

Analytical Review of Enrollment and Status of General Educational Institutions in Rural Areas of the Russian Federation

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Received 1 May 2017 • Revised 3 September 2017 • Accepted 29 September 2017

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the problem of improving the quality of education for children attending schools located in rural areas, including under-filled rural schools and branches of rural schools in Russia. The relevance of this study is determined by the lack of scientifically substantiated, practically approved models of interaction of these branches with the basic school, the absence of a sufficient regulatory framework for their operation, and the scientific and methodological support of the educational process therein. It was found that there is a strong correlation dependence between the share of rural schools and the share of rural population in the region, and there is a weak correlation dependence between the number of rural school branches and the share of the rural population, the population density, and the number of rural schools. On the basis of the results obtained, provisions on the subjectivity of branch establishment process in rural schools are formulated.

Keywords: rural school, base school with a network of branches

INTRODUCTION

For the modern Russian school, the problem of improving the quality of education for children studying in schools located in rural areas, including in under-filled rural schools and branches of rural schools of the Russian Federation, remains topical throughout the entire existence of the rural school, and is very relevant in the current conditions of optimizing activities in general educational organizations of the country. One of the models for optimizing the activity of a rural school is a basic school with a network of branches. At the same time, educational practice was faced with the lack of scientifically grounded, tested models of interaction of these branches with the basic school, the lack of a sufficient regulatory framework for the operation of branches, and the scientific and methodological support of the educational process in them.

The purpose of this study was to identify the objective and subjective factors for the development and operation of the rural school branch network, and to substantiate the conditions for optimizing their operation.

The significance of the study: The study showed the predominance of subjective factors of the rural school optimization by creating the 'base school-branch' model, and enabled the formulation of recommendations on the objectification of this process on the basis of solving a set of applied organizational and methodological tasks. The materials of the article can be useful for heads of educational structures of various levels and other subjects of educational activity (teachers, pre-school teachers, rural administrations, parents).

The achievement of the goal set is determined by the following tasks: the identification of the current state of the rural school branch network in various regions of the Russian Federation, the statistical analysis of the dynamics of establishing branches in the rural school, and the identification of the organizational and pedagogical conditions for its optimization.

Contribution of this paper to the literature

- In modern conditions, one of the most common models to optimize the activity of rural schools is to establish their branches, but there is no coherent theoretical basis for their establishment and functioning.
- With the predominant model for optimizing the rural school being “base school with a network of branches” over other models, the process of establishing branches is spontaneous nationwide.
- Despite the fact that the establishment of branches does not automatically solve the problems facing the rural low-numbered school, the branch that is part of the branch network has a certain potential for overcoming these problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Practice showed that the creation of a branch network does not eliminate the difficulties experienced by the under-filled rural schools, which have been sufficiently fully covered by a wide range of Russian researchers, both theoretically (Molokanova, 2001; Baiborodova, 2008; Roshchina & Chernenko, 2007; Yastrebov, Bessudnov, Pinskaya, & Kosaretsky, 2013), and empirically (Chernova, 2007; Lebedinzeva, 2008; Kosaretsky, Kupriyanov, & Filippova, 2016; Amini & Nivorozhkin, 2015). In recent decades, studies have also appeared that analyze the learning process in those rural schools that received the status of a branch (Ponomareva, 2017).

However, Russian scholars have not yet undertaken a comprehensive analysis related to the current state of the number and status of general education schools in rural areas, without which the problem of further development of the rural school branch network cannot be fully solved.

Theoretical analysis of foreign publications shows the relevance of the problem of ensuring the quality of education in rural under-filled (low-numbered) schools of the European and Asian countries. The mechanisms for small rural school management and the features of its functioning are considered by scholars and education practitioners in the context of overcoming various problems related to: 1) the geographical remoteness of schools, 2) the differences in the socioeconomic status of students' families, 3) the potential educational opportunities of students, created technical and human resources (Hargreaves, 2009; Wang et al., 2017), 4) the features of further adaptation and educational success of graduates of rural schools (Cristescu, 2015), and others.

