

## The native language learning in the General education system of the Russian Federation

Изучение родного языка в системе общего образования Российской Федерации

El aprendizaje de la lengua materna en el sistema de educación general de la Federación Rusa

A aprendizagem de línguas nativas no sistema de ensino geral da Federação Russa

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### Abstract

In view of the urgency of preserving linguistic diversity in the world, the authors consider the current state of native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation in the system of General education. The relevance of the research is confirmed by the analysis of publications carried out in the work. There is a controversy in the country about whether native languages should be included in the main educational program and whether it should be mandatory to study them. The study revealed negative trends associated with a decrease in the interest of students and their parents in learning their native languages, a decrease in the number of classes and the number of students who master the main educational program in their native language, choose it as an independent subject for study. The paper presents proposals aimed at popularizing the study of native languages in the General education system, which is the basis for their preservation and development.

### Аннотация

Учитывая актуальность сохранения языкового разнообразия в мире, авторы рассматривают современное состояние родных языков народов Российской Федерации в системе общего образования. Актуальность исследования подтверждается проведенным в работе анализом публикаций. В стране идет спор о том, должны ли родные языки быть включены в основную образовательную программу и должно ли их изучение быть обязательным. Проведенное исследование выявило негативные тенденции, связанные со снижением интереса учащихся и их родителей к изучению родных языков, уменьшением количества занятий и количества учеников, осваивающих основную образовательную программу на родном языке, выбирающих его в качестве самостоятельного предмета для изучения. В статье представлены предложения, направленные на популяризацию изучения родных языков в системе общего образования,

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**Keywords:** native language, general educational subject, education on the native language, language situation, republic of the Russian Federation.

что является основой их сохранения и развития.

**Ключевые слова:** родной язык, общеобразовательный предмет, образование на родном языке, языковая ситуация, республика Российской Федерации.

## Resumen

En vista de la urgencia de preservar la diversidad lingüística en el mundo, los autores consideran el estado actual de las lenguas nativas de los pueblos de la Federación de Rusia en el sistema de educación general. La relevancia de la investigación se confirma por el análisis de las publicaciones llevadas a cabo en el trabajo. Existe una controversia en el país sobre si las lenguas nativas deben incluirse en el programa educativo principal y si debería ser obligatorio estudiarlas. El estudio reveló tendencias negativas asociadas con una disminución en el interés de los estudiantes y sus padres en aprender sus idiomas nativos, una disminución en el número de clases y el número de estudiantes que dominan el programa educativo principal en su lengua materna, lo eligen como un tema independiente para estudiar. El trabajo presenta propuestas destinadas a popularizar el estudio de las lenguas nativas en el sistema educativo general, que es la base para su preservación y desarrollo.

**Palabras clave:** lengua materna; asignatura educativa general; educación sobre la lengua materna; situación lingüística; República de la Federación Rusa.

## Resumo

Tendo em vista a urgência de preservar a diversidade linguística no mundo, os autores consideram o estado atual das línguas nativas dos povos da Federação Russa no sistema de educação geral. A relevância da pesquisa é confirmada pela análise das publicações realizadas no trabalho. Há uma controvérsia no país sobre se as línguas nativas devem ser incluídas no programa educacional principal e se deve ser obrigatório estudá-las. O estudo revelou tendências negativas associadas a uma diminuição do interesse dos estudantes e seus pais em aprender suas línguas nativas, uma diminuição no número de aulas e o número de alunos que dominam o principal programa educacional em sua língua nativa, escolheu-o como um assunto independente para estudo. O documento apresenta propostas destinadas a popularizar o estudo das línguas nativas no sistema de educação geral, que é a base para sua preservação e desenvolvimento.

**Palavras-chave:** língua nativa; assunto educacional geral; educação sobre a língua nativa; situação linguística; República da Federação Russa.

## Introduction

Language is one of the most important elements of spiritual culture; it distinguishes one nation from another and allows its bearer to relate itself to a particular ethnic group (Kryazhkov, 2007).

If some languages disappear today from the face of the earth, then a part of our world is irretrievably lost. The loss of even "small" languages is an irreparable loss, because its originality shows how diverse human thinking can be (Morozova, 2011).

The issue of native language proficiency and awareness of its social value has the great applied importance both in the practice of children's family education and in teaching the native and

non-native languages in the general education system (Chuprov, 2013).

