

RUSSIAN SYSTEM OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION: SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROBLEM

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with economic and social problems of the preschool education system functioning in modern Russia on the example of the Republic of Tatarstan. The author's studies served as the basis for the analysis of investments in the education system of the Republic of Tatarstan for 2005-2014, within which framework the quantitative indicators on the number of preschool institutions and preschool children attending preschool institutions were analyzed. Analysis of current trends in the functioning of the preschool education system was supplemented by the results of a sociological survey conducted by the authors using the method of formalized interviews among the population of the Republic of Tatarstan for 2007-2010 and 2015. The results revealed modern problems and trends in the sphere of preschool education in the Republic of Tatarstan. The conclusion includes summary and recommendations on reforming preschool education at the present stage based on the experience of the Republic of Tatarstan.

Keywords: Preschool education. Education quality. Investment in education. Number of preschool educational institutions. Problems of preschool education. Federal state educational standard.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the modern Russian education system has been experiencing a stage of profound changes and reforms, which resulted in the introduction of a unified state examination into the secondary education system, the formation of a multilevel vocational education system, etc. The least changed was the system of preschool education.

During the years of perestroika, a large number of preschool institutions were closed due to a drop in the birth rate and a reduction in the number of children in preschool institutions. Undoubtedly, this was facilitated by a sharp decline in the level and quality of life of the population in the 1990s, which led to a deterioration in the demographic situation in the country, especially in rural areas, where traditionally prevailed a large family. However, state assets (including capital buildings in the form of health care and educational institutions) were often sold at insignificant prices, in some cases there were raider seizures and corrupt schemes involving the officials themselves. As a result of such economic activities of local authorities, a significant part of the structures of preschool institutions was irretrievably lost, and only their small proportion has been returned in recent years as a result of lawsuits and proceedings.

Another problem of the preschool education system has remained relevant for several decades – the quality of education and the introduction of a single state standard that ensures its achievement. The mere fact that the Federal State Educational Standard of Preschool Education was adopted only in 2013 indicates that the reform of this sphere takes place with a considerable delay. This is also due to the fact that not only the officials in educational sphere, but also society as a whole has no understanding of the importance of this level of education in the development of the child, in stimulating his/her creativity and forming the basis for the future deepening of knowledge. In addition, literate upbringing and education at this age, correctly conducted corrective work with preschool children allows rehabilitating those who have

deviations in physical and mental development, including them in a single educational space along with healthy children and, as a result, getting sound, active and self-sufficient citizens.

The problem related to the quality of education is the level of professional competence of employees in the sphere of preschool education. It is no secret that in the Soviet past and in the perestroika period, the attitude towards the professional suitability of the workers in this sphere, both from society and from the state administration, was simplified – “it's good that they look after the children, it's good that they carry out some activities - what more do you want?” Modern realities associated with the transition of society into the postindustrial type of social production poses absolutely different problems to the previously set. Mastering new technologies and applying creative methods in social production becomes a daily phenomenon, which puts forward new demands on the human capital of society. All these conditions determine the criteria for the professional competence of the employees of the education system at all levels – from preschool to higher professional education. The level and profile of education of the staff of preschool educational institutions in some cases do not meet the requirements; the mastery of new educational technologies, psychological competence and ability to work with children from different social, including deprived groups is still far from perfect.

Another socially important problem of the preschool education system is the availability of preschool education for all children without exception – regardless of their place of residence, financial situation of the family and the social status of parents. Often children from troubled families, social exclusion groups, and small villages, farms and hard-to-reach areas of the country become isolated. A significant role in this situation is also played by the shortage of preschool institutions in large residential areas.