The authors consider and analyze the following as models for the implementation of training in a rural low-numbered school: the resource center (basic school) (Almurzayeva et al., 2016); parallel functioning of schools where one teacher conducts several heterogeneous subjects, schools whose students attend schools in other settlements to study individual subjects; schools where two of the above options are implemented simultaneously (Fardoun et al., 2014), functioning of multi-level classes (mixed-/multi-age approach) (Raggl, 2015; Smit et al., 2015).

At the same time, foreign researchers did not pursue comprehensive studies covering the activities of the rural school with a network of branches.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The following methods were used as a research approach:

- 1) generalization and analysis of pedagogical experience expressed in quantitative indicators in statistical reports in the Unified Information System for the Support of Education and Science of the Russian Federation (RF MES UIS), and in qualitative indicators in the publications of scholars and education practitioners, and on the websites of educational institutions;
- 2) statistical processing of quantitative data on the number of educational organizations functioning as a model of ‘basic schools – branches’ (RF MES UIS); one-sided Pearson's criterion was used with the level of statistical significance set to $p = 1$.

The data presented in the Unified Information System for the Support of Education and Science of the Russian Federation RF MES UIS were used as a source for studying the correlation dependence between the number of branches in the territorial entities of the Russian Federation and the number of rural schools in general, the shares of the rural population and the population density in them. The following templates are used:

- form of OO-1 at the beginning of 2016/2017 academic year broken down for the territorial entities of the Russian Federation (public education institutions);
- form OO-1 at the beginning of 2016/2017 academic year broken down for the territorial entities of the Russian Federation (rural), (public education institutions).

With regard to the geographic and demographic characteristics of the regions of the Russian Federation, three most distinct regions were identified as respondents: the Central, Far Eastern and Southern Federal Districts, which

Table 1. Data sample about general education establishments of the Central Federal District

Constituent territory of the Russian Federation		Number			Number of teachers		
		classes with advanced study of certain subjects	schools	school branches	computer science	physics	mathematics
The Belgorod Region	total	625	547	6	314	380	1064
	rural	39	376	4	139	187	469
The Bryansk Region	total	29	495	37	254	349	974
	rural	3	316	35	98	186	448
The Vladimir Region	total	135	360	4	218	263	769
	rural	4	188	4	50	84	228
The Voronezh Region	total	328	803	17	525	567	1618
	rural	34	562	6	188	279	740
The Ivanovo Region	total	40	265	4	145	191	548
	rural	0	106	2	23	58	126
The Kaluga Region	total	32	338	4	157	249	693
	rural	0	194	0	43	99	255
The Kostroma Region	total	105	306	4	128	155	523
	rural	3	212	3	44	74	229
The Kursk Region	total	172	541	50	244	373	1067
	rural	2	390	50	105	222	572
The Lipetsk Region	total	195	277	78	273	279	829
	rural	25	169	76	138	150	382
The Moscow Region	total	963	1397	52	1141	1198	3878
	rural	97	469	6	205	298	810
The Oryol Region	total	155	374	17	177	224	681
	rural	2	274	13	78	122	340
The Ryazan Region	total	157	292	131	211	260	789
	rural	6	145	117	57	107	196
The Smolensk Region	total	190	387	27	205	267	728
	rural	0	247	27	85	132	315
The Tambov Region	total	96	108	125	187	286	804
	rural	2	38	116	80	164	424
The Tver Region	total	213	496	22	183	293	944
	rural	8	274	17	37	101	314
The Tula Region	total	194	459	5	265	372	988
	rural	2	254	3	68	151	337
The Yaroslavl Region	total	313	400	4	232	274	864
	rural	0	202	1	54	98	288

comprise 32 entities. For each of the territorial entities of the country belonging to these regions, the following data were selected: the number of schools, school branches, classes with advanced study of subjects, subject teachers (for example, teachers of computer science, mathematics, and physics) for the subject as a whole and the same data were analyzed for rural schools.

These samples are presented in **Tables 1** to **3**.

