Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses

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Chapter 8

Education and Literacy Data
in Russian and Soviet Censuses

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Social scientists the world over require a knowledge of the quality and extensiveness of the education made available to, and attained by, individuals in the societies they are investigating. Education plays a pivotal role in shaping and integrating many of the changes that fall beneath the umbrella of "modernization," including increased literacy, urbanization, migration, change in the occupational and work-force structure, and changes in fertility. Quite justifiably, education has been referred to as "the key that unlocks the door to modernization" (Kazamias, 1971: x).

With a large part of social science research rooted in explaining both the reasons for and the consequences of social change, modernization and hence education have become important research frontiers for the social scientist. Moreover, the close relationship between educational attainment and many societal changes brought on by modernization makes the value of education data more attractive to the social scientist. The quality and quantity of education available to a population has a great influence on a society, affecting, for example, labor-force productivity, literacy and political awareness, the allocation and acceptance of available jobs, the mobility of workers, and the spatial patterns of many of its institutions. For these reasons the economist, political scientist, sociologist, geographer, and others have found it helpful to include an analysis of education data in their research and, wherever appropriate, have utilized these data as viable surrogates in specific topical areas beset with scarce or unobtainable data.

Scholars conducting research on the USSR are often confronted with data limitations and thus must employ existing data to solve their problems. Education data can be especially useful in this respect because they are relevant to all disciplines in the social sciences. Writing about
Soviet education, George Counts noted that "the scope of Soviet education is a matter of great importance. . . . In actuality, education involves the entire process of inducting the young into the life of the group or society. Soviet education embraces the entire cultural apparatus, all of the agencies involved in the molding and the informing of the minds and hearts of both young and old" (Counts, 1969: x).

This chapter addresses the content and coverage of education data in the 1897 Russian census and in the 1926, 1959, 1970, and 1979 censuses of the Soviet Union. These volumes represent a virtually untapped resource for scholars; their contents have gone largely unnoticed and/or unappreciated, although they represent a wide variety of education and literacy data. The major goals of this chapter are to alert researchers to the availability of education data in the Russian and Soviet censuses and to prepare them for some of the problems associated with working with such data.

Educational Attainment Data

Educational attainment is one of the many valuable measures that reflect a society's level of social development. However, unless it is cross-tabulated with selected independent variables (e.g., age, sex, occupation, nationality, time), educational attainment represents a limited measure with which to work. Except for the 1926 census, which contains no education-related data, the Russian and Soviet censuses offer a wealth of educational-attainment information (though the contents of each vary greatly).

Age data are provided in the 1897, 1959, and 1970 censuses, cross-tabulated in all three cases with educational attainment on the secondary administrative level (republic) for 1959 and 1970 and on the tertiary level (uezd) for 1897. Specific levels of educational attainment, described in greater detail below, are provided according to the following categories: higher complete, higher incomplete, secondary special, secondary general, incomplete secondary, elementary, and, in the case of the 1897 census, higher military and secondary military education. The age breakdown across censuses is not as uniform as are the specific levels of educational attainment. In the 1897 census, ten-year cohorts are provided beginning with a 0–9 category and concluding with 60 years of age and over. The 1959 census begins with a 10–19 category and then provides five-year cohorts to age 70, while the 1970 census begins with 10–15 and 16–19 age groups and then switches to ten-year cohorts up to age 60. Some data are presented in absolute numbers and, as has become
more common, as a rate per 1,000 people 10 years of age and older. The age data are further cross-tabulated with gender and an urban/rural breakdown in three of the censuses (1897, 1959, and 1970). Thus, in any ten-year cohort the absolute number of people between 10 and 70 years old, male or female, residing in either rural or urban areas, in any republic or guberniya, who have completed one of six levels of schooling can be derived for 1897, 1959, and 1970. In the 1897 census, educational attainment by age is also cross-tabulated with social class. Unfortunately, aside from these, no other age-specific data are available in the census volumes. Age-specific data are the most important type of Soviet census data because of the lack of age-specific Soviet statistical data in general.

