

Advanced training of nomadic kindergarten and school teachers as a professional growth requirement

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Abstract

Provision of high-quality training to children regardless of their place of residence is a constant challenge in the modern world. One of the essential requirements for a better quality of education is teacher growth. Providing methodological support for teaching staff as part of their advanced training is becoming an integral part of teacher development. Educational activities in the nomadic context present many factors and challenges differing from those in kindergartens and schools located outside of nomad areas. This paper shows research results relating to advanced teacher training intended specifically for teachers working in nomadic educational institutions. Research studies on teacher development and advanced training have provided a theoretical framework for the present article based on the results of a research study which has been conducted in four Russian regions inhabited by the indigenous minorities of Russia's North, Siberia and Far East and operating nomadic kindergartens and schools. The data obtained have contributed to the development of a complementary advanced training program for education managers and teachers working in nomadic environments, taking account of the specific nature of teacher activities in the nomadic context and aimed to create necessary conditions for teachers' professional growth.

Keywords: nomadic pre-school and general education institutions, advanced training.

Introduction

The Russian Federation is a multi-national State with over 190 nationalities living on its territory. Areas of traditional economic activities are inhabited by forty-five officially recognized ethnic minorities; of these, forty are ethnic minorities of Russia's North, Siberia and Far East. What is special about these peoples is their aspiration to maintain their traditional lifeways and to get their children involved in ancestral economic activities in a natural nomadic environment. The rapidly changing world and globalization, however, have disrupted intergenerational continuity resulting in the loss of traditional economic activities and disappearance of local languages.

According to educational authorities, regions with populations involved in traditional economic activities count 4 621 nomadic families with 6 679 children (18). The so-called nomadic schools have been set up for children leading a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life with their parents in the following constituent entities of the Russian Federation: Republic of Sakha (Yakutia); Amur Oblast; Yamalo-Nenets, Nenets, Khanty-Mansi and Chukotka Autonomous Okrugs; and the Taymyr Dolgano-Nenets Municipal District of Krasnoyarsk Krai. A rich historical experience shows that such schools contribute to intergenerational continuity, the maintenance and revival of local languages, traditional practices and economic activities of indigenous minorities of the North.

Currently, one of the central issues facing nomadic educational facilities is staffing. Teachers employed in nomadic kindergartens and schools are expected to have not only professional competencies, but also a real-life experience of living in a nomadic environment.

The professional development of teachers and education managers is one of the priorities of *Education*, a national project aimed to provide teachers with an opportunity to obtain training throughout their professional life, and children with an opportunity to receive high-quality general education in a modern environment regardless of their place of residence (3). Russian regions implement various projects promoting the professional growth of teachers working in nomadic educational institutions. These projects include *The Arctic Teacher (Uchitel Arktiki)*, directed to enhance the quality of education and to supply teaching staff to the Arctic areas of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia); *Nomadic School (Kochevayashkola)* and *Pedagogy of the North (Pedagogika Severa)* projects. The Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug carries out projects such as *The Nomadic Kindergarten (Kochevoydetsky sad)*, *The Nomadic School/Nomadic Education (Kochevayashkola/Kochevoyeobrazovanie)* as alternatives to pre-school and primary education.

In 2021, the Council of the Federation Committee on Science, Education and Culture held an offsite meeting on the implementation of general education programs in nomadic schools, discussing a number of challenges including

improved access to and quality of education for the children of ethnic minorities of the North, improvements of educational legislation in areas of traditional residence and economic activities of the indigenous minorities of the North. The need was also highlighted to assist the Arctic regions in designing the *Children of the Arctic (DetiArktiki)* project by taking maximum account of their suggestions (19). Initiated by the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the above project aims to enhance the quality of life and education of children residing in remote areas of the Russian Arctic through the creation of conditions for improving their health and holistic development on a par with their peers from other regions (10).

In view of the above, the professional growth of teachers providing high-quality education to children leading a nomadic lifestyle with their parents is of particular relevance in the given context.

Literature review

Teacher growth is central to the educational system and needs to be ensured throughout their professional life. Continuing or lifelong education is described as the need for an ongoing educational process during which a person acquires and develops his or her personal and professional competencies. In terms of continuing teacher education, the focus is on teachers who raise their professional level and improve their personal, social and professional competencies with a view to having an increased impact on learners.