Table 2. Data sample about general education establishments of the Far Eastern Federal District

Constituent territory of the Russian Federation		Number			Number of teachers		
		classes with advanced study of certain subjects	schools	school branches	computer science	physics	mathematics
The Republic of Sakha	total	1024	631	12	1310	506	423
	rural	602	451	9	776	333	236
The Primorye Territory	total	410	529	30	1065	372	303
	rural	5	267	26	395	246	92
The Khabarovsk Territory	total	278	383	0	840	262	218
	rural	32	195	0	59	91	262
The Amur Region	total	98	295	32	647	236	187
	rural	41	202	28	352	141	92
The Kamchatka Territory	total	57	117	6	234	68	76
	rural	0	59	3	75	24	24
The Magadan Region	total	25	57	11	101	32	35
	rural	0	13	0	7	5	1
The Sakhalin Region	total	24	161	1	333	96	92
	rural	0	75	0	22	32	98
The Jewish Autonomous Region	total	2	66	10	110	37	35
	rural	0	36	9	44	16	13
The Chukotka Autonomous District	total	5	40	2	58	14	24
	rural	0	31	2	14	5	31

Table 3. Data sample about general education establishments of the Southern Federal District

Constituent territory of the Russian Federation		Number			Number of teachers		
		classes with advanced study of certain subjects	schools	school branches	computer science	physics	mathematics
The Republic of Adygeya	total	21	148	4	305	102	79
	rural	0	103	3	170	59	45
The Republic of Kalmykia	total	44	161	3	288	113	78
	rural	18	127	0	175	79	44
The Krasnodar Territory	total	76	1210	15	3141	961	793
	rural	22	813	7	1649	536	376
The Astrakhan Region	total	41	274	11	665	203	192
	rural	3	162	4	286	84	89
The Volgograd Region	total	321	780	10	1622	579	400
	rural	11	229	4	657	264	132
The Rostov Region	total	378	1148	26	2680	946	785
	rural	45	728	25	306	477	1228

The authors set themselves the task of finding out whether there is a dependence between the number of rural schools and the number of branches on such objective factors as the share of the rural population in the region and the density of the population. Comparative data for solving this problem are given in [Tables 4-6](#), where columns 2 and 3 show information on the share of rural population in the regions and population density as of the end of 2016, published on the website of the Federal State Statistics Service.

For comparison: the average population density in Russia as a whole is 8.56 persons per square kilometer, the share of rural population is 25.85%.

To find the dependence between the data given in [Tables 4-6](#), the Pearson’s linear correlation coefficient was used.

Table 4. Comparative data sample for the Central Federal District

Constituent territory of the Russian Federation	Share of rural population (%)	Population density (persons per km ²)	Share of rural schools (%)	Share of rural school branches (of the total schools and branches) (%)
Belgorod Region	32.93	57.13	68.74	1.05
Bryansk Region	30.09	35.16	63.84	9.97
Vladimir Region	22.06	48.04	52.22	2.08
Voronezh Region	32.85	44.69	69.99	1.06
Ivanovo Region	18.70	48.04	40.00	1.85
Kaluga Region	23.87	33.91	57.40	0.00
Kostroma Region	28.49	10.82	69.28	1.40
Kursk Region	32.66	37.34	72.09	11.36
Lipetsk Region	35.78	48.08	61.01	31.02
Moscow Region	18.40	164.91	33.57	1.26
Oryol Region	33.41	30.82	73.26	4.53
Ryazan Region	28.56	28.53	49.66	44.66
Smolensk Region	28.02	19.26	63.82	9.85
Tambov Region	39.85	30.48	35.19	75.32
Tver Region	24.57	15.50	55.24	5.84
Tula Region	25.28	58.6	55.34	1.17
Yaroslavl Region	18.29	35.16	50.50	0.49