Segments of the population with specific characteristics other than age further defined by their educational-attainment levels have been analyzed in conjunction with independent variables. One such variable, gender, is cross-tabulated with all of the characteristics mentioned above in the 1897 census; with oblast-level educational attainment (per 1,000 people over 10 years of age) in the 1959 and 1970 censuses; with the levels of educational attainment of those people employed in the national economy (per 1,000 people employed) in the 1959, 1970, and 1979 censuses; with educational attainment by social group (per 1,000 people over 10 years of age) in the 1959 and 1979 censuses; with the educational-attainment levels of the most populous nationalities (per 1,000 people over 10 years of age) in the 1959 and 1970 censuses by republic; with the educational level of those employed in specific branches of the national economy (per 1,000 people over 10 years of age) in the 1959 and 1979 censuses; and with the education levels of the population employed in manual and intellectual pursuits (per 1,000 people over 10 years of age) in the 1959 and 1979 censuses. An urban/rural breakdown of all of these cross-tabulated variables is also available in whichever years gender-specific data are given. Data for educational attainment (per 1,000 people over 10 years of age) for specific occupations are provided in the 1959 census, but they are not age, gender, or urban/rural-specific.

**Literacy Data**

Literacy data are more complete than educational-attainment data, for all five censuses offer some information on this subject. The earliest two censuses offer the most complete literacy data. By 1959, virtually the
entire Soviet population had achieved literacy, lessening the need for extensive age, gender, area, and other specific literacy data.

The 1897 census offers literacy according to age, class, sex, urban/rural residence, and native language. Age data are provided for each uyezd by one-year cohorts up to age 110, cross-tabulated with gender and urban/rural residence. Literacy data cross-tabulated with class association, gender, and urban/rural residence are less age-specific; this information is available for ten-year cohorts up to age 60 and is cross-tabulated by gender and urban/rural residence. Therefore, for 1897, one could determine the number of literate men/women of any age living in either rural or urban areas for any uyezd. One could not, however, find the number of literate Tatar native speakers by single years of age or the number of literate clergymen for the same age. Rather, one would have to settle for the number of literate Tatars aged 30–39 (either male or female, rural or urban) and the number of literate clergymen aged 30–39 (residing in urban or rural areas for any guberniya).

The 1926 census volumes offer the greatest amount of space devoted to literacy data, though the utility of such an extensive collection is probably less than that of the 1897 census. Age, urban/rural residence, and gender-specific data are available, although other variables (e.g., nationality and social class) are not age-specific, nor are they offered by an urban/rural breakdown. Consequently, despite extensive data presented for each region, literacy data cross-tabulated with characteristics other than gender and urban/rural residence are not age-specific. It is possible, then, to obtain the number of literate men or women of any age residing in either rural or urban areas of any region. One can not, however, determine the same for any given nationality or social class; literacy crossed with these two variables is only available according to gender.

A feature not available in the 1897 census but provided in the 1926 volumes is an in-depth analysis of the literacy of the populations of cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants. Literacy figures are presented for inhabitants of these cities who are ages 0–19 (by one-year intervals) and ages 20–100 (by five-year intervals); literacy figures are also available for Moscow and Leningrad which take into account class, age, and gender.

The 1959, 1970, and 1979 censuses have far less published literacy data than have earlier enumerations, giving literacy rates for those 9–49 years old by gender and urban/rural residence for each oblast. The extent of the literacy data from the 1959 census is one table. The 1970 census limits literacy coverage to one table as well, providing literacy rates for those 9–49 by gender and urban/rural residence for each republic. This

2. The all-Union literacy rate in 1959 was 98.5 percent. The lowest rate of literacy for any union republic was 95.4 percent in the Turkmen SSR.
table also provides a comparative literacy column, showing 1897, 1920, 1926, 1939, 1959, and 1970 rates of literacy by gender and urban/rural residence for each republic. The 1979 census omits the gender breakdown in its reporting, although it does provide urban and rural rates for 1897, 1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, and 1979. A major limitation, however, is that these rates are given only for the entire Soviet Union; no data below the all-Union level are available. The de-emphasis on literacy reporting in the past three Soviet censuses is more a result of near universal literacy in the Soviet Union than of a conscious data-restricting policy.

