

The Evolution of the Education System among the Peoples of Central Asia: From Ancient Times to the Mid-19th Century.

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Resume

The evolution of the education system among the peoples of Central Asia has been shaped by a rich history, influenced by various cultures, religions, and socio-political changes. From ancient times to the mid-19th century, education was primarily focused on religious and philosophical teachings, with an emphasis on Islamic knowledge after the arrival of Islam in the region. Early education systems were based on oral traditions, and later on written texts, particularly in the context of Islamic schools (madrasas) that flourished during the medieval period.

In the early centuries, the education system was focused on literacy, religious teachings, and moral principles. With the spread of Islam, madrasas became the main centers for both secular and religious education, where subjects like logic, grammar, philosophy, medicine, and astronomy were taught.

By the mid-19th century, education in Central Asia had declined due to political fragmentation and wars, as well as stagnation in scientific and cultural advancements. However, in the second half of the century, new educational reforms began to emerge, driven by the influence of the Russian Empire and a local desire for national identity and independence. This led to the rise of the "Jadid" movement, aimed at modernizing the education system to meet the changing needs of society and stimulate both scientific and cultural growth.

The evolution of education in Central Asia reflects the complex interplay of indigenous traditions, religious influence, and external forces that shaped the region's educational landscape over the centuries.

The emergence of the education system in our country is primarily associated with written literature. The "Avesta," created 2700 years ago, also pays special attention to the issues of upbringing and education. In the "Avesta," the education and training of children have a certain degree of system and goals, based on religious, moral, and physical education, as well as the teaching of reading and writing.

The Sogdian culture and Sogdian writing had a significant influence on the formation of the educational system in our country. Written monuments based on the Sogdian language, historical and partially artistic works, played an important role in raising the culture and literacy of the peoples of Turkmenistan for centuries.

Until the 8th century, schools, corresponding to our modern concept, mostly operated based on alphabets derived from Sanskrit, Greek, Orkhon-Yenisey, and Orkhon-Enasoy scripts. From the 8th century, when Maverrannahr was conquered by the Arab Caliphate, with the arrival of Islam and the establishment of mosques, schools began to open at mosques, where children began to receive knowledge and learn literacy. In these educational institutions, teaching was conducted in the Arabic language and alphabet.

Cultural development and spiritual uplift in our country in later periods were closely linked to the spread of Islam. As is known, in the Islamic world, great attention was initially paid to the education and upbringing system. After the establishment of Islam in Arab states, a two-tier education system emerged: the school and the madrasa. Schools appeared in Arabia in the 7th-8th centuries. By the 9th-10th centuries, they spread to Central Asia and the Volga region. Most schools in Turkmenistan were located in buildings near mosques and mausoleums or in private homes. Schools were often managed by imams of mosques or people who had graduated from madrasas. In schools, boys were taught by instructors known as domlas. Girls were taught by women in their homes, and they were called otiniy, otinibi, bibi khalifa, bibiyotin, and so on. There was no official curriculum in schools. However, students were usually taught the basics of Islam, writing, and arithmetic. The educational process consisted of learning Arabic letters and words, then reading and memorizing the Quran in Arabic. Students spent a lot of time learning the names of Arabic letters and their writing. Only after mastering the Arabic letters did students begin reading some chapters of the Quran, and later, they memorized it in its entirety. After completing their study of the Quran, students would proceed to read other religious books. Some students who finished school continued their studies in madrasas¹.

In general, no crafts or professions were taught in school, and the goal was not to prepare students for any practical activity in life. Upon completing their education, no official document was issued. The school mainly served as preparation for admission to the madrasa, being a secondary stage of education. Thus, the main task of the school in Islamic countries was to provide basic knowledge of the foundations of Islam and other sciences or disciplines. The Orientalist V. Nalivkin more accurately described the subjects taught in schools. According to him, the education began with learning Arabic letters, then moved to the study of "Haftiyak." In the next stage, students studied the "Four Books,"

¹ Uzbek Soviet Encyclopedia, 13- volume, p. – 284.

written in Persian, which outlined the basics of Sharia. After completing the "Four Books" course, students began memorizing poems by poets such as Khodja Hafiz, Bedil, Fuzuli, Sufi Alloyer, and others. These poems were written in both Persian and Turkic languages¹.

There were no methodological guidelines for the subjects and disciplines taught in the school. Each teacher taught them in their own way, or rather, within the framework of the traditionally established system.

