Principals' views of a role and effectiveness of their schools.

Comparison of schools located in different social contexts

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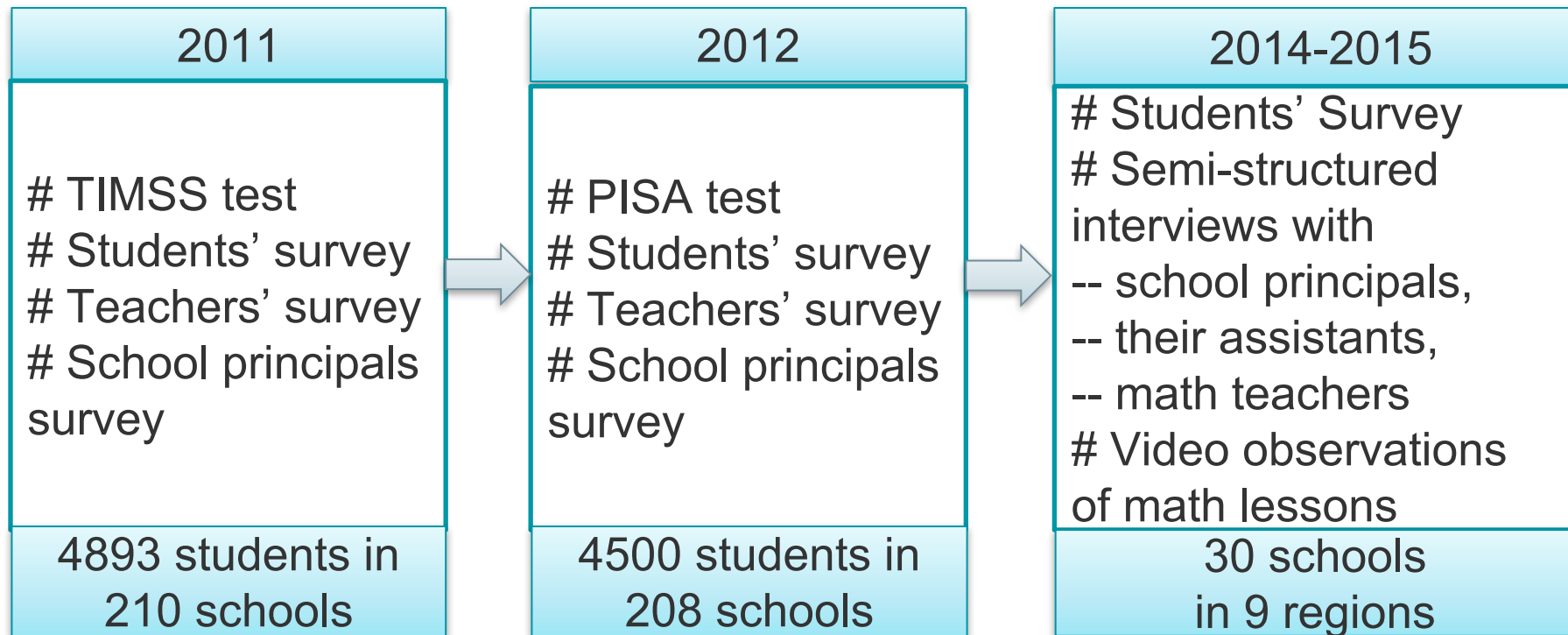# Problem and research questions

Russia scored high in TIMSS (grade 8) but lower in PISA (mainly grade 9).

PISA scores are well explained by students SES and TIMSS scores.

However there are a number of schools where students' scores are lower than predicted or higher than predicted by SES and TIMSS.

How do these under- and over-achieving schools define their role and effectiveness? What do principals and teachers do in these schools?

Data: Trajectories in Education & Career Study (TrEC)

2011	2012	2014-2015
# TIMSS test # Students' survey # Teachers' survey # School principals survey	# PISA test # Students' survey # Teachers' survey # School principals survey	# Students' Survey # Semi-structured interviews with -- school principals, -- their assistants, -- math teachers # Video observations of math lessons
4893 students in 210 schools	4500 students in 208 schools	30 schools in 9 regions

How the schools for interviews were sampled

We selected schools with unexpectedly high average PISA scores (the scores were higher than it was predicted by students' SES and TIMSS results). We also selected schools with unexpectedly low PISA scores and some schools with average PISA scores that are well predicted by students' SES and TIMSS results.