The solution to the above problems lies in the sphere of state and municipal administration and depends on the volume of investments aimed at the development of the education system in general and preschool education in particular. Thanks to the well-coordinated work of federal authorities, subjects of the federation and municipalities, a large number of economic problems in the sphere of preschool education have been successfully resolved in recent years. Nevertheless, the problems of underfunding certain areas, ensuring a decent salary of preschool workers, etc. still remain. In this paper, we propose to analyze the dependence of the population's satisfaction with the quality of preschool education and the level of investment in this sphere on the basis of the materials of our study conducted in the Republic of Tatarstan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study of the problems of preschool education holds a prominent place among scientific publications aimed at studying the problems of the education system and represents a huge layer of sociological, psychological, managerial and economic knowledge. An important place among them is given to fundamental research in the field of the sociology of education (Kliucharov G.A., Shubkin, Subetto A.I., and others) [1]. A wide layer of knowledge is represented by research in the field of child psychology (Abramenkoma V.V., Vygotskii L.S., Elkonin D.B., and others) [2-5]. The issues of educational services and forecasting the demand for preschool education in the region were considered by S.A. Beliakova, N. Vasilchenko, A.P. Egorshin, A.G. Granberg, and others [6]. K. Pollitt, R. Johnston, V.N. Vasilenko gave in their works an assessment of the effectiveness of social investment.

The works by Mayer A.A. [7] are devoted to the problem of socialization of preschool children and ensuring the quality of preschool education. The author states that two trends are observed in the system of preschool education in modern Russia, leading to a total decrease in the quality of education in this area: the aging of pedagogical staff and the outflow of qualified specialists on the one hand, and, on the other, the drop in the level of training of young specialists [8]. The problems of the quality of education in preschool education system are also studied in the works by Edakova I.B. [9], Evdokimova N.V. [10], Gazman O.S. [11].

Modern Russian education has been functioning in the context of reform for decades. According to the English scholar A. Toynbee, at the transition stages of history the education system is meant to become for the conservative majority an instrument of drawing it up to the level of a creatively thinking minority. In other words, education plays the role of a mediator between a nascent civilization and a lagging conservative culture [12]. In this regard, the main purpose of our study is to determine the place of the preschool education system in society based on a public assessment of its situation, identifying its weak points and developing recommendations for its improvement.

The main methods of research were analysis of the absolute and relative values of statistical indicators and the questionnaire survey. We conducted a questionnaire survey of the population during 2007-2015 in all administrative institutions of the Republic of Tatarstan (n=2,186 at each stage of the study). A total of 10,930 people over the age of 18 were interviewed. The sampling set was formed by a multistage regionalized quota sample. The sampling error was 5%. The survey was conducted in the form of a structured interview. To study the public opinion about the quality of educational services in the preschool education system, a screening question was posed: "Do you have a preschool child?". Thus, the respondents involved in the problem of preschool education and being competent to answer questions on the merits were selected from the general array. Statistical yearbooks for the period of 8 years in the Republic of Tatarstan were analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the survey showed a growing level of satisfaction among the population with the preschool education system – if in 2007 the proportion of those satisfied with the activity of the preschool education and upbringing system was slightly more than half of the respondents (56%), in 2015 it was three fourths of those who answered the questions (75.5 %) (Fig. 1).

This is due to the significant efforts of the state and municipal government applied in restoring and developing the system of preschool education. In 2010, the Education Development Strategy of the Republic of Tatarstan for 2010-2015 "Kilechek – Future" was adopted in the republic, which included the implementation of the long-term target program "Children of Tatarstan" (2011-2013), as well as the "Belekech" program, also aimed at the development, of the system of preschool education. For example, the budget of the Republic of Tatarstan for the implementation of the Belekech program only in 2010 was 283,934.8 rubles, and 2,546,011 thousand rubles were allocated for the strategy in general in 2010-2011. The analysis of aggregate investment in education shows a significant increase in this indicator in the period under study. A slight decrease in investment in education is observed in 2006.