The highest and final stage of education was the madrasa. Like the school, the madrasa appeared in the 7th-8th centuries in Arab countries as an educational institution for secondary and higher education. In the madrasa, scholars, teachers, and state officials were trained in the countries of the Near and Middle East. In the 13th century, special buildings for the madrasa were constructed in Central Asia. Usually, khans, large landowners, and wealthy people built madrasas. Those who built madrasas also allocated funds for their maintenance in the form of waqf (endowment). Education in the madrasa typically began in October and ended in April. The exact time of classes was not strictly defined. Education in the madrasa was conducted at three levels: primary (adno), intermediate (awsat), and higher (a'lo). In the madrasas of Central Asia, books written in Arabic and Persian were studied. First, the book "Avvali Ilm" written in Persian was studied, followed by Arabic grammar, the foundations of Sharia, and logic. Medicine, science of poetry (aruz), philosophy, geography, and other sciences were also taught. Each stage of learning in the madrasa typically lasted 3-4 years. Depending on the level of mastery of the material, education could last from 15 to 20 years².

There was no strict list of subjects taught in the madrasa. Wherever a teacher or prominent scholar in a particular field of science was, they could pass on their knowledge to students. To illustrate the sciences and disciplines taught in madrasas in the 7th-16th centuries in the Islamic world, it is appropriate to present the classification of sciences of that time. The great thinker Abu Zayd Abdur Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) divided the sciences of his time into two groups. The first group included philosophical sciences, which are understood by man through reason, called "al-ulum al-hikmiyya al-falsafiyya" (philosophical and wise sciences), also known as rational sciences (al-ulum al-aqliyya). Ibn Khaldun divided the sciences of the first group into four subgroups, which are further divided into several branches.

1. Logic.
2. Natural sciences (physics): a) medicine; b) agriculture.

¹ Nalivkin V. The School among the Natives of Central Asia. "Turkestan News," August 8, 1889.

² Uzbek Soviet Encyclopedia, 6-volume, p. – 508.

3. Theology (metaphysics): a) magic; b) spells; c) the secret of the Arabic alphabet; d) alchemy.

4. Mathematical sciences: a) Geometry. It includes the following subfields: measurement of lines, measurement of surfaces of bodies; measurement of volumes; measurement of areas; b) The science of numbers. It includes the following subfields: arithmetic; the art of counting; algebra; commerce, fractions, roots, and others; inheritance; c) Music. It includes the following subfields: sounds, melodies; the art of singing; d) Astronomy. It includes the following subfields: movement of stars; making astronomical tables; astrology (predicting the life and fate of a person based on the movement of stars).

Ibn Khaldun refers to traditional sciences (*al-ulum al-naqliyya*) as the second group. The foundation and authority of traditional sciences lie in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and they are considered the sciences of Sharia. Among the Sharia sciences, the scholar includes the following disciplines:

1. Tafsir (interpretation of the Qur'an).
2. The science of reciting the Qur'an.
3. The sciences of hadith.
4. Fiqh (Islamic law).
5. The science of inheritance.
6. Kalam (philosophy and theology).
7. Sufism (mysticism).
8. The science of dream interpretation.

Ibn Khaldun also includes in traditional sciences disciplines related to language. These include: a) Lexicography (the science of words); b) Grammar; c) Rhetoric (the science of expressing thoughts); d) Ethics (the science of morality)¹.

It can be said that the madrasas taught sciences that mainly fell within the circle of knowledge classified by Ibn Khaldun. Of course, it should be noted that there could be differences in the degree and quality of teaching in different madrasas.

It is known that the needs of society for specialists being prepared in the madrasas depended on the level of development of the country in social-political, economic, and spiritual-cultural aspects. In most cases, the attention to education depended on the rulers' attitude toward science and education. For example, during the caliphates in Baghdad, such as those of Mansur, Harun al-Rashid, and Ma'mun, significant attention was paid to the development of science and education.

¹ The classification of sciences by Ibn Khaldun is taken from R. Bahodirov's article "The Coverage of the Issue of the Classification of Sciences in the Muslim East in the 14th-16th Centuries" // "Oriental Studies Collection," 1995, Issue 6, p. 1517.

According to scholars of that time, there were more than 30 public libraries in Baghdad alone¹. The fame of Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom) spread throughout the world. At Bayt al-Hikma, scholars translated scientific and philosophical works from Greek, Latin, and other languages into Arabic. As V. Nalivkin writes: "... Many works of Europe originally appeared in the Arab world, in Arabic."²

In the Baghdad House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikma), great scholars such as Abu Nasr al-Farabi, al-Farghani, and al-Khwarizmi from TuranAsia conducted scientific research and taught at madrasas on the authoritative sciences of the time.