In recent years, Russian society widely discussed the need to reform the education system in order to strengthen the national component. A national school is not conceivable without teaching in the native language. The native language is the most important asset of the people, the main condition for the existence of an ethnic group, a means of knowing its history, centuries-old customs and traditions (Vikulova, 2015).

The issues of preserving and studying native languages in the education system are relevant both in Russia and abroad, as evidenced by the publications (Martynova, 2019; Soto, 1993).

Haynes (2007) writes about the importance of linguistic aspects in the implementation of school curricula. Cardenas (1984) and Weihua Yu (2011) pay great attention to bilingual education, which is advisable in the case of active dissemination of a non-native language in various fields.

Topical issues of expanding school education in English, that in many areas crowds out national languages are separately highlighted (Gök, 2008; Saidjalalova & Karimova, 2019; Kavaliauskienė et al., 2010).

In the context of growing federalism and differentiated language policy in the regions of the Russian Federation, the feasibility of comprehensive studies of the modern state of learning native languages and learning them is increasing. The analysis of indicators allows us to draw conclusions about the availability of the educational system for teaching native languages, which is normatively enshrined in federal law, and the degree of its actual implementation.

The expansion of the presence of the Russian language as the country's state language and English language as the language of interethnic communication creates the prerequisites for reducing the popularity of education in native languages and their study. It is necessary to develop measures aimed at increasing the popularity of the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation in the education system, which requires comprehensive analytical studies of the dynamics of key indicators on the study of native languages and education in native languages at various levels of general education. The analysis showed that such studies are absent in the literature.

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a comprehensive analysis of the state of education in native languages and the study of native languages in the general education system of the Russian Federation by regions and to present directions for improving educational policy in the field of native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

### Materials and methods

During the study we used comparison methods, comparative analysis, and the method of data's graphical interpretation.

An analysis of the statistical data posted in the Document Bank of the Ministry of Education of

the Russian Federation (<https://docs.edu.gov.ru>) was made to determine the existing problems in the field of native languages of the nations of the Russian Federation within the framework of general education.

The data of Form No. OO-1 "Information about the organization providing training for educational programs for primary, basic general, secondary general education" for 2016-2017 both in the whole country and in the context of separate regions were used for the analysis.

### Results

At the end of 2017, the number of pupils in Russian schools amounted to more than 15 million people. In addition to the Russian language, as an independent subject in schools, 10.6% of pupils study their native language - this is almost 1.6 million people. Another 75 thousand people study their native language optionally or in study groups.

Studying linguistic differentiation, it should be noted that most pupils (98.5%) are taught only in the state language of the Russian Federation - Russian language. The remaining 1.5% of pupils (228 thousand people) study in their native language.