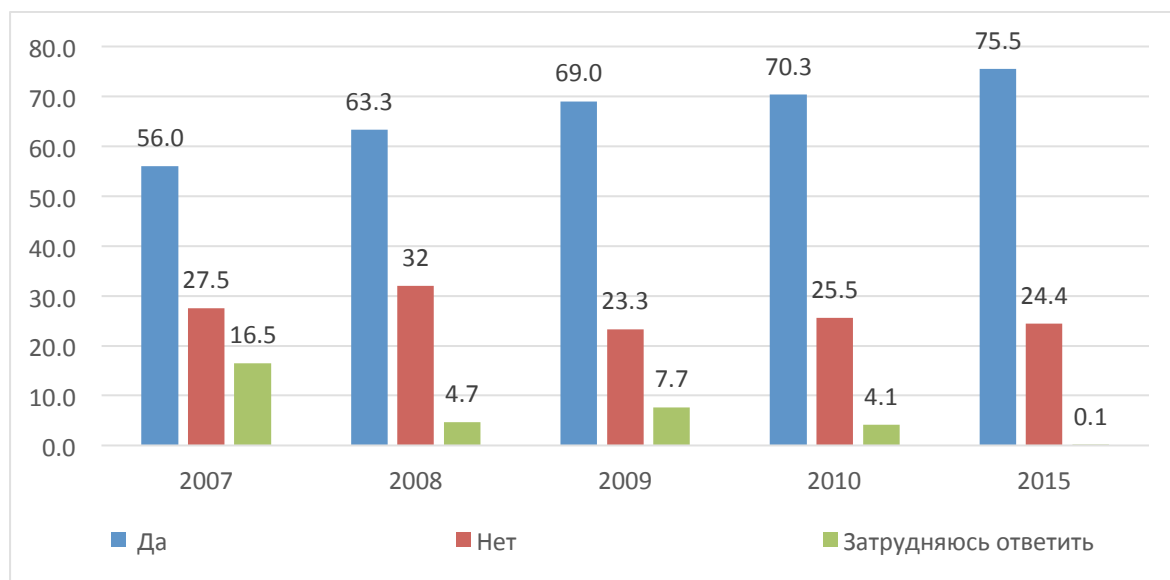


Figure 1 Distribution of the respondents' answers to the question: "Are you satisfied with the activity of the preschool education system?"

This was due to an increase in funding for the federal target Program for the preparation to the millennium of the city of Kazan. Year 2008 was marked by the economic crisis and as a consequence in 2009 investment in the education sphere decreased. In 2013, the XXVII World Summer Universiade took place in the Republic of Tatarstan. Therefore, the Republican funds were primarily channeled to this event. In 2013, we can see a decline in investment in education (Fig. 2). The general trend of the period under review is the growth of investment in education.

Nevertheless, the system of preschool education remains one of the most problematic. To study the situation, we asked the respondents: "What problems can you name in the system of preschool education?"

As the multiyear study trend shows, two main problems can be identified: lack of places in preschool institutions for all comers, and high tuition fee in the preschool institutions. At the same time, over the past seven years, the proportion of respondents who pointed to the lack of available spaces in preschool institutions decreased by half (in 2007 – 68.1%, in 2015 – 34.0%).