According to historical laws, the development of science and education only occurs when there is demand and need in society. When society's demand decreases, the development of science also slows down. The development of science and education in the Islamic world reached a high level in the early Middle Ages, which was linked to social needs and necessities. However, over time, feudal stagnation began to hinder scientific progress. Many scientific achievements, lacking social demand, remained at the theoretical level and were not implemented in practice. Many sciences became detached from life, took on the character of observational disciplines, and as a result, the disconnected scholarly tradition began to take root. This situation also arose in Baghdad, and the center of science shifted to Khorasan. Especially the support of scholars like Mahmud Gaznevi and Mas'ud contributed to this process. Later, when the conditions for the development of science worsened in Khorasan, science moved further north, to Turkmenistan. Khwarezm, Bukhara, and Samarkand became centers of scientific development in the Islamic world. One piece of evidence for this is the establishment of the academy of Ma'mun in Khwarezm. The reign of Timur and the years of Mirzo Ulugh Beg's rule made Samarkand famous worldwide as a center of science. Ulugh Beg himself was also a scholar, and at the madrasa, he lectured on astronomy and other sciences, as noted in historical books.

But unfortunately, by the 16th century, science and culture began to decline here as well, and the education system fell into decline. Madrasas began to focus more on religious sciences, especially the teachings of Sharia, than on secular ones. The limited view that knowledge of the basics of Islam, Sharia, and Fiqh was sufficient began to prevail in madrasas. Scholasticism, bookishness, and fanaticism intensified, and stagnation set in the educational system, which can be described as a principle of regression. This situation continued until the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries³.

¹ Nalivkin V. The School among the Natives of Central Asia. "Turkestan News," August 8, 1889.

² Nalivkin V. The School among the Natives of Central Asia. "Turkestan News," August 8, 1889.

³ Uzbek Pedagogy Anthology (Volume II). – Tashkent: "Uqituvchi," 1999. – P. 9.

It is known from the history of humanity that the level of the education system is always linked to the level of societal development. By the end of the 19th century, due to the fact that Turkestan was divided into small khanates, which were constantly at war with each other, the general development lagged behind European countries, and the feudal order of the production system persisted, along with the destruction of military power—all these factors weakened society and the state. Weak states, as a rule, became colonies of more powerful powers, which became a pattern in the social process from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Thus, the peoples of the Volga-Caspian region, the Caucasus, Siberia, and Turkestan found themselves under the rule of a powerful state—Russia.

Starting from the mid-16th century, mutual raids and destructive wars began in the region, and the ruling class began neglecting the development of science and education. As a result, a stagnation occurred in these areas, and the lag behind global progress became evident.

By the end of the 19th century, positive changes in the field of education began in Turkestan. The reason for these changes, as already mentioned, was the recognition of science and education as key means to improve life and free the population. Additionally, in the mid-19th century, after the region was conquered by the Russian Empire, a new system of governance was introduced. First of all, this system did not take into account the culture and spiritual values of the local peoples, but on the contrary, it emphasized their cultural backwardness. Secondly, by introducing its own education system, the empire planned to completely subjugate the local peoples and ideologically make them dependent. Furthermore, the policy of "Russification" led to a confrontation between the local population and the new culture. This, in turn, contributed to the realization of the need for a spiritual revival among the national intelligentsia. In such conditions, the "Jadidism" movement emerged, which played an important role in the development of education in the region.

In the second half of the 19th century, educational reforms began in Turkestan, and the education system underwent a number of changes as a result of social demand. Although some changes were made to the system of schools and madrasas that had existed in the country since the 10th-13th centuries, in general, education continued to follow traditional methods. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, it became clear that this education system not only failed to meet the demands of society but also lagged centuries behind the level of development. The existing education system could not even meet simple requirements, such as literacy education¹.

¹ Uzbek Pedagogy Anthology (Volume II). – Tashkent: "Uqituvchi," 1999. – P. 14.

Since the second half of the 19th century, the education system in Turkestan began to be improved. On one hand, this was due to measures taken by the metropolis to influence the consciousness of the local peoples, and on the other hand, to changes caused by the peoples' desire to recognize their identity and strive for freedom, which led to the spread of enlightenment movements.