

Schooling language as a factor of accessibility of higher education (example of the Republic of Tatarstan)

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Problem

Differentiation of opportunities of getting higher education for various social groups in Russian society has since recently become a subject of interest both for wide public and research groups. Socio-economic features and family's social capital, as well as quality of general education received are most often considered as factors of such differentiation. However, for some regions of Russian Federation where regional laws "On State languages" have been adopted and systems of national secondary education have been created, study of the effect of the schooling language in secondary school on inequality of access to higher education is pertinent.

In this respect, experience of the Republic of Tatarstan deserves researcher's attention. According to the All-Russia census of the population of 2002, the Tartars are the second in number ethnic group in Russia. The Tatar language is now the language of the greatest demographic and communicative potential among the minority languages in Russia; one third of the general education facilities where schooling is dispensed in non-Russian languages (1/3 of general-education institutions and 1/3 of their students) fall on Tatar language. In addition, according to responsible employees of the Ministry of Education of the RT, complete secondary education in non-Russian language is only implemented in the Republic of Tatarstan, while in the other regions of Russian Federation, terminal classes of national secondary schools switch to Russian as schooling language.

To what extent is higher education accessible for students from Tatar schools, do they have fair conditions, are the secondary school and higher school system ready to implement the principles stipulated in the federal and republican laws on languages? These questions were laid as the basis for this study.

Objective and methodology

The object of the study carried out between December 2002 and November 2003 was a study of accessibility of higher education in various professions for school-leavers from national schools (with non-Russian schooling language) on the example of the Republic of Tatarstan.

The following tasks were resolved in the course of the study:

- Identification of aims at getting higher education with school-leavers having terminated secondary school in Tatar and Russian language.
- Study of the degree of accessibility of higher education for students from schools with Tatar schooling language.
- Study of the effect of schooling language on quality of education received in higher school.

- Determination of the extent of possible influence on educational policy in the Republic of Tatarstan in order to equalize chances for high-quality higher education for all school-leavers regardless of schooling language in secondary school.

The empirical base for the study included:

- 1) individual (68) and focused group interviews (5) with secondary school and university teachers, professors and managers;
- 2) analysis of data bases and insider's observation in selection committees of eleven universities in Kazan (capital of the Republic of Tatarstan) during admittance campaign of 2003;
- 3) questionnaire poll on 609 school-leavers selected as per a target sampling in Russian-language schools (305) and Tatar schools and classes (304) in urban (71.9%) and rural areas of the Republic of Tatarstan (19.1%) as per school location. The poll covered pupils of various ethnic groups in proportion reflecting ethnic composition in the Republic of Tatarstan;
- 4) semi-formal interview with students of various higher schools having received secondary education in Tatar language (30 interviews);
- 5) data from 5 focus-groups learning in Tatar language in various higher schools.

Results

1. Legal basis for development of educational institutions with Tatar schooling language is constituted by the Federal laws adopted in the 1990-es: «On the languages of the peoples of Russian Federation», «On education», Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan and Laws of the Republic of Tatarstan «On the languages of the peoples of the Republic of Tatarstan», «On education», as well as «State program of the Republic of Tatarstan for preservation, study and development of the languages of the peoples of the Republic of Tatarstan».

Obviously, maximum attention both in regulations and practical implementation was paid to development of complete secondary education in Tatar language. As a result, number of Tatar schools went growing. If at the end of the 1980-s there were 995 Tatar schools in the republic, in recent years their number grew up to 1219, including in Kazan from 3 to 47, in Naberezhniye Chelny from 3 to 14. 2568 classes with Tartar schooling language were opened in Russian-language schools. According to the latest statistics, about 150 thousand pupils or 50.5% of total number of Tatar secondary-school pupils learn in Tatar-language schools and classes¹.

Development of national education in the republic shows the following important peculiarities. Firstly, the top political authorities in the republic did not speed up schools to switch to Tatar schooling language. Secondly, Tatar schools and classes work basing on schooling plans recommended by the Ministry of Education of Russian Federation allocating hours for learning Tatar language and literature on the account of the regional and national component. For all basic disciplines, school literature recommended by the Ministry and translated from Russian into Tatar is used, which makes it possible to preserve unified schooling standards and educational area. Thirdly, choice of schooling language is ensured not only for title ethnos, but also for other peoples living in compact settlements on the territory of Tatarstan. Fourthly, Tatar and Russian-language schools and gymnasiums receive equal amounts of

¹ Education in the Republic of Tatarstan 2003. Kazan: RITs «Shkola», 2003. C. 6.

budgetary financing. Fifthly, managers of the authorities of public education note that Tatar schools and classes are much safer from the viewpoint of juvenile delinquency.