Summary of Literacy and Educational Attainment Data

The 1897 and 1959 censuses offer data that is the most in-depth overall on educational attainment and literacy; both censuses provide extensive age-specific educational-attainment data, as well as non-age-specific educational-attainment data. The 1926 census does not include any education-related data, while the 1970 census contains limited data on educational attainment which are age-specific (for each union republic) and non-age-specific (e.g., for those employed in the national economy and by nationality). The 1979 census, at this writing, does not offer any age-specific educational-attainment data, and it is doubtful that any age-specific data will be made available. Miscellaneous data on education from the 1979 census were published in the Soviet journal Vestnik statistiki, though none were age-specific. Literacy data are plentiful in the earliest two censuses under investigation. However, illiteracy has virtually been eliminated in the Soviet Union, and the need for such data had lessened by the time of the 1959 census.

Using Education and Literacy Census Data

Much has been written about the problems associated with using published Soviet data. A large portion of the literature addressing these problems has concentrated less on the identification of pitfalls facing the researcher than on the doubts the researcher should have when using Soviet sources. Though one should be made aware of such shortcomings, to discredit all major sources of information dealing with the Soviet Union does little for research in the Soviet field or for bettering the understanding of Soviet society. A far more constructive manner in which to approach Soviet data sources and their associated problems is one that recognizes the potential for certain omissions, deletions, and even the possible manipulation of data but does not take all the above for
granted. Accordingly, this chapter addresses the problems confronting the researcher using data available in the Russian and Soviet censuses for an analysis of education. These problems involve the quality of reporting, changes in the definitions of key terms and curriculum, the quality of education across regions, and the questionable practice of grouping education data in certain situations which tends to mislead the user of such data.

Quality of Reporting

The quality of data published in any census is inextricably tied to many factors that cannot be qualitatively assessed. In the Russian and Soviet context, one must assume a degree of error when evaluating census data, for the amount of work done by hand, covering such an extensive land area, undoubtedly led to some inaccuracies. Structurally, in the earlier enumerations (1897 and 1926) the manner in which the census questionnaires were worded would seem to have increased the chances for errors in the reported data; whether the persons completing the questionnaire fully understood the questions is problematic. 3 Aside from the built-in problems that plague censuses conducted in non-industrialized, lesser-educated societies, there is the universal problem of conscious or nonconscious fallacious responses to certain questions. For example, the age data so essential to any analysis of education and literacy are, in many cases, suspect. Falsifying one’s age goes beyond vanity; economic advantages are often reason enough for people to claim that they are older than they actually are.

A problem that the researcher can more readily account for and minimize is that of “heaping,” typically found in age-specific data. Responses tend to cluster around ages ending in “0” and “5” years, a phenomenon that serves to nullify some of the advantages of having disaggregated age-specific data. In some cases the problem of heaping is so evident that the use of such data would be considered questionable. In 1897, in Samarskaya guberniya, 52,502 people claimed to be 50 years old, while only 12,381 people declared that they were 49 years old, and 8,634 replied that they were 51 years old (Russian Empire, 1904: 8–9). In another example, 25,007 people were reported as being 70 years old, while 2,745 were listed as being 69 years old, and only 1,888 responded on their census forms that they were 71 years old (Russian Empire, 1904: 8–9). Fortunately for those using these data for education analy-

3. Although the questions concerning education and literacy have been consistent from one census to another, some census questionnaires yielded more detailed information than others. Unfortunately, much of the potential information that could have been derived from the five published censuses has not been made available.
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ses, clustering does not become a major problem until the 20-year cohort. Educational attainment could be assessed without concern over this problem up to age 20, which serves five of the six levels of education covered in the census.\(^4\) Clustering around ages ending in “0” and “5” is common throughout the censuses offering age-specific data for all cohorts over age 20 and is neither gender nor urban/rural specific. The most common way in which researchers have lessened the impact of this problem has been by grouping the data into five-year cohorts and using statistical smoothing techniques.\(^5\)

Errors in calculation and print represent another problem that researchers using census data must anticipate and for which they must adjust accordingly. These errors are more prevalent in the 1897 and 1926 publications than in the later volumes. The frequency of errors of miscalculation and/or print should be on the decline following the new computer tape loadings that started with the 1979 census and will be used in all future censuses (Feshbach, 1981: 7). This method utilizes a coding by mark system for most questions on the census form which eliminates much of the handwritten coding used in the past. Very few answers will be entered onto the computer tapes by words; in these instances, local statistical administrators will code the data before they are entered onto the tapes (Voronitsyn, 1978: 2).