Table 5. Comparative data sample for the Far Eastern Federal

Constituent territory of the Russian Federation	Share of rural population	Population density (persons per km ²)	Share of rural schools	Share of rural school branches (of the total schools and branches) (%)
The Republic of Sakha	34.59	0.31	71.47	1.96
The Primorye Territory	24.39	11.71	50.47	8.87
The Khabarovsk Territory	18.03	1.69	50.91	0.00
The Amur Region	32.70	2.23	68.47	12.17
The Kamchatka Territory	22.17	0.68	50.43	4.84
The Magadan Region	4.30	0.32	22.81	0.00
The Sakhalin Region	18.44	5.59	46.58	0.00
The Jewish Autonomous Region	31.44	4.58	54.55	20.00
The Chukotka Autonomous District	31.19	0.07	77.50	6.06

Table 6. Comparative data sample for the Southern Federal District

Constituent territory of the Russian Federation	Share of rural population	Population density (persons per km ²)	Share of rural schools	Share of rural school branches schools
The Republic of Adygeya	52.70	57.94	69.59	2.83
Republic of Kalmykia	54.80	3.73	78.88	0.00
The Krasnodar territory	45.68	73.05	67.19	0.85
The Astrakhan Region	33.47	20.78	59.12	2.41
The Volgograd Region	23.34	22.55	29.36	1.72
The Rostov Region	32.20	41.95	63.41	3.32

RESULTS

The results of studying the dependence of the number of rural school branches on the share of the rural population, population density, and the number of rural schools are given in **Table 7**.

The obtained results give grounds to draw the following conclusion: if the share of rural schools depends on the share of the rural population in the region (which, strictly speaking, is obvious), then neither the number of branches nor their percentage is dependent on such factors as the share of rural population in the region, population density, as well as the number of rural schools in the region.

Table 7. The results of calculating the Pearson's correlation coefficient

Tested dependence		Value of correlation coefficient r_{xy}	Value of t- criterion t_r	Significance value p	Critical value of t- criterion t_{crit}
X	Y				
Share of rural population in the territorial entity	Share of rural schools in the territorial entity	0.68	5.11	0.01	0.45
Share of rural population in the territorial entity	Share of rural branches in the territorial entity	0.22	1.24	0.01	0.45
Population density in the territorial entity	Share of rural branches in the territorial entity	-0.05	0.91	0.01	0.45
Number of rural schools in the territorial entity	Number of rural school branches in the territorial entity	-0.08	0.44	0.01	0.45

DISCUSSION

The results of the study were verified by studying the information provided on the websites of the Education Administration bodies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and directly from the educational organizations that represent the basic school with the network of branches (branch network).

The conducted research suggests that the development of the rural school branch network subjectively depends on the views of regional leaders and educational institutions of various levels on this process: from regional administrations to rural settlements. Meanwhile, the experiment for testing different structural models of general educational institutions, conducted by the Russian Ministry of Education in 2002-2004 enabled to conclude that "... the base (reference) school with a network of branches became the basic model proven in all experimental regions. Creation of intra-regional basic schools provides high-quality education by means of concentrating material and technical, financial, human resources, managerial resources, by transporting students or arranging their temporary residence in the locations of basic schools (school boarding houses, temporary residence in families). The basic school is becoming a methodological and resource center at the intra-district level, and also the center for the dissemination of innovations for all education institutions that have become its branches" (Abankina, 2007: 183; 2008)

The results of the experiment were presented to the interested persons in 2006-2008, (the publications on the subject of the experiment refer to this time), and it can be stated that though the number of rural school branches grew over the next decade, the percentage share of the three territories analyzed totals 7.7% of the number of rural schools.

In some territorial entities, the number of branches in rural schools is minimized or even zeroed. Whereas in the Magadan and Sakhalin regions, the Khabarovsk Territory and the Republic of Kalmykia, the low population density is one of the factors constraining transition of ungraded schools to the status of branches of larger educational organizations due to the large distances among education institutions. In the regions with a high population density (for example, in the Ivanovo, Yaroslavl, Kaluga and other oblasts of the Central Federal District (see [Table 1](#))) other factors exert their influence. It can be assumed that there are no under-filled schools, on the basis of which school branches are created more often. But the analysis of data from the RF MES UIS website shows that the average occupancy of classes in rural schools is just 9.7 people, for example, in Kaluga region.