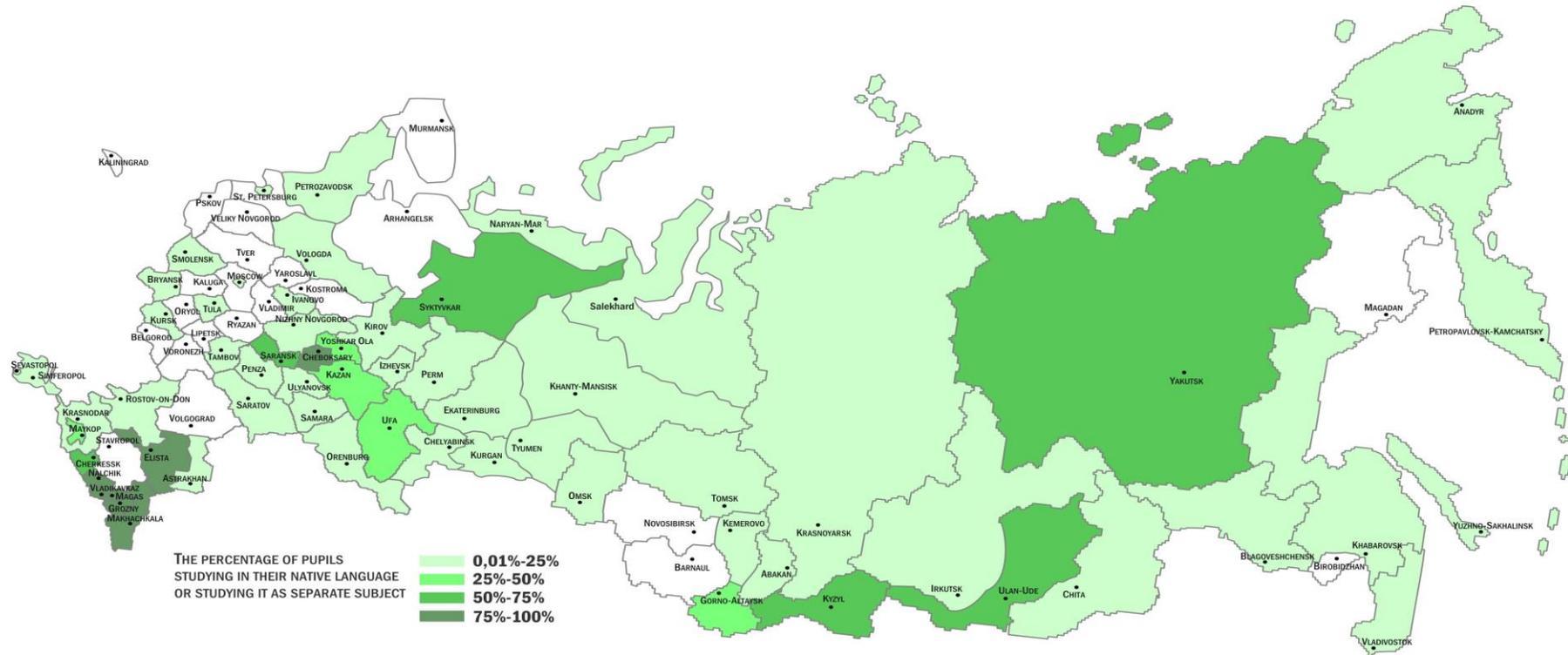
The analysis of the absolute indicators characterizing the number of pupils studying in their native languages or studying it as an separate subject, based on the data in Figure 1, allows us to identify the regions with their highest values (more than 100 thousand people). These are the republics of Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Tatarstan, the Chechen republic, Chuvash republic.

The data in Figure 2 allows us to identify the regions in which studying in the native language or studying it as an separate subject covers the largest percentage of pupils. These include the Republic of Dagestan (84.19%), the Republic of Ingushetia (96.71%), the Republic of Kalmykia (75.07%), the Republic of North Ossetia – Alania (95.48%), the Chechen Republic (99.24%), Chuvash Republic (81.43%).

The analysis of the data in Figure 3 reveals the regions with the largest relative increase (decrease) in the number of people who studied native language or studied in their native language in 2017 compared to 2016.