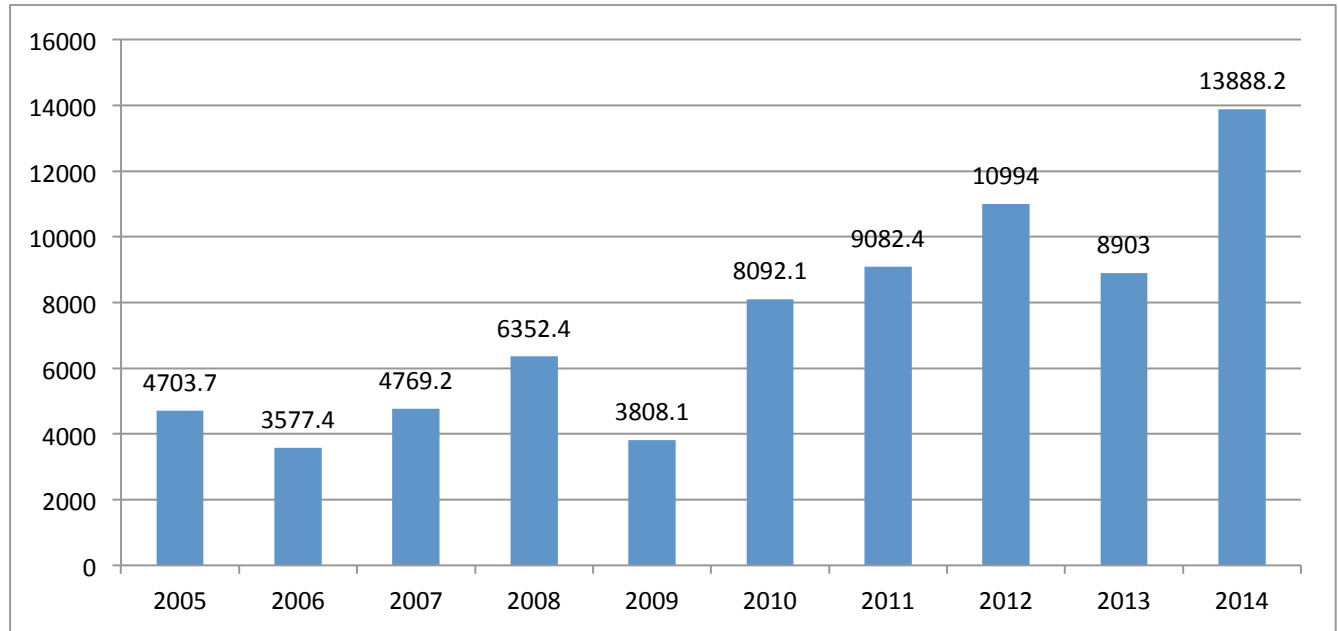
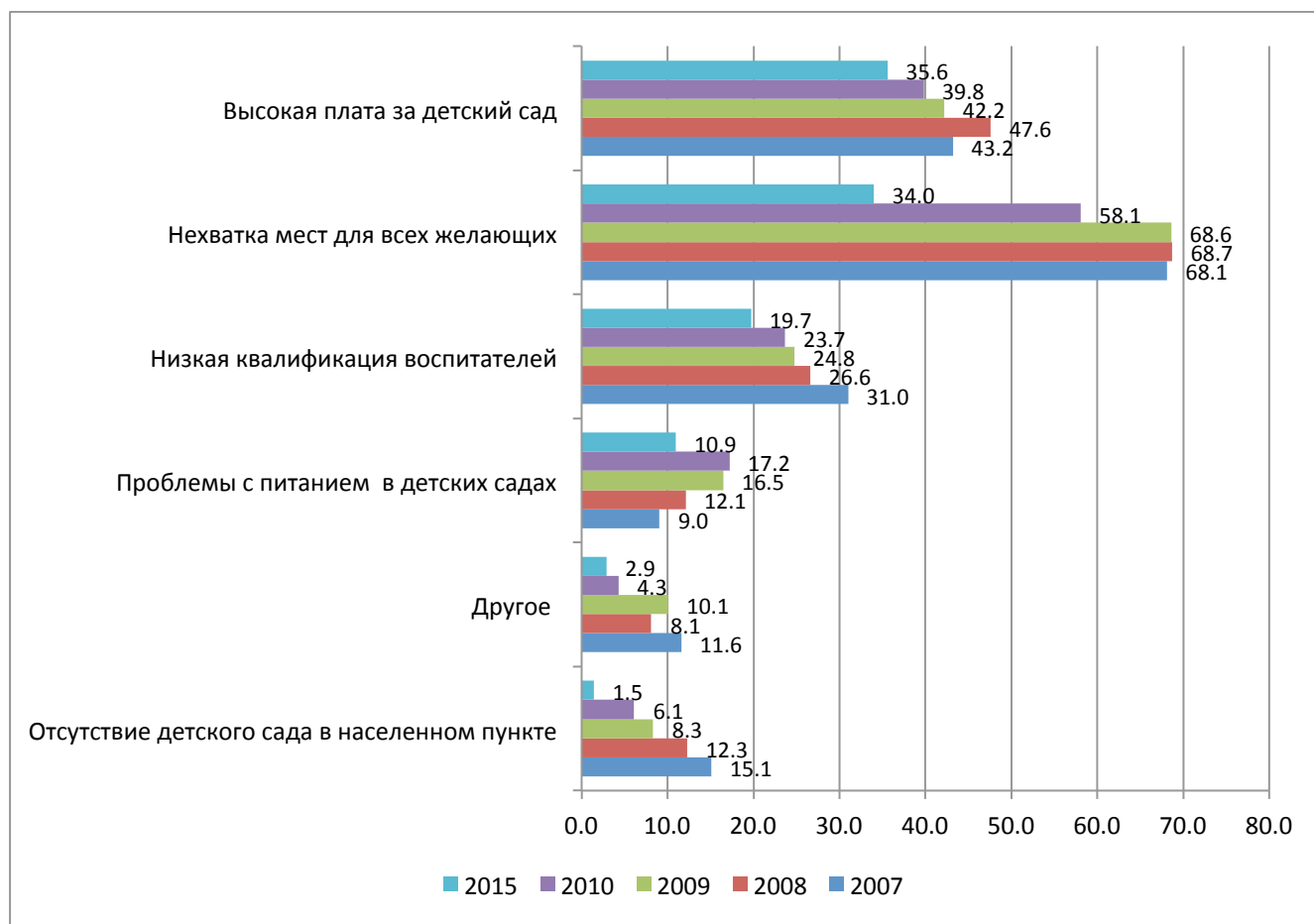