Residuals of schools average PISA scores

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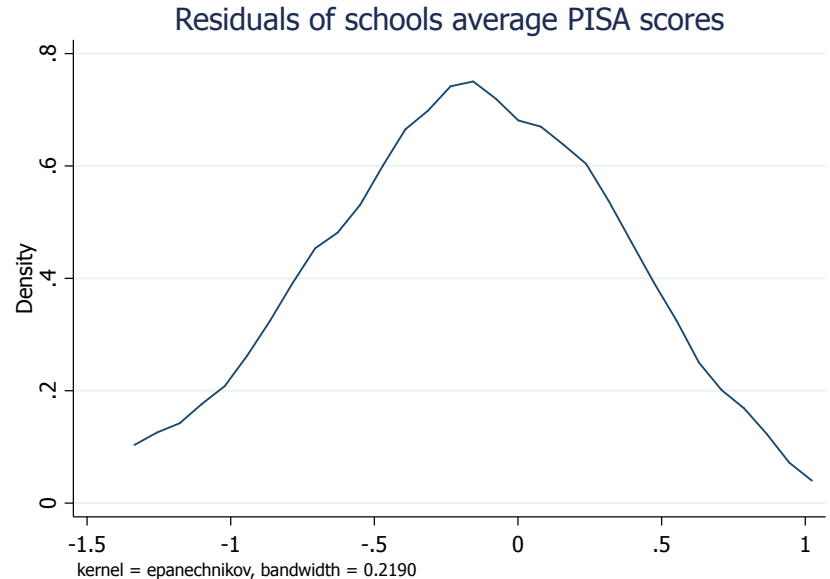
Methodology

We are using mixed methods design. Analysis of interviews is combined with quantitative description of schools' social context, and students' test scores.

The grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz 2006) was implemented to analyze the interviews.

A framework was developed by combining the different points of view brought out by the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Two-phase coding and categorization process using the constructivist strategy of the grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006):

- on the initial coding phase - closely studied segments of the transcribed interviews for making a catalog of initial codes,

- on the focused coding phase - the most significant initial codes were used to integrated large amounts of interviews.

Methodology

The principals' responses were conceptualized via memo-writing for generating theoretical assumptions. Finally, similar principals' views of school role and its effectiveness were identified and grouped in 4 models.
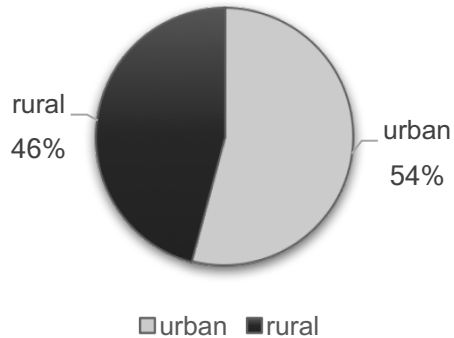
The models were compared using the following parameters:

1) Social contexts schools work in: school location (region, urban/rural place), parents (education level, involvement into education, expectations), school resources (finances, teachers), school status, expectations and requirements of the educational departments of different level.

2) Principals' perception of the school background, definition of the school mission and educational strategies, principals' role and style of work.

At the final step analysis of interviews will be combined with quantitative description of schools' social context, students' background and test scores provided by TREC study data
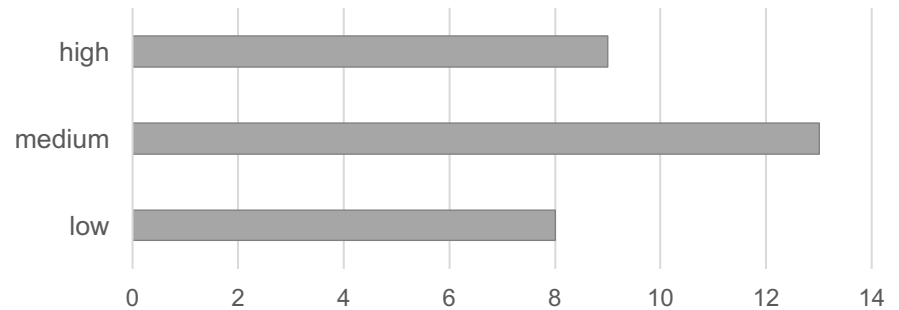
Social contexts schools work in
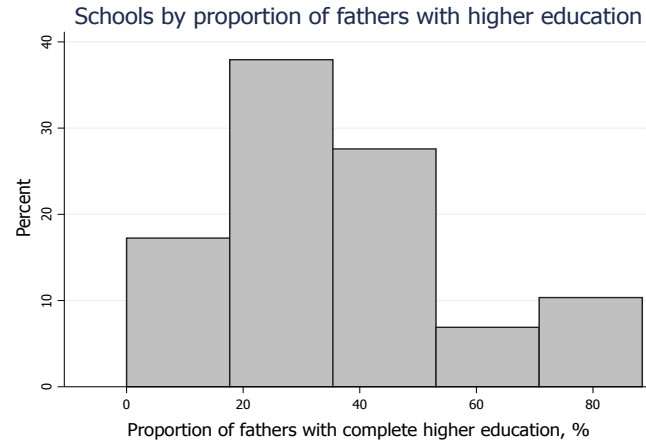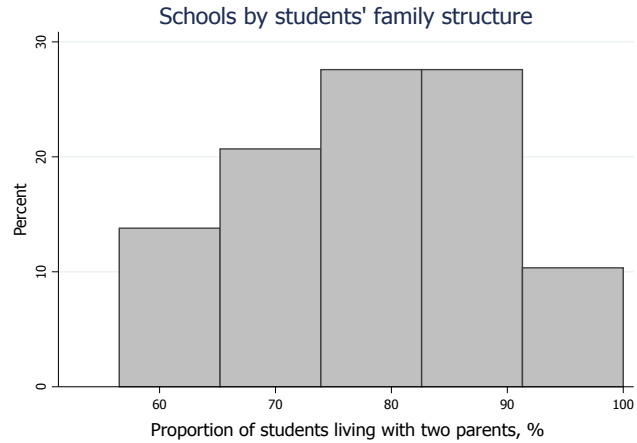
The models of school positioning