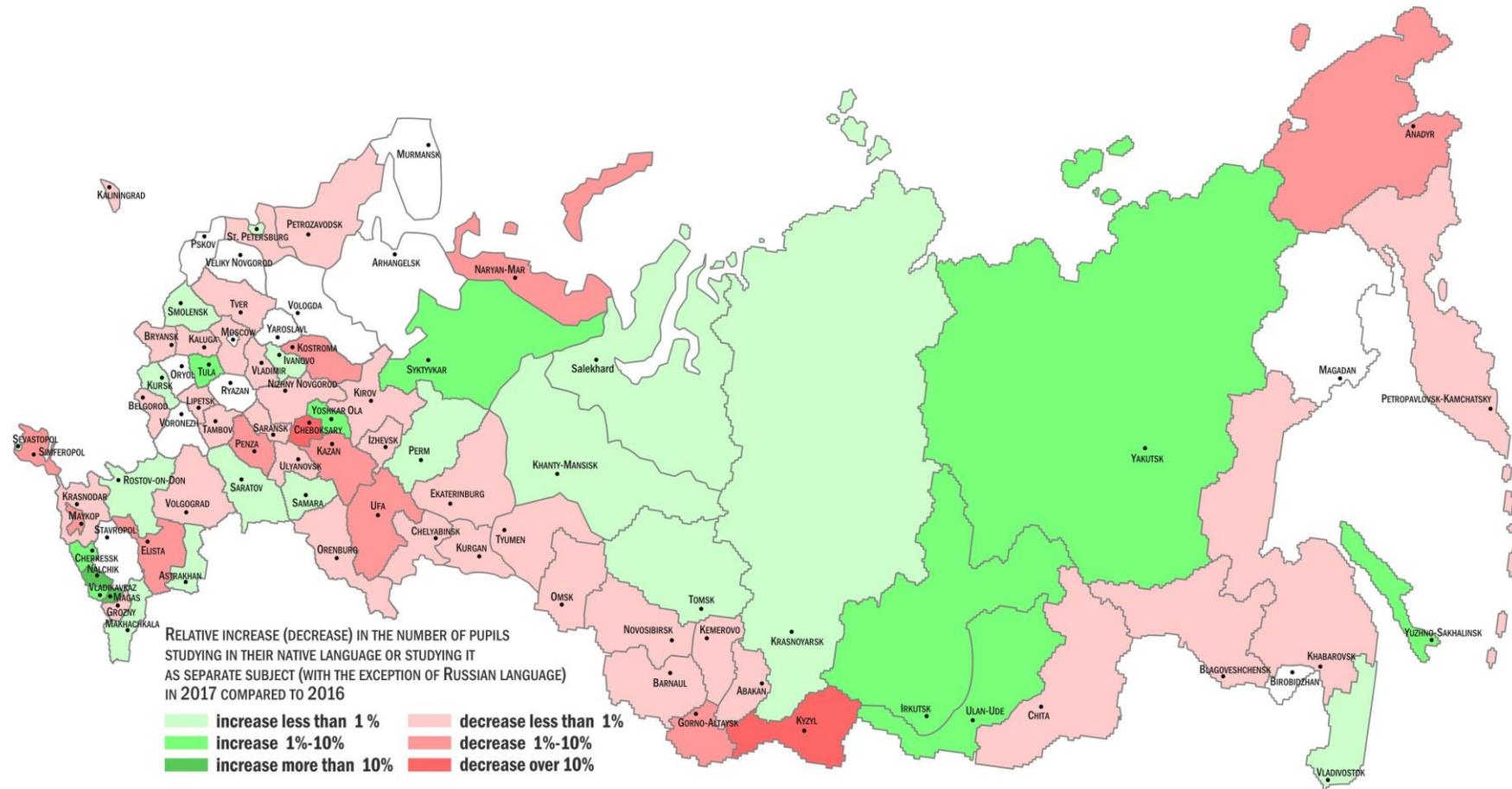


*Figure 1.* The number of pupils studying in their native language or studying it as an separate subject in 2017.  
Source: made by the authors.



**Figure 2.** The prevalence level of the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation (with the exception of Russian language) in the education system (2017 data).

Source: made by the authors.



**Figure 3.** Relative increase (decrease) in the number of pupils studying in their native language or studying it as an separate subject (in 2017 compared to 2016). Source: made by the authors.

The largest increase in pupils in relative terms (more than 10%) is noted in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, the Republic of Ingushetia; relative decrease (more than 10%) - in the Republic of Tuva, Chuvash Republic.

In regions with a high decrease level in the relative number of pupils studying in their native language or studying it as an separate subject, a negative situation is noted in the issues of popularizing native languages, which requires the development of activities that include campaigning with children and their parents within and outside the education system.

In 2017, there was a tendency to reduce learning in the native language, with the exception of Russian language: over the year, the number of pupils decreased by 21.5%, which is more than 62 thousand less than in 2016. The highest negative dynamics in absolute terms was the Tuvan (-20 thousand people), followed by Bashkir (-15 thousand people), Ingush language (-6.5 thousand people), Karachai (-6.3 thousand people). Among the languages that expanded their presence in 2017 as a language of study, we can include the Rutulian (+6 thousand people), Avaric (+2 thousand people), Chechen (+1.8 thousand people) and Kumyk (+1.5 thousand people).

A detailed description of the dynamics of the number of pupils by those languages that showed a significant decrease in indicators in 2017 compared to 2016 is below.

The decrease in the number of pupils in Tuvan was due to the negative dynamics of the indicator in the Republic of Tuva by 20180 people, while the number of pupils studying in Russian increased by 20198 people. Thus, the decrease in the indicator is caused solely by the choice of the pupils themselves, their parents (legal representatives). In addition, there is an increase in the number of pupils studying the Tuvan as independent subject for 13523 people, i.e. more than half of the pupils who switched from Tuvan to Russian as the language of study began to study it as an independent subject. The detailed dynamics of pupils by grade did not reveal significant discrepancies with the overall dynamics. At all levels of primary and basic general education, an approximately equal number of pupils who choose Russian as the language of study instead of Tuvan is ascertained. At the level of secondary general education, there has been a general decrease in the number of pupils, including those studying in the Tuvan.