As an example, R. Fuller considers that the professional growth of teachers involves the following stages:

- the survival stage (first years of teaching experience);
- the adaptation stage (active acquirement of methodological guidelines); and
- the maturity stage (characterized by teachers' aspiration to reconsider their teaching experience and to carry on independent pedagogical research) (5).

In our view, what matters most in teacher growth is how advanced training is organized. Analysis of theoretical literature revealed that many researchers have discussed relative issues in their works: management at the various levels of the advanced training system (E. M. Nikitin, A. M. Novikov, K. M. Ushakov, etc.) (15, 2); and development of teaching competencies as part of advanced training (N. L. Gololobova, E. A. Nagrelli) (6,11). As for the notion of advanced training, reference may be made to research by E. M. Nikitin, N. G. Masyukova and R. Fuller, among others.

E. M. Nikitin gives the following definition of advanced training: "...pre- or re-formation of professional activities; professional communication; personal qualities; working knowledge of new ways to solve professional challenges and new professional thinking techniques; coping with negative attitudes and obstructive impacts of previous experiences (if any); changes in the motivational and operational professional sphere; and self-formation as an advanced training subject" (14; 62). N. G. Masyukova understands advanced teacher training as "complementary professional training focused on improving, developing and updating previously acquired teaching knowledge, skills and competencies" (9; 33). According to R. Fuller, advanced teacher training refers to changes in the professional behavior of teachers throughout their pedagogical life (5).

Issues relating to teacher training in Russia's North, Siberia and Far East are discussed in research studies by N. D. Neustroev, A. N. Neustroeva, T. A. Shergina and J. K. Ferguson (13); researchers such as G. M. Fedorov and R. S. Nikitina investigate how educational activities are organized for children leading a nomadic lifestyle with their parents (4); and the formation of the ethnocultural competency of prospective teachers to be employed in schools attended by the ethnic minorities of the North is studied in papers by N. D. Neustroyev, A. N. Neustroyeva, etc. (12).

KraetliSaverio, researcher on nomadic peoples and member of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), stresses the fact that millions of children of nomads are outside of the education system: "In a sense, education is a paradox for nomads. They tend to obtain low points in terms of enrolment, attendance, class performance, achievements, higher education and gender balance" (8; 67-72).

A study carried out by Y. M. Abdulrahman suggests the following strategies that might make any innovation more efficient and results-oriented:

- in planning, implementing and assessing nomadic education, it would be useful to take account of the living conditions of nomads, and the latter should be considered as key actors and fully participate in the process;
- nomadic teachers should be members of nomadic tribes and be ready to follow schoolchildren in their migrations;
- educational programs elaborated specifically for the children of nomads should include practical skills that will at long last help them refocus themselves or diversify their professional goals;
- given that nomads live mainly in rural areas, the development of rural communities is what many scientists and researchers consider of utmost importance;
- many experts highlight the significance of the State's financial commitment. Production of special equipment, purchase and provision of nomad education kits should be considered as an integral part of the educational process and be widely used in order to ensure the continuity of education among the children of nomads" (1; 407-428).

Materials and methods

To identify the needs and urgent issues relating to the professional growth of teachers employed in nomadic kindergartens and schools, a survey was conducted in four Russian regions inhabited by the ethnic minorities of the North, Siberia and Far East. Respondents from the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and the Taymyr Dolgano-Nenets Municipal District of Krasnoyarsk Krai account for 11 per cent of the total number of participants, and those from the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug are 8.5 per cent. The largest number of respondents are from the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, with 68 per cent of the total number of participants.

The present research is based on theoretical methods (study and analysis of academic literature and statistics on the areas under investigation) and the empirical ones (surveying, projecting and modeling).

A content analysis has been made of activities carried out by both institutes for education development and independent educational centers and/or institutes affiliated with higher educational institutions specialized in advanced pre-school and school teacher training and re-training in Russian regions. These include the following:

- Republic of Sakha (Yakutia): S. N. Donskoy-II Institute for Education Development and Advanced Training, Open Institute for Development of Professional Competencies and Qualifications, North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk, Institute of New Technologies of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia);
- Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug: Regional Institute for Education Development;
- Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug-Yugra: Institute for Education Development in Yugra;
- Amur Oblast: Amur Regional Institute for Education Development;
- Taymyr Dolgano-Nenets Municipal District: Krasnoyarsk Krai Institute for Advanced Teacher Training and Re-Training; Information Expertise Center.

