

# Russian Federation

Galina Kovaleva  
Marina Kuznetsova  
Galina Sidorova

*Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation  
Institute for the Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education*

## Introduction

In accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the state language of the Russian Federation throughout its territory is Russian.<sup>1</sup> Republics that are members of the Russian Federation have the right to their own additional official languages. According to Chapter 14, “Language of Education,” of the federal law *On Education in the Russian Federation*,<sup>2</sup> teaching and learning the official languages of the republics of the Russian Federation can be introduced in educational organizations within those republics. However, 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 education system. Implementation of the above rights is executed by educational organizations, classes, and groups. Most students are taught in Russian, although in recent years, the number of schools with instruction in the native language has grown significantly in some regions.

## Overview of Education System

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

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 and federal law. Meanwhile, students can get upper secondary education simultaneously with vocational education (for example, in colleges).

Preprimary education is for children ages 3 to 6 and is not compulsory. Preprimary educational organizations also exist for groups of children ages 2 months to 3 years. As of the end of 2020,

preprimary institutions served 7.4 million children. Along with state Kindergartens, new types of institutions, including family Kindergartens, have been established.

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 schools that include all three stages. Basic general education, or lower secondary education, comprises Grades 5 to 9, while secondary general, or upper secondary education, comprises Grades 10 and 11. Because general education is compulsory, students who finish basic school and wish to attend vocational school study general education subjects (equivalent to Grades 10 and 11 at a basic level) as well as vocational education subjects and skills.

Higher education in Russia is free. However, school graduates who do not get a free placement spot can get higher education on a commercial basis. Most higher education organizations adapted the Bologna Process and offer two levels of educational programs: bachelor's degree and master's degree.

According to the federal law *On Education in the Russian Federation*, federal authorities are responsible for the development and implementation of the unified education 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 education 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.

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

- Requirements for achievement results
- Requirements for the structure of the basic education program
- Requirements for the conditions of program realization

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

- Federal State Education 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 are competence based. Primary school students who finished primary education in 2021 were taught according to the same Federal State Education Standards that students who finished primary education in 2016 were taught.

- 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 in 2015,<sup>a</sup> aiming to facilitate independent school assessment by allowing any independent organization (e.g., public organizations, parents, schools, education authorities) to initiate the evaluation process. The Ministry of Education developed recommendations for conducting independent evaluations and using the results.

The idea of inclusive education continues to be developed actively in the Russian Federation. Typically, students with special needs have been educated at specialized schools. Many parents now prefer to send children with special needs to regular public schools, which requires intensive retraining of primary school teachers.

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

The first six months of first grade include the course Learning to Read and Write. During this time, students should master the way of reading and practice reading the entire alphabet. They also learn to write letters of the Russian alphabet and practice the skill of writing words and sentences. In the second half of the year, the acquired reading skill is developed further. By the end of first grade, students should read fluently by syllables or read whole words. In Grades 2 to 4, there is in-depth work on understanding the texts that are read and, at the same time, reading technique also is improved.

The Ministry of Education annually approves the Federal List of Textbooks, including textbooks recommended for use in primary education. The Ministry releases this list to help teachers select the program of study and accompanying instructional materials. The textbooks and instructional materials consider regional and ethno-cultural characteristics of the individuals in the Russian Federation. Teachers choose instructional materials from the list in accordance with their professional preferences, recommendations of the regional authorities, students' 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

<sup>a</sup> Letter of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia dated April 3, 2015, N AP-512/02, "On the submission of methodological recommendations for independent evaluation of the quality of education"

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 from 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 and authors. The textbooks are available in print and electronic format. The electronic versions contain visual materials adapted for electronic format, 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.

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 education resources, providing professional development for teachers in technology, and introducing ICT into the learning process and school management. Some results of these activities include 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 Federal State Education Standards, the role of ICT is changing considerably from a means of communication and getting information to a means of learning and personal development. The Standards determine three levels of requirements for ICT in general education: ICT in the curriculum and school resources, teacher practice with ICT, 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, photos; 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’ devices, and teachers’ tablets.

### Use and Impact of PIRLS

Russia participated in PIRLS 2001, PIRLS 2006, PIRLS 2011, PIRLS 2016, and PIRLS 2021. Participation has had a significant impact not only on teaching reading, but also on the assessment of reading literacy. Previously, oral forms of reading literacy assessment were dominant in Russian primary schools: A child read the text, the teacher asked the child 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.

Given that the conceptual framework of PIRLS places emphasis on reading informational texts, this position has been strengthened in primary education in Russia. A great influence on the content of the learning was exerted by the variety of informational texts that are used in PIRLS. As a result, the section on informational texts in the literary reading program has been enlarged. Also, the interdisciplinary program called Reading. Working with a Text was developed as part of the new Federal State Education Standards (2009).