Similarly, the negative dynamics in the number of pupils studying in the Bashkir is associated with the choice of the language of study in the Republic of Bashkortostan. In the region as a whole, there is a decrease in the number of pupils in their native languages: in Bashkir - by 15376 people, in Mari - by 545 people, in Mordvin - by 37 people, in Tatar - by 3945 people, in Tat - by 165 people, in Udmurt - by 27 people, in Chuvash - by 434 people, while the number of pupils studying in the Russian language increased by 21608 people.

At the same time, unlike the Republic of Tuva, there was a decrease in the number of pupils who chose as independent subject such native languages as Bashkir (by 8433 people), Balkar (by 483 people), Tat (by 650 people) and a number of other languages. There is a significant increase in the number of pupils who choose the Tatar language as their native language for study as an independent subject (6039 people).

In addition, it is noted that the decrease in the number of pupils studying in the Bashkir to the utmost is the characteristic of the level of basic general education.

Thus, in the Republic of Bashkortostan there is a rather sharp decrease in pupils' interest in learning in their native language and studying it as an independent subject.

In the Republic of Ingushetia, there was a decrease in pupils in their native language by 6499 people and an increase in pupils who chose Russian as the language of study by 10542 people. It should be noted the significantly positive dynamics in the number of pupils who chose the Ingush language for study as an independent subject - 23,661 people.

The number of pupils in the Karachai language decreased in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic by 6,276 people with an increase in the number of pupils choosing Russian as the language of study by 7089 people. The growth in the number of pupils who chose the Karachai language as an independent subject amounted to 6457 people. At the same time, it is noted the negative dynamics of the choice of other languages of study, with the exception of Russian language, - Circassian, Karelian, Nogai, Ossetian.

Thus, in the republics of Tuva, Bashkortostan, Ingushetia, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, as well as in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, in the Republic of Tatarstan, there is a rather large decrease in the number of pupils who choose

their native language as the language of study, which is primarily associated with the wishes of their parents (legal representatives). An analysis of the staffing of educational institutions in the native language field demonstrates high rates for the republics of Tuva and Tatarstan. For the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, the Republic of Ingushetia, the indicator is less than 95%, which can also cause negative dynamics of pupils in their native language.

Despite the reduction in the number of pupils in languages other than Russian, the number of pupils studying their native language as an independent subject, on the contrary, increased by 5%. The most positive example in absolute terms in 2017 was the Dargin (+23.7 thousand people), as well as Dolgan (+16 thousand people) and Jewish (Yiddish) - + 13.5 thousand people. The largest negative dynamics were shown in the Soyot language (-16 thousand people), Teleut (-8.5 thousand people) and Orok (Uilta) - a decrease of 8.1 thousand people.

Attention should be paid to the languages of the nations of the Russian Federation, which are not taught or taught possibly only optional, as well as those languages that disappeared from educational programs in 2017. The first include Itelmen, Ket, Negidale, Udege, Enets, Orok (Uilta); to the second - Shor, Teleut, Saami.

It should also be noted languages that are on the verge of extinction - the number of pupils learning it is less than 100 people. These are Eskimo, Olcha, Soyot, Tofalar and Nivkh (in two dialects).

The native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation are studied not only in those regions where they are titular, but also in a number of other subjects of the Russian Federation in which ethnic diasporas live.

An analysis of the prevalence of teaching native languages in Russian schools showed that the possibility of studying in the native language was implemented for 33 languages in 28 subjects of the Russian Federation. Most of them (24 languages) are studied in one region; in 3 languages (Mari mountain, Udmurt and Evenki) studying takes place in two regions of the country; in one language (Chuvash) - in three regions; in 3 languages (Abazin, German and Polish) - in four regions. The most widespread are Tatar language - studying in it is available in 5 regions, and Rutul language - studying in it is available in 9 regions.

Moreover, 69 languages are studied as an independent subject in schools in 58 subjects of the Russian Federation. Basically (for 33 languages), one native language was taught as an separate subject in one school in the region. 17 languages are studied in 2 regions of the country; 7 languages - in 3 regions; 5 languages - in 4 regions. 5 regions provide the opportunity to study the Mordovian Erzya, Evenki and Mari meadow languages exists; 6 regions provide the opportunity to study the Udmurt and Chuvash. The most common to study as separate subjects are the German language - it is studied in 9 regions, and the Tatar language - it is studied in 22 regions.