Changes in Curriculum

Education policy in Russia and the Soviet Union has undergone numerous changes since the 1897 census was conducted. Curriculum reforms have resulted from the changing needs of Soviet society in general and from specific branches of the national economy in particular. These curriculum changes, summarized below, have made it difficult to compare data from one year to another without exercising caution during the analysis.

The early policies of the Bolshevik government and the initial policies of Stalin had two major goals. First and foremost was the building of an able intelligentsia from what was an overwhelmingly illiterate society;\(^6\) the second goal was to eliminate all remnants of tsarist and bourgeois idealism. In short, education was to serve the goals of the Party (Zajda, 1980: 14). The move away from the classical education offered in tsarist

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4. Higher education could not be completed until age 21. Therefore, this level of education is susceptible to the problem of heaping.

5. The Sprague multiplier and Beers smoothing technique are two of the more widely used methods. For more detail, see A. J. Jaffe, *Handbook of Statistical Methods for Demographers* (New York: Gordon, 1977).

6. According to the 1970 Census, the 1920 literacy rate was only 44 percent in Soviet Russia, with areas in Central Asia having less than 4 percent of the population literate.
Russia began in 1918 when the “Declaration on the Single Labor School” was made at the All-Russian Congress on Education. The declaration stressed the political nature of education, and how this was to be the most vital tenet of Soviet pedagogy (Konstantinov, 1974: 14). Since 1918, the basic tenet of this declaration has remained intact, despite numerous reforms in the curriculum.

The first major policy change came in 1920, as a nine-year curriculum replaced the earlier eight-year program. The relatively liberal New Economic Policy influenced the content of the curriculum change, which resulted in the formation of a curriculum that attempted to bridge the gap between society and school life (Zajda, 1980: 20–22). This policy came to an abrupt end as Stalin ascended to power and instituted the curriculum that was to serve as the basis of Soviet education for two decades.

Throughout the 1930s, and lasting into the 1950s, the fundamental basis of the Soviet education system was the seven-year incomplete primary/secondary school and the ten-year completed secondary school. A seven-year factory school and a four-year trade school were also established in order to prepare semiskilled and skilled laborers for all branches of the industrializing economy. The basic educational structure, then, was established for the coming two decades and included the following: 7 (1) primary school (four years); (2) incomplete secondary school (seven years); (3) secondary school (ten years); and (4) trade school (four-year vocational/technical school).

Since the 1926 census offers no data on educational attainment, researchers are not faced with comparative research problems arising from differences between the education structure in 1926 and 1897. The quality of education did, however, change owing to a shift in the emphasis of the curriculum. 8

By 1959, when the next census offered educational-attainment levels with which comparisons to the 1897 results could be made, compulsory primary education had been introduced and a uniform curriculum established. In the early 1940s, the age at which compulsory education was to begin was lowered from 8 to 7 years. In 1949, compulsory seven-year education was introduced, and in 1969 compulsory secondary education (complete ten-year secondary) for those between the ages of 7 and 18 was required. These changes served to raise the educational-attainment levels of the Soviet population, but the quality of education received was hardly uniform. Many of those included in the data for having completed

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7. Included in this structural reform, but eliminated in 1934, was the school of the rural youth.
8. Qualitative changes were partially a result of the reintroduction of formal examinations that had been abolished during the 1920s, the use of standardized textbooks, and strict classroom discipline.
primary and secondary education had done so in evening and correspondence schools that serve the goals of the Soviet worker and government well. Workers are able to attain education and skills at higher levels while minimizing the loss of labor/manpower time. It has been suggested, however, that the quality of education received in evening and correspondence schools is markedly lower than that attained by the students studying in the standard day schools (Rosen, 1971: 129). This should be recognized when one evaluates the educational-attainment levels of the Soviet population since the 1950s; enrollments in these institutions have been very high the past twenty years, and their graduates have accounted for a large part of the newly educated segment of the Soviet population.