The survey data obtained were used to develop a complementary advanced training program for teachers and education managers working in nomadic educational organizations, which can be implemented in Russian regions with nomadic or semi-nomadic populations.

Results and discussion

The first set of questions in the survey carried out in the above-mentioned regions concerned general background information (place of residence, employment, position held, level of education, work experience and subject taught). In terms of employment, 55 per cent of participants work in schools and 26 per cent in pre-school educational organizations.

If broken down by position held, 34 per cent of respondents are teachers, 25 per cent are pre-school teachers, 17 per cent hold managerial positions in educational organizations (pre-school and school heads and their substitutes), 11 per cent are employed in Departments for Education and school boards. Furthermore, 20 per cent of respondents teach the native languages spoken by the ethnic minorities of the North, i.e. Khanty, Dolgan, Nenets and Evenki ones; 11 per cent are elementary school teachers, 31 per cent have 6 to 15 years of work experience and 20 per cent of respondents have under 5 and over 30 years of experience.

Another set of questions was centered around regional advanced training organizations (institutes and centers). For instance, institutes for education development deal with advanced training issues in the Yamalo-Nenets and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrugs. As for other constituent entities, several organizations are identified as respondents. This is, for example, the case for the Taymyr Dolgano-Nenets Municipal District operating the Krasnoyarsk Krai Institute for Advanced Teacher Training and Re-Training and the Information Expertise Center; similarly, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) operates the Institute for Development of Education and Advanced Training as well as the Institute for Advanced Training affiliated with the Federal University.

Other questions in the same set of questions concerned details about advanced training courses tailored for nomadic pre-school and school managers and teachers. Thus, 75 per cent of respondents from the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and 70 per cent of the surveyed in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO) confirmed that such courses are offered indeed. In the Taymyr Dolgano-Nenets Municipal District of Krasnoyarsk Krai (TDNMD KK) and the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (KhMAO), 25 per cent and 33 per cent of respondents pointed to the existence of such courses, respectively (Fig. 1).

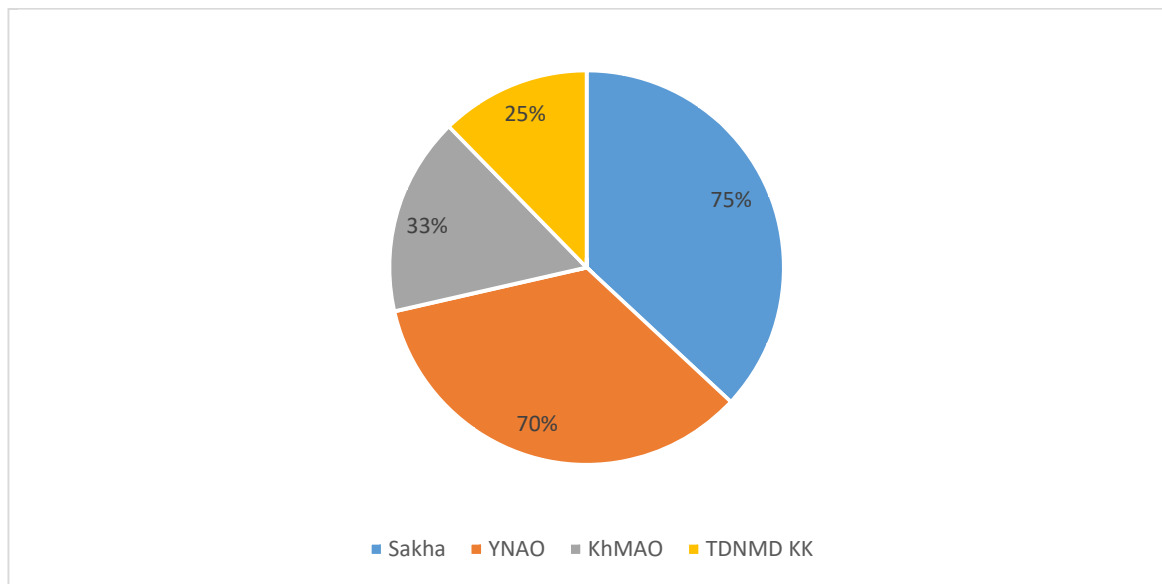


Fig. 1. Advanced training courses offered to nomadic pre-school and school managers and teachers in various Russian regions

However, 88 per cent of respondents have not enrolled in such courses in the past three years. In our view, this may be due to the remoteness of nomadic educational organizations, slow Internet connection hindering the smooth running of online courses or lack of time available to teachers.