In 55 out of 85 subjects, pupils have the opportunity to study their native (non-Russian) language optionally or in study groups.

According to the total number of pupils, the leaders are Chechen, Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash and Avar languages - more than 100 thousand people study them. A significant part of pupils (from 10 to 100 thousand people) is characteristic of 23 languages of the peoples of Russia; between 100 to 1000 people study 31 languages. 10 languages are characterized by the smallest number of pupils: Korean, Eskimo, Georgian, Soyot, Tofalar, Nivkh (in two dialects), Shor, Latvian, Ulch and Turkish. Less than 100 pupils study them in schools.

The most common language in Russia is the Tatar language, more than 76 thousand people study in it in 5 regions of the country. In addition to the Republic of Tatarstan, these regions are the neighboring republics of Bashkortostan, Chuvashia and Perm region, as well as a small group of pupils in the Republic of Crimea. More than 175 thousand people across the country study the Tatar language, it has been implemented in 22 regions as an independent subject.

Among the native languages, only the Chechen language is more widespread than Tatar, more than 270 thousand people study it, however, the studying is concentrated in the region of location - 95% of those who studying the Chechen language live in the Chechen Republic, and the remaining 5% are in the neighboring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan. About 3 thousand people study in the Chechen language also in the republic itself.

The Chuvash language can be considered widespread, almost 104 thousand people are taught Chuvash in schools in 6 regions of the

country: the republics of Chuvashia, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, as well as the Ulyanovsk, Samara and Orenburg regions. Moreover, more than 11 thousand people have the opportunity to study in the Chuvash language, not only in Chuvashia itself, but also in the neighboring republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.

Among the most common languages, the following languages should be noted: Avar, Bashkir, Buryat, Ossetian, Kumyk, Mordovian Erzya, Udmurt, Mari meadow, Yakut. Teaching these languages, as well as Chechen, is concentrated in one region and in 2-4 neighboring subjects. The number of pupils studying other languages is either less than 10 thousand people, or they are concentrated within one region.

Teaching foreign languages takes place either without reference to the locality (Armenian, Polish, Jewish (Yiddish), German), or gravitates mainly to a specific subject of the Russian Federation (Azerbaijani to the Republic of Dagestan, Finnish to the Republic of Karelia, Kazakh to the Astrakhan region, etc.).

The analysis of linguistic diversity in the regions of the Russian Federation showed that in 16 subjects of the Russian Federation, in addition to Russian, only one native language is studied; 2-3 languages are studied in 23 regions of the country. Another 23 regions are characterized by significant linguistic diversity; in these regions pupils studied 4-6 languages. A greater number of languages are studied only in schools in the republics of Tatarstan, Sakha (Yakutia), Dagestan and Bashkortostan.

The largest number of different native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation are studied in schools of the Republic of Dagestan. These are 9 languages, and among them are not only the languages of the peoples of multinational Dagestan, but also the languages of neighboring peoples and large national diasporas (Abazin, Avar, Azerbaijan, Dargin, Kumyk, Lak, Lezgi, Tabasaran, Chechen).

The next in the number of languages in which the educational process is conducted are the Republic of Crimea - 5 languages (Crimean Tatar, Polish, Rutul, Tatar, Ukrainian); Republic of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan - 4 languages in each one.

By the number of languages that are studied as an independent subject, the leader is the Republic of Bashkortostan - 14 languages. In the Republic of

Dagestan, 12 languages were taught, in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) - 7 languages were taught, in the Republic of Tatarstan - 6 languages were taught. In 4 regions, 5 languages are an independent subject in the school - in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, in the Republic of Crimea, in the Republic of North Ossetia - Alania and in the Khabarovsk region.