Another change in the 1950s which serves to hinder comparative studies from one census period to another (especially between 1959 and 1970) was the reinstituting of polytechnical training by way of a 1958 decree. This was done in order to prepare Soviet youth better for work and life; a major criticism of the education system up to that date was that schooling had become too isolated from the real life of the student. This reform was also made in response to a greater need for more trained agricultural and industrial workers. Thus, students were encouraged to continue their education in technical colleges and schools which specialized in preparing students for an extremely wide variety of careers. These matriculants were completing the equivalent of a secondary education, though their training was overwhelmingly specialized and technical. Researchers must take this into account when qualitatively evaluating the Soviet education system solely on the basis of the numbers completing secondary education.9

The Khrushchev era, known for its many reforms in general, left its mark on the education system with some major curriculum reforms. In 1958, aside from attempting to improve academic standards, Khrushchev changed the seven-year school to eight years and the ten-year school to eleven years. He also attacked the Soviet school of the 1950s, claiming that the education offered during that time served to divorce students from reality and left them insufficiently prepared for practical life (Tomiak, 1974: 44). As a result, the number of electives was expanded, and a two-year work requirement was instituted for all students before they entered higher education. Secondary specialized schools, which offered more job-related training than the traditional secondary schools, were promoted by Khrushchev, mostly to meet the needs of an expanding industrial sector of the Soviet economy.

The fact that the above reforms were only in practice for six years has led to problems for those using the data in the 1959 and 1970 volumes for comparative purposes. It is virtually impossible to make a qualitative assessment of Soviet secondary education when this education has come to encompass such a wide range of academic/vocational training. In addition, the data corresponding to the 1959–70 intercensal period is difficult to interpret because the Khrushchev reforms did not cover all eleven years. The researcher should be aware of the enrollments in the different types of secondary education institutions before generalizing about the qualitative and quantitative trends in Soviet secondary education.

The past twenty years have seen reforms that could color the face value of education data available in the past two censuses. In 1972, a universal decree was passed which required education for all up to age 17. This served to increase the number of eligible students who continued secondary school beyond grade eight from 80 percent in 1970 to 97.8 percent by 1978 (Zajda, 1980: 37). Thus, the increase in the number of people who had finished secondary education by the time the 1979 census was taken was to a considerable extent a result of this new government policy. This increase in the number of secondary education graduates would probably not have occurred had the decree not been made.

Two other changes should be noted for those using these data over time for comparative purposes. First, in 1969, primary education was reduced from four to three years. This seemingly minor change has had a major impact on data showing primary education completion levels. Instead of completing the first phase of education at age 11, children could now finish primary school by age 10. Because the data in the census volumes are given as the number of people per 1,000 population aged 10 years and older who have completed various levels of education, 10-year-olds who used to deflate the educational-attainment data are now significant contributors to the overall level of primary educational attainment. This reform has served to increase the pool of eligible primary education attainees, for instead of the possible cohort pool being 11-year-olds and older (7-year-olds begin school), it has increased to include the 10-year-olds. Consequently, the researcher should be aware that the rate of primary school completion has increased drastically since 1970 because of the inclusion of 10-year-olds.

The second reform, enacted after the 1970 census, required that all males aged 15 and older obtain preconscription military training. Since military conscription is mandatory, the already compulsory nature of at least an eight-year education has a de facto check and insurance policy. If a male must serve in the military and obtain two years of preconscription
training offered predominantly in the school system, the student is almost assured to be in school beyond the eighth grade.

Qualitative changes in the curriculum, as opposed to general structural changes listed above, present a more difficult problem to account for and compensate for when comparing data over time. Since 1970, the courses offered in grades 4 (the first year of secondary school), 6–7, and 9–10 have changed extensively. For example, there has been an increased emphasis on communist indoctrination in grade 4 (Matthews, 1982: 40–66, 153–76). More important to curriculum content, however, have been the extensive changes in mathematics (grades 9–10) and basic sciences (grades 6–7), with linear equations, logarithmic functions, and physics (e.g., molecular kinetic energy) now taught as part of the standard curriculum. These changes would seem to imply that a secondary education completed today is more rigorous than that of the past and hence qualitatively different. Problems could arise if one were to compare attainment levels without evaluating the quality of education offered in each of the periods being compared.

Differences in the quality of education among regions of the country is yet another potential problem researchers might encounter when evaluating education data from the censuses, especially owing to the multiethnic character of the USSR. It is one thing to point out that certain Central Asian nationalities are completing secondary school at a rate equal to or in some cases above that of residents in the RSFSR but quite another to assume that Central Asian education is equal qualitatively to that offered in the RSFSR. Researchers should resolve such questions before using the seemingly objective level of educational-attainment data.