1. School as a provider of educational services at the market

2. School in transition (institutionalist model)

3. School with high social mission (island of soviet ethos)

4. Socially oriented school (battle against deprivation)

Model 1: Provider of educational services at the market

- Medium or large schools located in urban areas. Average or above average SES students. Schools are better supported with resources

- Market concept of education. School provides educational services to families

- Quality of service is measured with students' achievements, attainment of higher education in a better college, and upward social mobility. School competes for a better position in rankings with schools of higher status (symbolic capital).

- Principal is an effective manager. A lot of attention paid to control of education quality.

- Teachers are required to have a good portfolio, to provide high students' outcomes

- Two strategies of differentiation
  - *in inclusive strategy* schools differentiate education as much as possible taking all students' abilities into account.
  - *in exclusive strategy* most attention is focused on higher achieving students. Common for schools having concern about reproduction of their brand (e.g. math school)

Model 2: School in transition (institutionalist model)

- Located in small towns. More heterogeneous school composition. Students of medium and above medium SES. Less proportion of parents with higher education completed. Shortage of resources is often described as crisis.

- Education field consists of interactions and rules. Following the rules is a way to acquire additional resources and to enhance school status.

- The goal is school promotion. Educational quality is measured with quality of in-school conditions and high status. It compete with schools nearby but in non-academic spheres, that not necessarily improve students achievements

- Provision of good conditions may increase students' chances for success in life (higher education, marriage, getting a job). This will work for school reputation.

Model 2: School in transition (institutionalist model)

- Principal's role is mainly to get resources, to promote school and to set the rules up. They use the following strategies:

  o Schools take part in various innovative projects (FGOS). Knowledge of rules is crucial for a principal as well as building innovative and rather democratic environment in a school. Incoherence of school vision by principal and teachers could take place. Principals prefer young innovative teachers that are ready to learn.

  o Principals build personal relationship with policy makers representing schools at different levels. Schools focus on extracurricular activities approved by local authorities (e.g. moral or patriotic education). Bureaucratic style of leadership (with hierarchy and distance) is usually set up within a school. Everyone in school knows his/her responsibility. Teachers loyalty has great value.

- These schools may work out programs for gifted kids. However focus is still on majority of students (with average achievements).

Model 3: School with high social mission (island of soviet ethos)

- Located in small towns and rural areas. Students SES varies. Parents usually could not be constantly involved into their kids education

- Opponents of educational market concept. To educate new generations is a high social mission. Soviet type of education is regarded as an ideal model

- Students' achievements is not a measure of education quality. Attaining higher and secondary vocational education are equally valued. Schools try to enhance students life chances. However shortage of resources is regarded as a barrier. Thus their main focus is on non-academic education and on out-of-classes activities. School produces moral patriots, good citizens.

- Principal is rather a teacher of teachers than a manager. Principals patronize teachers, teachers patronize kids. Sometimes school tries to patronize parents.

- School rarely differentiates education. Teachers' focus is on students with average and low achievements. School uses individual work with students that have behaviour problems.

- Teaching is predestination. Good teacher loves kids and has altruistic motivation

- Parents involvement is not supported. School has conflicts with parents that have high requirements to education. High parents' ambitions are marked as inflated self-esteem

Model 4: Socially oriented school (battle with deprivation)

- Located in rural places or in poor parts in small towns. Students of low SES, ethnic minorities or migrants. No schools nearby, no competition. Parents are less involved

- School role is to compensate students for a disadvantaged situation they are in (to save students), to make them complete secondary education, teach them how to adapt to the hostile world. School directs students to getting a job.

- Education quality means friendly school climate, school life filled with events. School is socio-cultural center in the settlement.

- Principal's main role is to provide resources and to be a 'mother' for students solving their problems. Less distance with teachers and students.

- Teachers should be patient, be ready for overload (shortage of teachers)

- Individual work with students is common. School keeps the records of their progress, provide them with individual education plan, help them to choose a future profession

- Focus is on lower achieving students (majority). School supports them with extra-lessons

- School cooperates with social services

In what schools do students benefit more?

Social context plays an important role. It is difficult to compare schools in models 1 and 4. However how principals define the situation is of importance as well.

Model 1 schools work with relatively higher SES kids and have more resources. They are more supportive for higher achieving students. Other types of schools less focused on students achievements and upward social mobility

Models 2 and 3 schools have very different views on education. Them all are limited in resources. However model 2 schools try to overcome the limits while their counterparts don't. The same time these schools have smth. in common. They have focus on non-academic education and do not compete for academic excellence with other schools. They try to support students with average level of achievements

Model 4 schools are more supportive for disadvantaged kids. However they regard students background as a barrier and do not work for upward social mobility.

In all models 2 to 4, less focus on academic outcomes may produce a ceiling effect