Figure 2 Investments in fixed assets in education in the Republic of Tatarstan, million rubles.

This can be explained as a result of the implementation of the republican programs for the development of the preschool education system, including the provision of equal availability of preschool institutions to all children. In 2010-11 the development of the system of preschool education, including the construction and development of the infrastructure of preschool educational institutions received from the republican budget 2,546,011 thousand rubles. The fact that the share of respondents who noted the problem of the lack of preschool institutions in a populated area decreased from 15.1% in 2007 to 1.5% in 2015 (it should be noted that this is mainly residents of small settlements And rural settlements) suggests the efficiency of the conducted measures. In addition to these main problems, there are still a number of other issues in the system of preschool education. Despite the insignificant positive trend, the problem of high tuition fee in preschool institutions (in 2007 – 43.2%, in 2015 – 35.6%) remains topical. Another important issue for the system of preschool education is professional competence of the pedagogical staff. Every fifth respondent (19.7%) pointed to this problem (in 2007 – 31.0%) (Fig.3).



High fee for nursery school services
Lack of available places for all comers
Low qualification level of the pedagogical staff
Food problems at nursery schools
Other
Lack of any nursery school in a city

Figure 3 Distribution of the respondents' answers to the question: "What problems can you name in the system of preschool education?"

Analyzing the number of preschool educational institutions for 1990-2014, the following trend can be traced: from 1990 to 2010 there is a decrease in the number of nursery schools from 2,498 to 1,890 units. The growth of the number of preschool institutions has been observed since 2011 – since the start of the implementation of the republican target programs - from 1,925 to 2,029 units. It is noteworthy that even with a fairly intensive increase in the number of preschool institutions in recent years, it turned up impossible to reach the level of year 1990 (Fig. 4).

The number of preschool-age children attending nursery schools repeats the development trend of the number of preschool institutions. This is due to the demographic situation that occurred during this period. From 1990 to 2007, there was a trend towards a decline in the birth rate in the country.