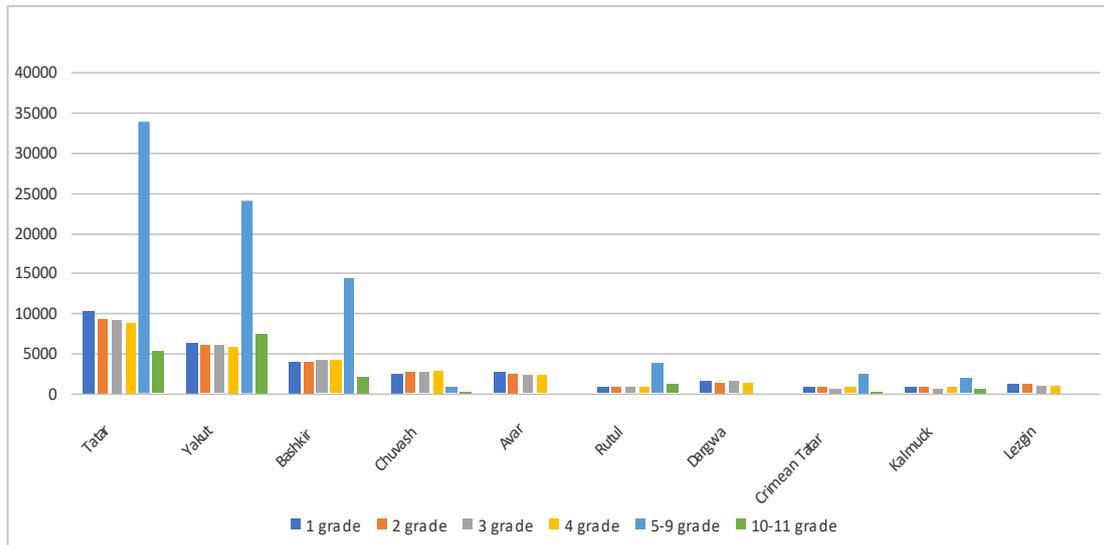
Additionally, as part of the study, the structure of the total number of pupils studying in their native languages or studying them as an independent subject was studied.

An analysis of the total number of pupils studying in their native language or studying it as an separate subject showed that the Republic of Dagestan is the leader among Russian regions in 2017. In the education system of the republic, 13 languages are studied, involving more than 325 thousand people to study their native language. More than 100 thousand people also study their native language in the Chechen Republic, in the Republic of Tatarstan, in the Republic of Bashkortostan and in the Chuvash Republic. In 15 regions, the number of pupils is in the range of 10-100 thousand people; in 19 regions the number of pupils is in the range of 1-10 thousand people; in 23 Russian regions, it is relatively small groups of pupils totaling less than a thousand people.

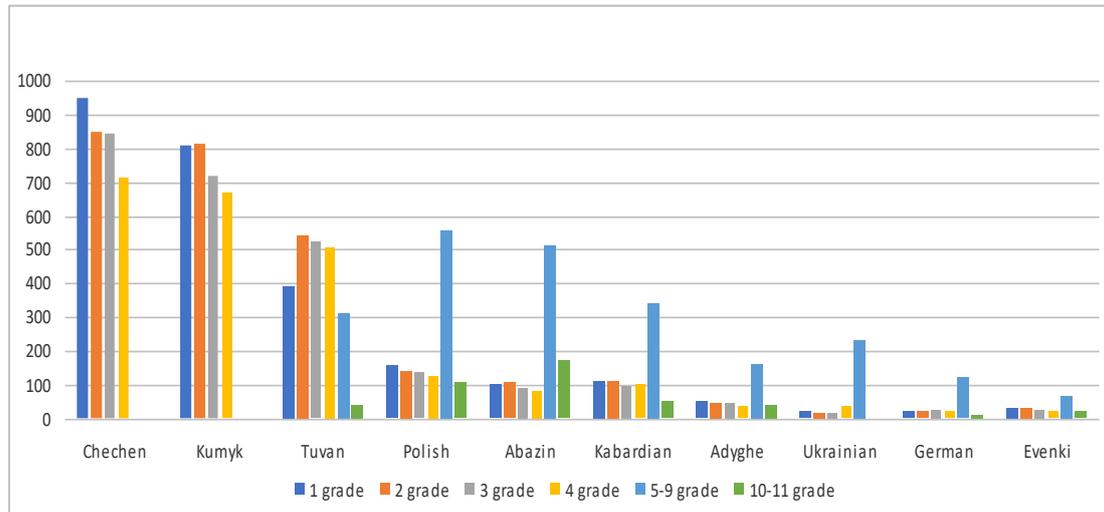
It should be noted that in most subjects of the Russian Federation, where foreign languages teaching as a native languages, their study attracts a small part of pupils - in 44 regions, the proportion of people learning native languages to the total number of pupils is less than 14%. This group includes regions where is clearly caused by relatively small linguistic diversity, such as in the Smolensk or Ryazan regions, and regions with a large linguistic and national diversity. For example, the Udmurt Republic, where 5 native languages are studied by just over 10% of pupils, despite the fact that the share of the non-Russian population is estimated at almost 38% (according to the 2010 population census). 9 republics of the Russian Federation are characterized by a significant proportion of pupils who studying native languages: Karachay-Cherkess Republic, Republic of Mordovia, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Republic of Buryatia, Republic of Tatarstan, Mari El republic, Republic of Adygea, Republic of Bashkortostan and Republic of Altai - in these regions, the percentage of pupils studying native languages is in the range of 25-70% to the total number of pupils. 6 republics are characterized by a very high share (70-90%) of pupils who studying native languages: Republic