The information posted on official websites of general educational organizations located in the rural areas of the Kaluga Region indicates the presence of low-numbered schools. For example, Nemerz basic general educational school in the Suhinichi district has less than 20 students; Melikhovo basic general educational school in the Ulyanovo district has just 7 students; Kasyanovo basic general educational school in the Ulyanovo district educates 28 schoolchildren. At the same time, the creation of the rural school branch network as an option to save the under-filled rural schools of the Kaluga Region was declared in the pages of online publications (including the federal portal Russian Education) as far back as in September 2008: "... the deputies of the Legislative Assembly of the region, together with experts from the Ministry of Education and Culture, developed a mechanism for preserving small rural schools. Primary or basic schools with low occupancy become branches of larger secondary educational institutions. They will get the name - basic schools. In this case, the schools themselves and the teaching staff are preserved. Perhaps in regions with a low number of branches in rural schools, other models for enlarging general educational organizations are being developed" (Russian Education, 2008).

In other regions, on the contrary, the process of creating branches in rural schools is very large-scaled. In the Far Eastern Federal District, these are the Primorye Territory and The Amur Region (see [Table 2](#)); in the Southern Federal District, this is the Rostov Region (see [Table 3](#)); in the Central Federal District, these are the Kursk, Lipetsk, Tambov, Moscow Smolensk and other Regions (see [Table 1](#)). For example, Municipal budget educational

institution Zavoronezhskoe secondary school located in the village Zavoronezhskoe, (Michurinsk district, the Tambov Region) currently represents a basic school with eight branches in villages Bolshaya Sosnovka, Borshchevoe, Zhidilovka, Zeleniy Gay, Panskoe, Ranino, Terskoe, and Turmasovo. In three branches (Zhidilovka, Turmasovo, Terskoe) the educational process is carried out under the primary, basic and secondary (complete) curricula. In other branches, the educational process is carried out only under the primary and basic general education curricula. Currently, 518 students are studying in the basic school and 547 students are taught in the branches. The official site of the Zavoronezhskoe secondary general educational school provides information about the branches, and regulations on their activities (Zavsosh, 2017).

The above examples confirm the thesis about the subjectivity of the branch creation process in rural schools. There are several reasons for this phenomenon.

Firstly, the main goal of creating a branch network is to improve the quality of education of rural schoolchildren. However, the interested public (parents, students themselves, teachers, managers of various levels) is not informed how the training in the branches contributes to the solution of this task, and most importantly, whether it happened in the already existing branches. Moreover, not only information about the quality of education is absent, but there are no simpler data on the enrollment in rural school branches and the level of education provided by the branches as a whole on the websites of various educational authorities.

Secondly, the regulatory framework that governs the branch creation processes and the activities of branches as structural subdivisions of the basic schools is underdeveloped. Often, on the forums of heads of general educational institutions one can see letters with the following content: "Hello, dear colleagues. I beg you to help me with the issue of opening a school branch. The essence is: there is a village school. It is on the verge of closure. In order not to close it, the Education Management Body assumes the possibility of making it a branch of another school. How is it possible? I am interested in the procedure itself. I suppose that in the beginning it is necessary to carry out the reorganization procedure by joining. But then comes the moment of stupor. If we join this school, what is the correct way of registration? Is it a branch (or subdivision), or is it possible to simply join and leave it at that? Will the school have just two addresses?" (Jurzon, 2017).

It is possible to give website examples of legal companies or personal websites of lawyers containing recommendations on the regulatory and organizational support for the creation of a network of general educational institutions that provide conditions for obtaining a quality general education regardless of the place of residence. All of them abound with references on certain normative documents (and these websites were created at different periods and, accordingly, some links are already outdated), but nowhere the template of the relevant reorganization documents approved by the founder of general educational organizations is proposed. In addition, some lawyers caution against establishing the branches, upon the pretext that a rural school cannot be closed without the consent of the residents of a rural settlement, and such an agreement is no longer required to close the school branch. The introduction of an item in the normative documents stating that the decision to reorganize or liquidate a branch is not allowed without taking into account the opinion of the inhabitants of this rural settlement will remove this problem.