The following questions aimed to identify the need in distinct advanced training programs for managers and teachers of nomadic educational organizations. In this case, 88 per cent of respondents agreed that distinct programs were necessary (Fig. 2).

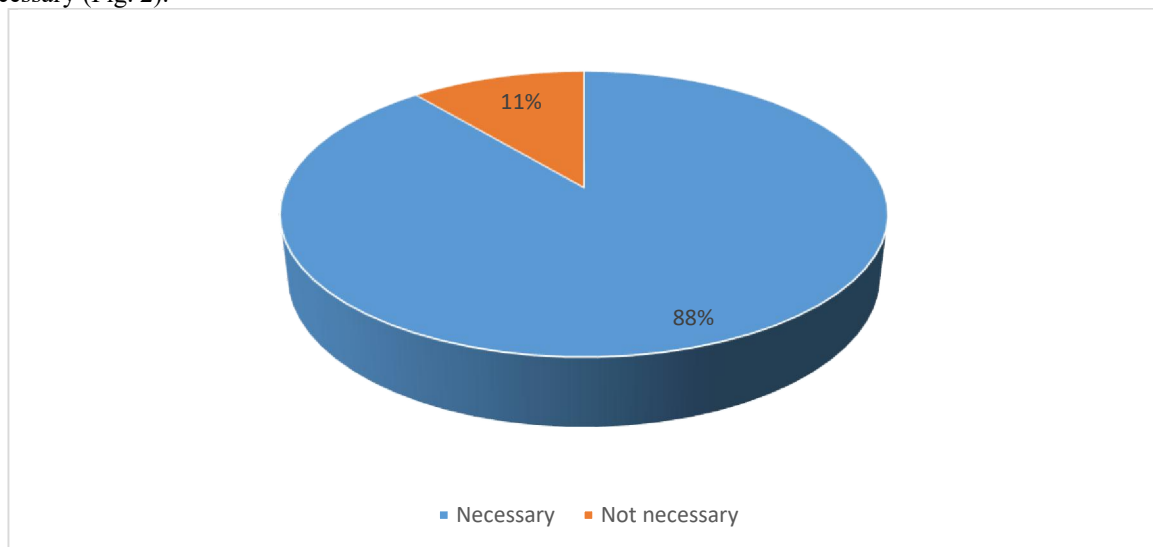


Fig. 2. Respondents' view on the need to have distinct advanced training courses for nomadic pre-schools and schools

Work in nomadic environments is complicated by existing organizational issues relating to training in nomadic pre-school and general education organizations. Since the issues identified by the respondents from all regions are similar, the authors have classified them as follows:

- 1) facilities and equipment of nomadic educational organizations;
- 2) transport services;
- 3) absent or slow Internet connection;
- 4) curriculum and information management.

In addition, the respondents were asked to select the most convenient form of advanced training courses: 38 per cent and 68 per cent of respondents opted for offline/traditional learning and online/distance learning, respectively.

The results obtained have assisted in developing the *Organization of Education in Nomadic Environments*, a complementary advanced training program intended for education managers and teachers employed in nomadic pre-school educational organizations and schools in Russia's North, Siberia and Far East.

This program has been developed by specialists from the Department of Nomadic Education (Federal Institute of the Native Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation) as part of the State assignment set by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation for 2021 and entitled *The Development of Scientific Frameworks and Educational Models for the Children of Ethnic Minorities of Russia's North, Siberia and Far East Leading a Nomadic Lifestyle with Their Parents*. The program aims to develop and improve competencies necessary for professional activities in compliance with the requirements of the Order No. 544n of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security of 18 October 2013 on approval of the "Educationalist (teaching activities in pre-school, primary and secondary general education) (educator, teacher)" standard (17).