Evaluating the Data as Provided in the Census

The way in which education data are categorized and presented creates problems for both comparative temporal and regional analyses. With regard to educational-attainment data, the Soviet scholar V. Ovsienko believes that reporting data as rates per 1,000 population aged 10 and over understates the level of education (Ovsienko, 1972: 40). Because 10–15-year-olds could not possibly complete secondary education or higher education, Ovsienko maintains that this statistic fails to reflect accurately how well-educated a given population is. Comparing levels of educational attainment across regions whose population structures differ markedly leads to problems as a result of the age 10 and over category used in Soviet statistical sources. On the one hand, if an area has a large portion of its population between the ages of 0 and 20, education attainment could be exaggerated given the large numbers (and large
percentage of the total population) finishing school as required by the dictates of the past twenty-five years. On the other hand, regions with older populations (e.g., Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine), which had relatively more men and women pass through the Soviet school system before compulsory secondary education was introduced, and when instability due to World War II limited school participation, would show fewer attainees of secondary education simply because of age structure. It could be argued, however, that if a given region has a large percentage of its population in the 0–9 cohort, a cohort that cannot attain even the lowest level of education, the region’s level of education is understated by the current methods of categorizing and presenting the data. The Slavic areas, with the bulk of their populations over age 15, would seem to benefit statistically from the existing guideline used for reporting educational-attainment data as rates per 1,000 population aged 10 years and above. Whichever case is more applicable to given regions of the USSR, one problem is evident: standardization of the data is necessary so that age structure is not the major factor for interregional differences in the educational-attainment data used in any serious analysis.10

Because 17 is the youngest age by which one could complete secondary education, and because age data are broken into five-year cohorts after a 16–19 cohort (1970 census), Ovsienko suggested a reordering of the age data in order to obtain the most accurate measure of educational attainment. The researcher could simply use the 16–19-year-old cohort and, consulting pertinent volumes of the Narodnoye khozyaystvo series, discount the 16-year-old population from the larger cohort by finding the number of births in the given area in question sixteen years before the date of the census being used. What the researcher would be left with, then, is a 17–19-year-old cohort that, when combined with the remaining population (20 years of age and older), gives a far more accurate base population from which to form an education rate (in this case, per 1,000 population). The same correcting techniques could be used when calculating primary educational attainment (with 11 years and older as the base population) and higher educational attainment (with 21 years and older as the base rate). When Ovsienko made adjustments similar to these, the results of the educational-attainment data from the 1970 census changed as follows: instead of 187 per 1,000 completing second-

ary education (grade 10, both general and specialized secondary educa-
tion), 220 per 1,000 finished that level; instead of 42 per 1,000 people
reported as having completed higher education, the exclusion of the
10–20-year-old cohort from the base population resulted in a revised
ratio of 55 per 1,000 (Ovsienko, 1972: 42).

Another problem associated with the way in which educational-
attainment figures are published in the census volumes is the exclusionary
characteristic of the level-by-level reporting. For example, those who are
listed as having completed higher education are not included in the
figures for having attained lower levels of education. Researchers must
keep this in mind when analyzing interregional data and data over time.

Other features of statistical reporting methods include the problem of
the continuing/discontinuing student. Those students who have complet-
ed at least half of the required period of instruction for a higher
education are classified as having an “incomplete higher education.”
Those who have completed less than half of the required course of
instruction are listed as secondary education attainees (USSR, 1978: 52).
The problem with this method of classification is that it is impossible to
discern from the data how many students in these two categories are
continuing in education. The same problem holds true for the attainees
of an incomplete secondary education. It has been suggested that an
additional explanatory column be added to the census data in order to
provide the number of those in between levels of instruction as well as
the number of continuing students at each level.11 Thus far, this sugges-
tion has not been acted upon.

Problems facing researchers investigating literacy are twofold. First,
when comparing rates from one time period to another, the researcher
should recognize that the criterion for establishing literacy has continual-
ly changed. In 1897, for example, people who stated that they could
read were considered literate; in 1926, people were considered literate if
they were able to write their last name; by 1959, the questionnaire asked
whether respondents could read and write, only read, or do neither; and
by 1970 and 1979, with less emphasis placed on gathering literacy data,
the questionnaire merely asked respondents to note if they were unable
to read.

