empire numbered 9723 *mektebes* and 1064 *Madrassas* (Islamic schools) and the number of Jewish schools with 198,003 schoolchildren was 9248 (*Ibid.*: 186–191, 238). In other words, from 0.5 up to 1 million school-aged children studied in schools, excluded from the census. Besides, some children studied at home. Thus, at a minimum estimation, about 1 million children studied out of school at the day the census carrying out.

Secondly, more than one million children left school prior the end of education (in 1910 – 1,268,383 people according to the census data), about 0.5 million children ended the course of education at the age of 11 (Andreev 1916: 310).

Thus, the number of school-aged children can be increased by 2.75 million people. In other words, in 1914 almost 11 million people studied in educational establishments, unstructured schools and at home or 80 % of school-aged children.

The impact of the World War I on schools opening is hard to estimate, because of data shortage. Nevertheless, we can suppose that the funding of the public education in Russia remained on the same level, especially in 1914. As a result, from our point of view, by 1917 almost 85–90 % of children studied at school.

In support of the last thesis, we can bring in more arguments, concerning the literacy of recruits in Russia's army. Thus, Kharkovskaya Guberniya statistical survey contains the following data: in 1900 the number of literate recruits was 45.1 %, by 1910 the percentage had risen up to 66.7 % (Kharkovskaya Guberniya 1911). Samarskaya Guberniya zemsko-statistical reference book for 1914 contains the same data: 1899 – 35 %, 1912 – 65 % (Samarskaya Guberniya 1914). In Mogilevskaya Guberniya: 1897 – 39 %, at the early 20th century – about 50 %, in 1912 – 76 %, and in 1913 – 79 % (Mogilevskaya Guberniya 1914). Besides, the number of literate recruits was over 80 %.

Let us suppose that the increase of literate recruits number stayed static, then by 1914 the results would be the following: Kharkovskaya Guberniya – 75 %, Saratovskaya Guberniya – 70 %, Mogilevskaya Guberniya – 82 %.

Even if the data is exceptional, in other words not common for the whole country, the percentage of literate recruits in Russia by 1914 had to be approximately 65–70 %. But 1914 recruits left primary schools in 1904–1907 (due to World War I the men aged from 18 to 21 were called for a draft), it means the percentage of educated boys by 1914 had proportionally risen. To our mind, the raise can be approximately estimated at 20 %, in Mogilevskaya Guberniya, for instance, this percentage led to 100 % rate of schoolboys.

Taking into consideration all the aforesaid, we would like to mention that in 1894–1917 the primary education in Russia made a significant progress. Due to the efforts of the government which having drawn the conclusions from the First Russian Revolution, in 1908 adopted a 10-year program aimed at all-Russian education introduction. The process gained such a powerful impetus that, from our opinion, by 1917 the task had been completed.

During the Civil War, the primary education system suffered heavily. We can just mention as an instance that several dozen thousand of parochial schools were closed. The new teaching methodology met with a mixed reaction at the teaching staff. It took Soviet government more than 10 years to reorganize primary educational system and primary education became compulsory only in 1930.

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