Official data from the Ministry of education of the Republic of Tatarstan show that the share of higher school entrants from Tatar-language schools is lower than in total for the school-leavers in the republic that entered universities. Thus, in 2000/2001 scholar year, 55.8% of all school-leavers and 46.4 % of school-leavers from Tatar-language schools entered higher schools, in 2001/2002 scholar year 60.1% of all school-leavers and 51.5% of school-leavers from Tatar-language schools entered higher schools, in 2002/2003 scholar year, 62.3% of all school-leavers and 51.9% of school-leavers from Tatar-language schools entered higher schools². May be the cause of this situation is that 50.6% of pupils in Tatar schools are rural inhabitants, while the share of rural inhabitants in total number of pupils is 29%. The analysis of the data from the Direction for public education of Kazan shows quite a different picture: if 78% of the pupils terminating all schools in the city enter higher schools, 85% of the pupils of Tatar gymnasia are successful at entering universities.

2. Mass poll among school-leavers has shown some discrepancies between official statistical data on the number of Tatar children being educated in native language and the real situation. The poll was held at school-leaver's schools, and sampling presented equal number of pollees from Tatar schools and classes and Russian-language schools from all ethnic groups. Basing on official data, we could expect that equal number of pupils would indicate Tatar and Russian as their schooling language. However, answers to the questions about the matters dispensed to school-leavers in Tatar and Russian languages respectively have shown that schooling is done in Russian language for two third of the pupils. According to our data, Tatar language as schooling language is mainly wide-spread in rural areas of the republic. In the towns, Tatar children really taught in native language are much fewer. We believe that such discrepancy between the official data and poll results may be due to the following factors. Firstly, development of national school in the republic followed the way of founding not only specialized educational institutions (Tatar gymnasia, schools, etc.), but also so-called mixed schools. In Tatar classes of such schools, Tatar language is only partly the schooling language. Pupils terminating such classes often disappointed with incomplete representation of matters in Tatar language.

Secondly, such discrepancy may be due to the fact that even in rural areas, where national school undoubtedly has long-lasting traditions and established status, the teachers guided by considerations of preparing children for selection examination to enter higher school decide on their own to teach in Russian language for senior classes. Nominal Tatar schools and classes sometimes in reality implement multi-linguistic educational process, which is, in our opinion, a positive phenomenon and meets the requirements of information society. However, this process requires further study.

Considering status features of the pupils in Tatar schools, one can't avoid paying attention to the fact that one out of four such children defines his/her family's welfare as «living from pay-date to pay-date», «can't meet the ends together». Pupils in Russian schools only select such items in 16.4% of the cases. Respectively, school-leavers from Russian-language schools who do not plan to continue their education only in 4.2% of the cases explain this by the fact that the family cannot pay for education or student's accommodation during schooling. Such obstacles are alleged by one of ten pupils terminating Tatar schools. For pupils with Tatar schooling language, 19% of mothers and 20.4% of fathers have higher education, while in the group of children from Russian-language schools, higher education for the mother was reported by 27.4% of the pollees, and 24.4% for the father. These data let us cautiously assume that in general, pupils in Tatar schools and classes have lower social status.

² Education in the Republic of Tatarstan 2003. Kazan: RITs «Shkola», 2003. C. 8.

The results of mass questionnaire poll among Tatar pupils let us assert that if they had a choice, they would choose Russian as schooling language. Among the causes noted by the pollees willing to receive education in Russian language, allegation of better understanding of the matter (more than 60% of the pollees per each group of matters) and certainty that schooling in Russian language would facilitate higher school entrance examination (about 50% per each group of matters). We find the same reasons in student's interview: «...*Tatar language is only needed for yourself, but to enter higher school, Russian language is needed. It is difficult to learn in university after Tatar school...*». Thus, youth mostly manifest an instrumental approach to selection of schooling language associating it with chances for entering and learning in higher school, career and success in life.