The second problem with literacy data concerns the age category used
as a population base from which to measure the literacy rates. A. I.
Gozulov, the Soviet statistician, is one of the many who have criticized
the use of the 9–49-year-old cohort as the population base from which to
measure literacy (Gozulov, 1965: 75). The Soviet rationale for limiting
the base population to the 9–49-year-old cohort employed in recent

11. For a description of what constitutes each level of education as interpreted in the 1979
Soviet census, see USSR, 1978.
censuses revolves around the belief that literacy rates after age 49 do not change significantly, and that by beginning the cohort at age 9, preschoolers and first graders who could not be expected to be literate are rightfully excluded (Ovsienko, 1972: 42). Gozulov maintains that this cohort does not represent the potentially literate (gramotno-sposobnoye) population and that the rate should be measured from a population base consisting of those 8 years of age and older. The population aged 50 and over in many parts of the USSR could influence literacy rates, especially in areas where educational-attainment levels have only recently reached all-Union levels. The lower limit of the age cohort used in measuring literacy rates need not be altered nor given close attention by the users of the census volumes for data on literacy. Since all 8-year-olds in the Soviet Union are learning to read and write regardless of which republic they reside in, problems arising as a result of differing age structures across regions are unlikely.

In addition to the data available in the census volumes, statistical journals (Vestnik statistiki) and specialized periodicals (e.g., Sovetskoye obrazovaniye, Uchitel'skaya gazeta, Sovetskaya pedagogika, Vestnik vysshei shkoly) provide occasional data on educational attainment, school enrollments, and the number of educational institutions in the USSR for various years. All of these statistics are often available in the all-Union and republic-level volumes of the Narodnoye khozyaystvo series, and UN publications offer much of this information (in French and English), though in less regular intervals.

Agenda for Research Utilizing Education Data

The use of education data provided in the census volumes should increase in the coming years. Many of the problems and challenges facing Soviet society, as interpreted by those in the West, are closely tied to educational attainment and phenomena related to educational attainment. For example, data on educational attainment could be utilized by the economist who is interested in deriving age-specific data for labor-force estimates (Feshbach, 1982: 27–37). Specifically, the need for skilled and educated labor will inevitably influence enrollments in higher education, and enrollments in higher education will in turn influence the number of available workers. Educational-attainment data could also serve those interested in assessing the quality of the labor force based on the specific type of schooling the graduates have completed.

Analyzing the spatial distribution of educational attainment across the USSR will aid the researcher interested in investigating and projecting migration trends as they relate to the demand for laborers created by
economic development programs. Given the spatial breakdown of the number of graduates completing the various types of secondary and higher education, along with plans for economic development throughout the Soviet Union, a researcher could project where gross labor deficits for specific types of employment will be most acute and, with some reservations, predict migration trends. For example, crude migration estimates could be made using education data that show an abundance of trained metallurgical workers for a given year coupled with government plans for the spatial expansion of the iron and steel industry.

Labor participation studies can be aided by the education data provided in the censuses. The acceptance or rejection of a job by a worker could depend upon the level and type of education the worker has completed. With problematic labor shortages surfacing in many branches within the Soviet economy, the education goals (universal secondary education and increased higher educational-attainment levels) and economic goals of the Soviet government appear to be in conflict. With labor becoming less of an available resource, one must assume that the government will urge students, who were previously encouraged to complete higher education, either to work a few years and then return to school or to attend evening or correspondence schools while working in the national economy.

Research on ethnicity and nationalism can be aided by using education data for the union and autonomous republics. Unfortunately, ethnic data for educational attainment have not been available since 1970. Political participation research is another area in which education data should be utilized. The question of whether an increase in the education levels of the Soviet population has led to, or in the future will lead to, increased demands for participation in the state’s political process could be further investigated.\(^\text{12}\) The success or failure of the Soviet education system as an effective socializer of the educated masses could be determined by answering the above question.

Because education pervades so many institutions of a given society, education data are applicable to most social science research. The census volumes provide an excellent source for education data in spite of the decreasing amount of age-specific data available to the researcher. Virtually the entire Soviet population is literate today, reducing the

significance and need for literacy data. Nevertheless, the earlier volumes of the censuses are rich with literacy data that make comparative analyses possible and worthwhile.

References