Acquaintance with the texts in digitalPIRLS and ePIRLS posed several serious questions for the Russian pedagogical community. In the teaching methodology, there are still no answers on how to combine learning to read paper texts and electronic texts, whether there are significant differences in the strategies for reading these texts, and when to include teaching keyboard writing, among other issues. Today’s younger students do not always acquire their experience of reading electronic texts on a screen and writing short messages using the keyboard in school; these are often the result of spontaneous learning outside of school. A promising direction for the development of primary education is a combination of traditional approaches and ICT—directed learning and spontaneous experience.

## The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades

In primary education there are 13 models for the subject of literary reading and 12 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 the increased use of various types of

informational texts (for example, official or scientific). In addition, more attention was paid to reading texts when studying the main subject areas: the world around us, mathematics, Russian language, and history. Literary reading is part of the continual 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 now widely used 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 knowledge of the phonetic system at an early stage, it is believed that children become better familiarized with the skills of reading.

Students who participated in PIRLS 2021 learned literary reading according to the same Federal State Education Standard (FSES) of primary education as students who participated in PIRLS 2016. This FSES was 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 as 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 FSES has 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 FSES pays 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, 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 meta-subject 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 called 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.

## Professional Development Requirements and Programs

In accordance with the professional standards of teachers, 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. For example, 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 makes up 10 to 15 percent of instruction 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 teacher education. The first includes general humanitarian and socioeconomic subjects and is relatively the same in all higher education institutions, regardless of the specialization. The following subjects, only four of which are mandatory in 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 portion of the curriculum.

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.

There is no specific requirement for ongoing professional development in reading. Primary teachers have in-service training every three years, but this is no longer mandatory 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 in which teachers explore active forms of organization of the education 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 considered when the training programs are developed. Primary school teachers' certification includes assessments of professional competence in developing interdisciplinary skills (reading literacy, logic skills, and ability to solve problems).

## Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

In Grades 9 and 11, mandatory state final certification is conducted in the form of examinations. There are no mandatory state examinations at the primary education level.

Since 2015, "All-Russian testing works" on subjects of the curriculum have been conducted in the Russian Federation. These works are being developed at the federal level and are aimed at assessing the achievement of the planned learning outcomes. The works are carried out in writing; students receive a form with assignments and independently complete tasks. These works are not examinations; rather, the idea is to use unified tasks to assess the quality of mastering the curriculum. In Grades 4 to 8, work is carried out on the Russian language subject. One of the components of this work involves students reading a text and completing tasks for it, for example: identify and write down the main idea of the text; draw up and write down a plan of the text; answer questions about the content of the text and questions about the language features of the text.

Currently, a regional quality assessment system is being developed 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 education results (including the compulsory component determined by federal authorities and the one determined at the regional level) specifying the content and structure of regional assessment tools

In addition to the national examinations and federal and regional works, a primary, basic, or secondary school may set an examination on every subject. Examinations may be administered in oral or written forms, and may include short answer questions, essay questions, and sometimes multiple-choice questions.

The Russian Federation implements assessments in education as a tool to support the learning process that focuses on achieving new education results, and that are demanded by schools: Intraschool assessment systems together with independent assessments allow schools to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses objectively and to make necessary organizational and personnel decisions. 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. The system of educational achievement assessment provides measurement of school subject and meta-subject results.

In the last few years, much attention has been paid to assessing the functional literacy of students. Reading literacy is assessed as one of the components of functional literacy. In primary school, assessment of reading literacy goes in two directions. The first direction is the assessment of reader literacy on the subject of Literary Reading. For this purpose, subject testing works created at the federal, regional, and school levels are used. The second direction is the evaluation of reader literacy as a meta-subject result, which is achieved by means of all subjects. For this purpose, complex works are created, the texts of which are not related to any specific subject.

The tests in reading for primary school (Grades 1 to 4) were developed using the PIRLS approaches to assessing the processes of reading comprehension. 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 evaluate 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 are held devoted to the issues of reading support. The activity of the Society of Russian Literature (previously known as the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature) was resumed in 2016. The main tasks of the society are to consolidate the efforts of scientists, teachers, cultural figures, and the general public to preserve the leading role of literature and the Russian language in the upbringing of the younger generation; strengthen the unified cultural and education space; and develop the best traditions of Russian humanitarian education, cultural, and educational activities. The society holds various events for children and provides assistance to teachers. 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 for girls

(girls were the main characters of stories, the problems in the stories were more interesting for girls, etc.). 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 are becoming more common. In first grade, when not all students can read, instruction may focus on individual or group activities. Sometimes students who can read when they begin first grade are grouped together for advanced learning.

As a rule, students whose mother tongue is not Russian receive instruction in Russian as a state language.<sup>b</sup> Some children whose native language is not Russian come to school without speaking Russian, creating challenges; these include indigenous children and those from immigrant families. The number of immigrant families in Russia has increased sharply, 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 covering Russian language and literary reading were developed to provide training for immigrant children in Grades 1 to 4 in general education institutions. These textbooks are aimed at educating immigrant children in the Russian language, reading in Russian, and adapting to a new sociocultural environment. There are many forms in which these textbooks are used: 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 education route of a child or in additional lessons. The compensation of 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 tend to fall behind in the school curriculum. Some schools hold special lessons with such children, but only at 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.