of Kabardino-Balkaria, Republic of Dagestan, Chuvash Republic, Republic of Kalmykia, Republic of Tyva and Republic of Komi. Almost all pupils study their native languages in three republics: Chechen, Ingushetia and North Ossetia - Alania.

Graphical interpretation of the data on the most common native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation in terms of the number of pupils studying in their native language is below (Figure 4 and 5).



**Figure 4.** Number of pupils studying in their native language. Source: made by the authors.



**Figure 5.** Number of pupils studying in their native language (continuation). Source: made by the authors.

Considering the distribution of pupils studying in their native language by classes, we can distinguish two main models of language teaching in the Russian educational system. The first is education entirely in the native language throughout the entire period of study in primary

and secondary schools (1–9 grades). Such a model is characteristic, for example, of the Tatar, Bashkir, Rutul, Crimean Tatar and Kalmyk

languages. For other languages, studying is limited only to the elementary school stage, such

as studying in the Chuvash, Avar, Dargin, and Lezgi languages, and in high school pupils continue to study in Russian. In general, almost all languages are characterized by a sharp decrease in the number of pupils studying in it in 10–11 grades (with the exception of the Yakut, Polish, and Abaza languages).

The analysis of the proportion of pupils studying in their native language in the total number of pupils in the country as a whole showed that the three most common languages are Tatar (0.51%), Yakut (0.37%) and Bashkir (0.21%). At the same time, while during primary and basic general education the majority of pupils in the country (except for the Russian language) are taught in the Tatar language, then in the system of secondary general education the largest proportion of pupils are taught in the Yakut language. The remaining languages are characterized by smaller proportions - more than a basis point of pupils corresponds to 10 languages.

Considering the number of people studying their native language as an independent subject, we can generally indicate that almost all languages are characterized by a systematic decrease in the number of pupils from 1st to 11th grade. Some languages, such as the Buryat, Komi and Mari meadow languages, the main group of pupils begin to learn only from the second grade, but in 10-11 grades their number decreases for all languages.

The largest proportion of pupils studying their native language as an independent subject falls on Chechen, Tatar, Chuvash, Avar, Bashkir languages. The distribution by the levels of general education, as in the case with the absolute indicator, characterizes the lowest indicators for secondary general education, where for the most part the native language is not studied. This applies, first of all, to the Chuvash, Buryat, Mordovian languages.

## Conclusion

The negative dynamics in the number of pupils studying in native languages is due mainly to a decrease in their popularity among pupils. At the same time, as the analysis showed, the complete rejection of studying native languages does not happen - they are introduced as a school subject.

It should be noted the predominant share of those who studied native language in primary and secondary schools, while in high school, teaching

in native languages or studying them as a school subject is practically absent. These data are associated with the need for further education in the system of secondary vocational or higher education, which is implemented in the country in the state language. There are practically no precedents for teaching in native languages at universities in the Russian Federation.

In general, the results of the analysis demonstrate certain problems in terms of popularizing studying in native languages and studying them as an independent subject. Particular attention should be paid to those regions where there is a negative dynamics in the number of pupils studying or learning native languages. In addition, there is the advisability of expanding the practice of studying individual native languages in the system of secondary general education.

Among the activities that increase the popularity of the study of native languages include contests and olympiads in specialized subjects that create additional motivation among pupils to study native languages.

In addition, work with parents is of particular importance, since it is family education that influences the choice of the native language at school. It is the parents (legal representatives) of the pupil, in accordance with the requirements of the current legislation, who decide which language the pupil will study as a native language.

Taking into consideration the trends of urbanization, reducing the scope of the use of the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, it is advisable to expand campaigns of a creative orientation that can arouse pupils' interest in traditional culture and language (festivals, concerts, etc.).

All these and other measures are effective as a set of measures, which it is advisable to fix in the regulatory and program documents of each region, to include in state programs.

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