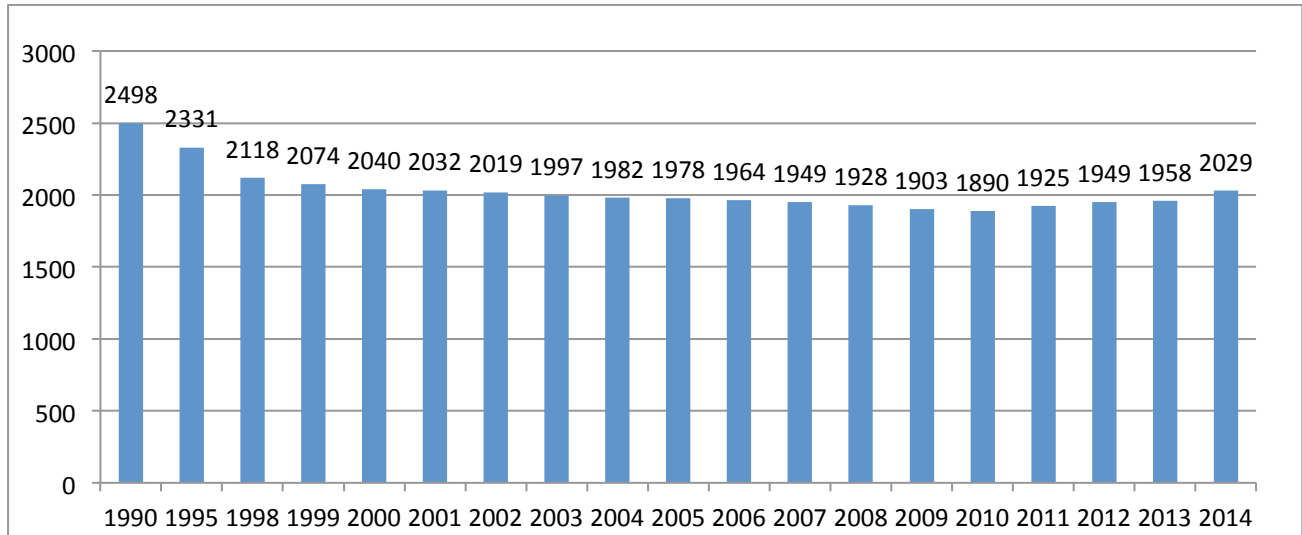


Figure 4 Number of preschool educational institutions (units)

Only a shift in the state policy towards a demographic situation aimed at supporting maternity and childhood has led to some positive dynamics in this area. The introduction of the maternity capital program and the improvement of the economic situation in general have led to a certain increase in the birth rate in the country, while the level of 1990 has not been reached (Fig. 5).

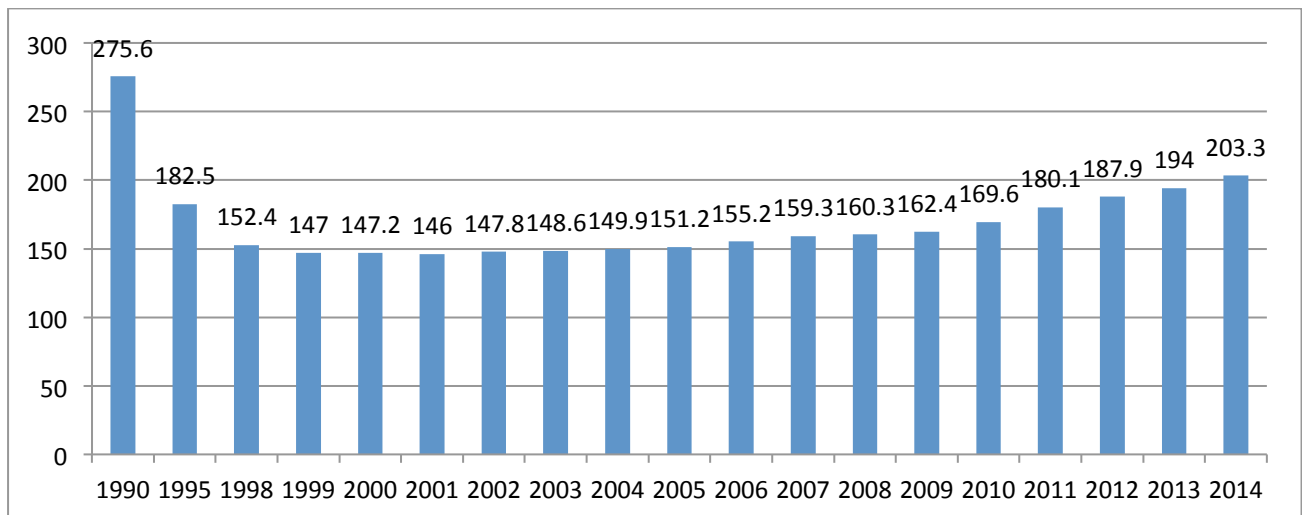


Figure 5 Number of preschool-age children attending preschool educational institutions (thousand people)

The indicator of the number of children per 100 places in preschool educational institutions also demonstrates the main problem in this area: the lack of preschool institutions for the preschool children (Fig. 6).