The effect of Tatar schooling language on accessibility of higher education is in general insignificant. However, the influence of this factor is magnified in combination with other circumstances such as family's economic potential, parents' education level and limitation of information resources in rural areas. As a rule, Tatar language becomes a factor of inequality of access to higher education for pupils in rural schools having low social roots. To resolve this problem, it seems advisable to switch schooling in ethnically and linguistically Tatar areas to Russian language in terminal classes.

3. Motivation for selecting higher school is the same for pupils in Russian-language and Tatar schools. For one third of the pupils, the first reason is opportunity to get desired profession, one fourth's priority is quality of schooling in the given school. It is interesting to note that school's prestige was mentioned as priority factor by 21.7% of Tatar pupils and 11.7% of Russian pupils.

One fifth of the pollees believe that they could better present their knowledge at higher school entrance examination in Tatar language. 83.3% of them are senior pupils in Tatar schools. However, the share of those who intend to go through entrance examination in Tatar language is lesser: 13.6 %. It is worth noting that among rural school-leavers, the share of those who are uncertain on the language in which they would pass entrance examination is considerable. This is most probably due to low awareness of the pupils of the opportunities of choosing the language of entrance examination.

4. While the official reports say that entrance examinations in universities were organized in Russian and Tatar language on the entrant's discretion, and the pro-rectors of the universities for schooling mostly confirm this, interviews with students sometimes sounded differently: «...*I passed the examination in Russian language because they didn't accept it in Tatar language*».

To obtain information on the real state of affairs, insider's observation was organized in selection committees of Kazan universities in July 2003. Observers were specially trained and provided with special forms for checking observation results higher school students graduated from Tatar schools. They were given the role of full insider³, i.e. they were playing the role of universities entrants. The field survey was carried out in 11 universities.

The results of the study let us state that universities managers do not, with rare exception, take into account the interests and peculiarities of previous training of the pupils having received education in Tatar language. In 2 higher schools only out of 11, information on selection rules was presented in Tatar language, and only once on the procedure and rules of appeal, in 3 universities on the professions opened for enrolment. In two selection committees only the entrants could establish communication in Tatar language. Possibility of passing entrance

³ The role of full insider assumes such organization of monitoring where objectives and status of the researcher is hidden from people involved in the situation. This method is sometimes qualified as secret observation. See for detail: I.F.Deviatko. Methods of sociological investigations. M.: «Universitet» book house, 2002. pages 41–44.

examination in any discipline in Tatar language was confirmed in 4 higher schools out of 11 only.

The interviews with university's pro-rectors show that there are no insuperable obstacles for organization of entrance examination in compliance with the republican law; what is lacking is rather desire and, may be, control from the side of public authorities and institutes of civic society.

5. The project included documentary study of data bases of selection committees of higher schools for 2002 in order to find out real facts of language-associated behavior at entrance examination. Absolute majority of students terminating Tatar schools (from 55% to 70%) when having real opportunity of choice consider it more favorable for them to pass entrance examination in Russian language. It is surprising that almost half of rural pupils construct their strategy of entering higher school basing on Russian language. Furthermore, the share of entrants choosing Russian language for entrance tests for selection to prestigious universities grows up to 77% - 90%.

6. Higher education in Tatar language is still not supported by many people. The desire to get education in special groups with Tatar schooling language was told by about 16% of the entrants. 75% of them come from Tatar secondary schools. It is quite obvious that interest for higher education in Tatar language is mainly manifested by those pupils for whom Tatar language is basic language of communication, who master written Tatar language and think in native language.

10% of the senior pupils in Tatar schools have never heard about opportunities of getting higher education in Tatar language. Low level of awareness is due both to external causes (lack necessary information from educational authorities and universities) and internal (lack of motivation with the school-leavers themselves for inquiring for opportunities of higher education in Tatar language).

Extension of the number of professions for which valuable training can be received in Tatar language, wide broadcast of information among senior pupils on the opportunities of getting higher education in native language could lead to higher popularity of education in Tatar language and changes in the current situation where education in Tatar language is mainly popular with those who choose linguistic professions or simply lack self-confidence.