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.

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

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<sup>b</sup> These students have the right to receive preschool, elementary, and secondary education in their native language, but most of them prefer to receive elementary and secondary education in the state language in order to know it well. They study their native language as one of the subjects of the curriculum.

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 fallen dramatically.

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 intellectual disabilities and severe dyslexia. Referral of students to these classes or schools is carried out only after the deliberation and decision of a medical-psychological-pedagogical commission and with parents' consent.

## Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

### Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic has affected the organization of the education process significantly in the Russian Federation. Since the end of March 2020, restrictive measures have been introduced in the country. In April to May 2020, all schools were forced to switch to distance learning. At the beginning of the 2020–2021 academic year, schools began working in the usual in-person format. At the same time, a number of special measures were taken to reduce the communication of students from different classes. The start time of lessons was scattered, and each class stayed in one location. Since November 2020, distance learning was resumed in a number of regions as the only possible method, or education was organized as part of “free attendance” (when the student’s legal representatives independently decide on full-time in-person or distance learning). Decisions to open educational institutions were made by each region separately. In the second half of the 2020–2021 academic year, a class periodically went into a two-week quarantine when a student who fell ill with COVID-19 was identified in the class, as well as when the attendance threshold in the class was not reached due to the absence of students because of illness (if 20 percent of students are absent, the director of the educational institution could decide independently to transfer the class to quarantine).

### Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning

Over the past two years (2020–2021), the pandemic has had a significant impact on the education system in Russia. On the one hand, the process of digitalization of education began to intensify. The practice of teaching by using elements of digital education technologies in the classroom began in some schools long before the start of the pandemic, and since the spring of 2020, this practice has increased. The Ministry of Education distinguishes three components in the development of the digital educational environment: infrastructure development (school internet, computer equipment, software); content (providing schools with resources with quality content that meets federal standards); and communication (technologies for organizing communication). On the

other hand, the negative impact of the pandemic on the education system was revealed: The peculiarities of the distance learning format led to a decrease in the quality of the educational services received. The learning process in the Russian Federation is focused strongly on the constant face-to-face interaction between the student and the teacher, and the lack of such contact made it difficult for students to fully master the volume of the school curriculum. This was especially reflected in the formation of practical skills that are difficult to develop and control within the format of distance learning. It also turned out to be difficult to implement a personality-oriented approach within this format.

To a greater extent, the pandemic has had a negative impact on primary school education. The distance learning format did not allow realizing the most important task of elementary school—to adapt the child to the education process. In addition, interaction with the teacher, which allows maintaining a high level of motivation and involving children in the education process, is very important for a child in elementary school. The psychological characteristics of children of elementary school age may not allow them to integrate fully into a distance lesson and feel comfortable. There are several potential technical limitations in distance learning: The teacher could be hard to hear, it is difficult to see the teacher and all the material needed for the lesson simultaneously, there is a constant view of the faces of classmates during the dialogue with the teacher instead of the lesson material—all of these factors may have distracted younger students from the content of the lesson and prevented them from concentrating and fully receiving the material. Younger students may not be able to study the material independently, concentrate, and sit in one place for a long time. The distance learning format introduced in elementary school during the lockdown could affect younger students' ability to learn, which may negatively affect their further education in middle and high school.

### **Policy and Practice Changes**

Changes in state policy in the field of education during the pandemic were associated with a recommendation to switch to distance learning to reduce the risks of the spread of coronavirus. To help educational organizations, the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation sent methodological recommendations on the use of distance learning technologies. At the same time, the educational organization had the right to decide for itself which distance learning technology—including online resources, services, and platforms—to use. To reduce epidemiological risks in 2020 and 2021, changes were made to the procedure for passing state examinations: The dates for taking examinations were postponed, the form for taking examinations for graduates who do not plan to enter higher educational institutions was changed, and examinations on elective subjects were canceled for graduates of high schools.

## Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021

The PIRLS 2021 study was not affected by the pandemic. The field test was conducted from September 28 to October 9, 2020; the main study was conducted from April 12 to May 31, 2021. During these periods, educational institutions were not closed, primary classes were taught full-time, and there were no obstacles to the study. None of the classes included in the sample were quarantined during the field test and main studies, and all took part in the study. Conducting testing in schools also took place during the planned period from May 1 to May 31, 2021. Thus, it is asserted that the pandemic did not disrupt plans for conducting and collecting research data for PIRLS 2021.

## Suggested Readings

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 68. (1993). Retrieved from <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/constitution/item>

<sup>2</sup> Federal Law No. 273 of December 29, 2012, *Ob obrazovanii v Rossijskoj Federatsii* [Law on Education in the Russian Federation of 2012].