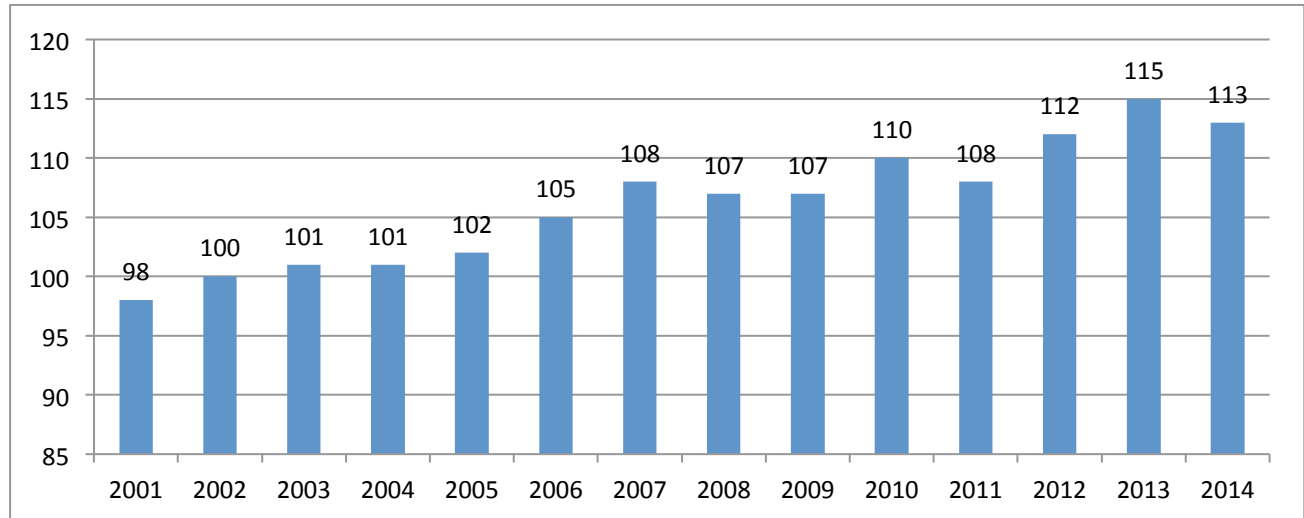
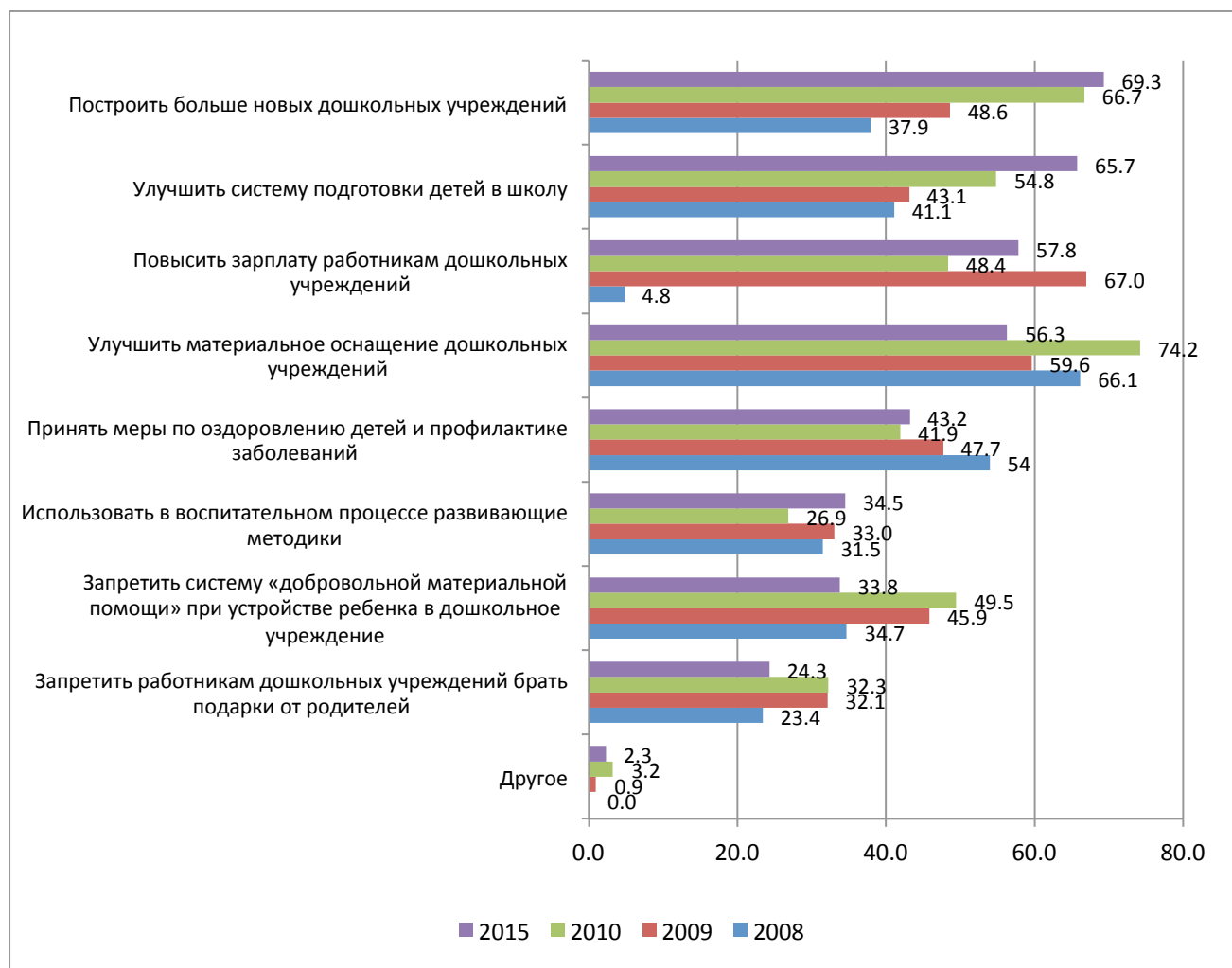


