



EDUCATION XIV. SPECIAL SCHOOLS

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Children with special educational needs include the gifted, slow learners, the physically handicapped, the emotionally disturbed (*nā-sāzegār*), and the blind and the deaf. In Persia education for such children basically consists of instruction in reading, writing, other elementary-school subjects, and some vocational training. Blind pupils and some deaf pupils can, however, with the help of interpreters, advance through secondary school and sometimes even university.

Until 1968 responsibility for children with special educational needs had fallen on the individual schools. In that year the National Organization for Special Education (Sāzmān-e āmūzeš o parvareš-e esteṭnā'ī-e kešvar, or SĀPEK) was established as a general directorate (*modīriyat-e koll*) under a deputy minister of education. SĀPEK initiated classes for special students as adjuncts to the regular school curricula, rather than founding separate schools (T. Bāgčabān, pp. 61-62). After the revolution of 1979, however, the number of independent centers for children with special needs increased, accounting for 85 percent of total facilities in 1991 (Eṭrī, p. 10), though quality has not kept pace with this rapid expansion. SĀPEK also established in Tehran four institutes for teachers'



training at the junior-college level and five similar institutes in Khorasan, Isfahan, Hamadān, Kermān, and Kūzestān. The two-year program leads to a degree in special education.

Education for the deaf and blind began in Persia in the 1920s, but other groups did not receive special attention until the 1970s (Table 1). In the 1980s there was further growth in special education. Of the total enrollment of 38,717 pupils in 1990-91 54.5 percent were classified as slow learners, 22.4 percent as deaf or partially deaf, 5.3 percent as blind, 2.5 percent as emotionally disturbed, and 15.3 percent as gifted (Table 2).

Education for the deaf. Education for deaf children began in 1925 on the initiative of Mīrzā Jabbār ‘Askarzāda, known as Bāgčabān, who admitted three deaf boys into his kindergarten (*bāgčā-ye atfāl*; see viii, above). In working with these children he devised his “speaking-hand alphabet,” in which, in contrast to other sign alphabets, the shape and location of the hand correspond to the phonetics of the sounds, rather than merely to the shapes of the letters. Bāgčabān, using his alphabet and natural gestures, was quickly able to teach the deaf children speech and lipreading, as well as reading and writing (J. Bāgčabān, 1343 Š./1954, pp. 7-8). He opened the first school for the deaf in Tehran in 1933. After sixteen years of effort the first charter and elementary curriculum specifically for deaf children were drawn up and ratified by the Supreme Council on Education (Šūra-ye ‘ālī-e farhang) on 4 March 1950 (J. Bāgčabān, 1356 Š./1977, p. 138). Furthermore, in 1964 the first group of specially trained deaf pupils passed the same standard sixth-grade examinations administered to hearing children, and most of them were graduated from secondary school in 1970.

In 1968 special classes for deaf adults were established in Mašhad by the Committee for Combating Illiteracy (Kamīta-ye mellī-e peykār bā bīsawādī). In 1976, 204 newly literate adults were studying in the special-education centers of the Organization for the Welfare of the Deaf (Sāzmān-e mellī-e refāh-e nāšenavāyān, established in 1971). In 1974 two well-equipped counseling centers for deaf children between two and five years of age and their mothers were established in Tehran (T. Bāgčabān, pp. 62, 96, 125). These centers also trained counselors and conducted experiments in educational method.

With the creation of SĀPEK in 1968, use of the speaking alphabet and natural gestures was banned, and the “purely oral method” already in use in some technologically advanced countries was adopted. In 1980 the first lexicon of



Persian sign language, entitled *Farhang-e zabān-e ešāra'ī-e fārsī* and consisting of 988 words (initiated and prepared by Jūliā Samī'ī), was published by the Organization for the Welfare of the Deaf. The number of deaf children enrolled in special schools rose from 3,521 in 1980 to 8,684 in 1990, accounting for more than 22.4 percent of all students in special schools; 85 percent were in elementary schools, 11 percent in middle schools, and 4 percent in secondary schools (Eṭrī, p. 1; Table 2).

Education for the blind. The first Persian boarding school for the blind was established in Tabrīz in 1926 by a German priest named Ernst G. Christophel. By 1964 four other such schools had been opened by Christian churches: the Nūr-Ā'īn School in Isfahan (1943), the Rūdakī Educational Center for the Blind in Tehran (1949), the Šūrīda Academy in Shiraz (1963), and the Rūdakī Academy in Ahvāz (1964). In 1964 the Reżā Pahlavī School (now Šahīd Moḥebbī Academy for the Blind) was established in Tehran with a donation from former Queen Faraḥ. In 1965 the Ḳazā'elī Academy was founded in Tehran, and four years later the Abā Bašīr educational organization was formed in Isfahan (Nāmenī, p. 1). The Braille method, adjusted to the Persian alphabet by Dr. Moḥammad Ḳazā'elī, who was himself blind, is now used throughout Persia; large-print books and educational tapes (*navār-e darsī*) serve the needs of partially blind pupils. The number of blind and partially blind pupils enrolled in school rose from 809 in 1980-81 to 2,040 in 1990-91, accounting for 5.3 percent of all schoolchildren with special needs. About 55 percent of these children were enrolled in elementary schools, 30 percent in middle schools, and 15 percent in secondary schools (Eṭrī, p. 1; Table 2).

Slow learners. The special needs of slow learners have been recognized in Persia only since the 1970s. The number in school rose from 3,850 in 1980-81 to 21,120 in 1990-91, accounting for 55 percent of schoolchildren with special needs. More than 99 percent of them were enrolled in elementary schools and only 192 (less than 1 percent) in secondary schools. Although this group accounts for more than half of all schoolchildren with special needs, educational services (trained instructors and appropriate textbooks and educational materials) are provided for them only in Tehran, Khorasan, Kurdistan, and Zanjān (Eṭrī, p. 1; Table 2).

Emotionally disturbed children. The number of learning-disabled children enrolled in Persian schools rose from 318 in 1980-81 to 954 in 1990-91, accounting for less than 2.5 percent of all schoolchildren with special needs. About 97 percent of these children were enrolled in elementary schools and



only about 3 percent in secondary schools (‘Eṭrī, p. 1; Table 2).

Gifted children. Detailed curricula for gifted children had been revised in the 1950s, but funding was insufficient to implement them. Currently there are no effective programs for them, although their number has rapidly increased from 542 in 1980-81 to 5,823 in 1990-91, accounting for more than 15 percent of pupils with special needs (‘Eṭrī, p. 1; Table 2).

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