The results of the research will be used by: 1) research teachers to develop a scientific and methodological rationale and guidance notes on the rural school activity organization in modern conditions, including the issues of regulatory legal support of activities, specifics of work related to the enlargement of educational organizations by creating a branch network, as well as training methods and technologies (taking into account regional specifics), 2) teachers-practitioners (school principals, heads of branches, head teachers, subject teachers) at the stage of deciding on possible restructuring of the educational organization in the context of its enlargement, including solving of the problem of explaining to the local inhabitants of the prospects and opportunities provided by the branch network for the students (as exemplified by the already functioning branches).

CONCLUSION

Taking into account that in modern conditions in most regions of Russia the "branch network" model has been established as the most viable and effective model for organizing rural school activities (in the context of enlarging educational organizations) and, considering the above reasons for the predominance of subjective factors in establishing branches of rural schools over the objective ones, it can be concluded that it is necessary to solve the following problems.

The *first task* is connected to the generalization of the experience of the territorial entities in the Russian Federation, which have widely implemented the experience of creating branch networks, primarily from the point of view of ensuring the quality of students' education, and the development of mechanisms for informing the pedagogical community and parents about the potentials of a specific region and, most importantly, of the already available results of this work in the educational organizations of the country.

The *second task* assumes the preparation of a compendium of materials for heads of general educational organizations, including: legislative acts of the Russian Federation (their constituent parts) governing the activities of rural schools in the context of enlarging educational organizations; instructive materials supporting the creation and liquidation of the branch; recommendations for the development of a local act on the branch; templates for registration of documents.

The generalization of the experience of regions having experience in organizing education in rural schools on the basis of enlarging general educational organizations through the creation of branch networks publicly available on the websites of educational organizations and educational authorities of various levels allows us to state that the creation of branches does not automatically solve the problems faced by rural under-filled schools, including those caused not only due to a small number of students and teachers, but also due to significant territorial, and sometimes information, isolation:

- the lack of teaching staff with basic education corresponding to the subjects being taught,
- the absence of required infrastructure and equipment for teaching individual academic disciplines,
- impossibility, in the absence of a psychologist, social pedagogue, and speech therapist in the staff, to carry out high-quality and timely psychological and pedagogical support for students at various stages of training (including on the issues with regard to designing individual educational routes, identifying conditions that complicate the formation of the schoolchild's personality, etc.), information and methodological support of teachers' activities, counseling of parents,
- limited direct professional communication of teachers (first of all, 'intra-subject' communication of subject teachers), etc.

Unlike the under-filled school, the branch that is part of the branch network has a certain potential (accumulated at the expense of all the participants in the 'branch network' and its social partners) to overcome these problems, provided the complexity of applied organizational and methodological tasks are solved, in particular referring to:

- the development of guidance notes for the organization and implementation of the educational process in the system school-branches (synchronization of the timetable in terms of optimizing the use of physical infrastructure and equipment and personnel resources of the institution, arrangement of design and research activities of students taking into account the capabilities of material and personnel resources of the branch, basic school and its social partners, ensuring the quality of education in individual subjects);
- availability of a system of psychological and pedagogical support for students of the branch network;
- expansion of opportunities for professional communication of teachers working in the branch network, including in the framework of methodological associations, etc.

Summarizing the above discussion, it can be stated that only the reorganization of rural under-filled schools into the branches of basic general educational organizations and the prevalence of the 'branch network' model in educational practice of the territorial entities of modern Russia are not sufficient conditions for the successful solution of the main task facing the modern general education – the task of providing the quality of education. At the same time, the availability and introduction of scientifically based regulatory, legal, organizational, managerial and methodological support for the activities of the branch network in general, and the branch in particular, will overcome the above-mentioned problems, and form a set of necessary conditions that will ensure the quality of general education in rural schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was carried out within the framework of the state task of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation (Project No. 27.9479.2017/NM "Development of a scientific and methodological rationale and guidance notes on the organization of rural school activities in modern conditions, and specifically regulatory legal support of activities, specifics of work, including that connected to the enlargement of educational organizations through the creation of a branch network, as well as the methodology and technologies of training (taking into account regional specifics)").

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