Figure 6 Number of children per 100 places in preschool educational institutions

The above analysis allows us to state that there are a number of problems in the system of preschool education, primarily related to the construction and support of the infrastructure of preschool institutions, creation of conditions for a full-fledged organization of educational activities. According to the respondents, to solve the problems in this area, it is necessary to continue the establishment of new preschool educational facilities (69.3%). This would reduce the number of children in groups, and therefore introduce more advanced technologies in the training system on the basis of an individual approach, which will improve the system of preparing children for school (65.7%). The current teacher salary system remains to be far from perfect. In this regard, 57.8% of the respondents recommend to raise the salaries of teachers, associating their effectiveness with material encouragement. 56.3% of the respondents suggest to improve the material and technical equipment of preschool institutions in terms of computer equipment, to purchase new equipment for the sake of children's health and prevention of morbidity (48.2%).



Establish more new preschool institutions
 Improve the preschool teaching system
 Raise the salary of the preschool staff
 Improve the material base of the preschool institutions
 Take measures for the improvement of the children's health and disease prevention
 Apply the developing techniques in educational process
 Prohibit the system of "voluntary material assistance" by the parents when enrolling their child in a preschool institution
 Prohibit the staff of preschool institutions to take gifts from the parents

Figure 7 Distribution of the respondents' answers to the question: "What do you think should be done to solve problems in the field of preschool education?"

Approximately every third parent (34.5%) suggests applying the development methods in the activity of preschool institutions. Some of the respondents recommend to combat more actively corruption to improve the work of the system of preschool education and upbringing. Thus, 33.8% of the respondents propose to legislatively prohibit the system of "voluntary material assistance" by the parents when enrolling their child in a preschool institution. 24.3% of the respondents suggest prohibiting the staff of preschool institutions to take gifts from the parents (Fig. 7).

SUMMARY

The conducted analysis allows us to state that the system of preschool education and upbringing in modern Russia undergoes a stage of transformation. This is due, first of all, to a change in the state's

attitude to the problem of fertility and the formation of the human capital of society. Modern post-industrial shifts put forward high demands on the quality of human capital, which foundations, of course, are laid already at the level of preschool education. On the example of the Republic of Tatarstan, it can be argued that at this stage the strengthening of the material and technical base of the preschool educational system is of utmost urgency, namely, the commissioning of new facilities and the reconstruction of existing ones, as well as the improvement of the material and technical equipment of preschool institutions. At the same time, the society puts forward new requirements concerning the quality and effectiveness of preschool education, and provision of these institutions with highly qualified personnel. According to the parents, preschool institutions are the organizations that represent not only educational services, but also a place for improving and strengthening the health of children. Consequently, reforming the system of preschool education in modern Russian society requires solving the whole set of economic and social problems.

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