The goal of the Program is to improve the professional competencies of auditors in the field of nomadic education with a view to providing educational services in nomadic educational organizations. Training period: 72 hours. Form of education: on-site/off-site.

The proposed program is divided into modules centered around topics outlined in the Instructional guidelines No. 03-1333 for providing education services to the children of nomadic or semi-nomadic ethnic minorities of Russia's North, Siberia and Far East, approved by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation on 20 November 2020.

The first module explores issues in the provision of education services to children leading a nomadic and/or semi-nomadic lifestyle with their parents. The second module focuses on the implementation of educational activities in nomadic territories.

To tailor training to the individual needs of learners, the program comprises a special module allowing learners to choose one of the proposed topics. This module has been developed with account of needs identified, as part of the study, in regions operating pre-school and general education schools. At the request of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, the program offers two areas of focus: nomadic kindergartens or nomadic schools. Learners are asked to choose one of the two options, according to their intended teaching activity. Thus, if the learner chooses "Education of pre-school children in a nomadic environment", the complementary advanced training program will include lectures and practical classes on the following topics:

- Ethnic and psychological specificities of pre-school children;
- Individual learning plans for pre-school children in the nomadic context;
- Preparing children for school in camping grounds and in a nomadic environment;
- Teaching children with special needs;
- Pre-school teachers in a nomadic environment, et al.

If learners opt for another area of focus ("Implementation of the education program in nomadic schools"), the program proposes the following topics:

- Ensuring educational activities in nomadic schools;
- Quality of education in nomadic schools;
- Developing the native languages of the indigenous peoples of the North;
- International and Russian experience with nomadic education, et al.

The forms of assessment in the complementary advanced training programs include entrance and midpoint tests.

Below is an example of a midpoint test assignment:

1. Check the forms of general education services offered to children leading a nomadic and/or semi-nomadic lifestyle with their parents, in terms of educational organizations (choose all the right answers):

- 1) Attribution of the nomadic family status;
- 2) Drafting a provision for a nomadic pre-school group/kindergarten, a nomadic family pre-school groups or a nomadic school governing the organization of various forms of education and training of children leading a nomadic and/or semi-nomadic lifestyle with their parents;
- 3) Establishing individual and/or accelerated learning plans within the scope of the educational program for learners leading a nomadic and/or semi-nomadic lifestyle with their parents;

Final examinations take the form of a project or an assignment based on work experience. Auditors can choose among the following indicative topics:

1. History of nomadic kindergartens/schools in my area.
2. My work experience in the nomadic kindergarten/school.
3. What is special about teaching in a nomadic environment?
4. Nomadic school today and tomorrow.
5. Problems of nomadic educational organizations and ways of overcoming them.

Lists of regulations, core and additional literature and websites on nomadic education represent the program's methodological and informational framework.

In Russian regions, complementary advanced training programs are elaborated by regional organizations providing the academic and methodological support to teachers.

In 2020, the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation approved a Plan for the establishment of a single federal system for methodological support of teachers and education managers (16). A single federal website on advanced teacher training has been created and is now fully functional. The best advanced teacher training programs used in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and intended for training of Russia's teachers and education managers are listed, following a professional and social assessment, in the Federal Register of complementary teacher training programs.

The author's complementary advanced training program has passed an internal expert review at the Federal Institute of the Native Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation and an external expert review at the Vinogradov Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The program will also be tested, as part of the State assignment of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, in five Russian regions inhabited by the ethnic minorities of Russia's North, Siberia and Far East.

Conclusion.

Provision of educational services in a nomadic environment implies tackling a wide range of logistical, methodological, organizational and pedagogical challenges. The role of nomadic kindergarten and school teachers is of crucial importance in this process.

An accelerated pace of innovative processes within the Russian educational system requires new approaches to the professional level of teachers and education managers, and advanced teacher training is an integral part of the ongoing improvement of professional excellence. Conditions should be created at the regional level for teacher development through advanced training courses. Our program, *Organization of the Educational Process in a Nomadic Environment*, intended for nomadic pre-school and general education school managers and teachers, could prove useful in various regions of Russia's North, Siberia and Far East with nomadic and semi-nomadic populations.

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