



EDUCATION XXVIII. IN TAJIKISTAN

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Modern education in Tajikistan developed as the country emerged as a Soviet socialist republic, under the Soviet policy of standardizing the educational system throughout the Soviet Union, with language as virtually the only variable. In Tajikistan, as in other Central Asian republics, this policy brought about nearly universal literacy and establishment of institutions of secondary and higher education that provided training in a wide range of occupations required by the local economy.

Before the Soviets consolidated their control of Central Asia in 1924 the territory of Tajikistan was divided between the emirate of Bukhara (q.v.) and the province of Samarkand in Russian Turkestan. Three parallel educational systems functioned in these areas. The first was a centuries-old system of traditional schooling in *maktabs* and *madrasas* (see iii, iv, above; [CENTRAL ASIA ix](#)), which had gained strength through the 19th century. The curriculum usually included Arabic conjugation and syntax (*ṣarf wa naḥw*), theology (*kalām*), natural philosophy and theosophy (*ḥekmat-e ṭabīʿī wa elāhī*), and Islamic laws (*feqh*). Those who wished to study literature and arithmetic usually did so privately. The language of instruction was Persian, and



textbooks were predominantly in Persian and Arabic (‘Aynī, 1362 Š./1983, pp. 163-65). In 1910 there were ninety *maktabs* and *madrasas* in Ҷojand, with a population of 40,000; total enrollment was 1,380 (Obidov, 1965, p. 10; Medlin et al., pp. 10-45; Wheeler, pp. 198-200). The second system comprised the “Russian-native” schools, founded by Russian officials and missionaries after the annexation of Turkestan. Both Russian and native children were taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as elementary geography and history. Native students received instruction in both Russian and local languages; religion was taught by local Muslim clerics. In 1911 there were ten such schools with 369 students on the present territory of Tajikistan (Obidov, pp. 10-12). The third system consisted of schools operated on “new principles” (*maktabhā-ye oṣūl-e jadīd*), founded by activists of the Jadīd movement whose modernizing objectives included educational reform. In order to create a generally literate civil society, Jadīd educators broadened the traditional curriculum to include geography, natural sciences, and arithmetic; even reading and writing were taught by modern methods, and there was strong emphasis on the Islamic religion (Allworth, pp. 130-40). Prominent among these educators was Ṣadr-al-Dīn ‘Aynī (q.v.), who, as a member of the semisecret Jam‘īyat-e tarbiā-ye aṭfāl (Association for Children’s Education), encouraged the establishment of new schools and wrote textbooks suited to modern curricula, for example, *Tadhīb al-ṣebyān* (1909). Such textbooks, emulating Tatar models, included poems and edifying tales, emphasizing the virtues of love for one’s parents, telling the truth, and so on (Allworth, pp. 130-40; ‘Aynī, pp. 801-04). Teaching in these schools, which grew rapidly after the turn of the century, was generally bilingual in Tajik and Uzbek, the latter under the influence of the Tatars of Russia, who had promoted nationalism among Central Asian Turks. Both the Russian authorities in Turkestan and the Bukharan clergy took a negative view of Jadīd schools and occasionally shut them down. Nevertheless, they seem to have attracted more students than the Russian-native schools, though no reliable data are available on their number or enrollment in Tajikistan (Medlin et al., pp. 46-62; Shorish, 1972, pp. 80-100). The Russian-native and Jadīd schools produced many of the teachers of the Soviet period. All three of these systems were integrated into the new Soviet system within a decade after 1917.

The Soviet government gave public education a high priority, particularly in regions with low literacy rates. Between 1917 and 1919 the following educational objectives were adopted: universal literacy, nationalization of schools, provision of free coeducational instruction, instruction in native



languages, abolition of religious instruction, and training of productive labor (Holmes, 1979). In Tajikistan the literacy campaign was launched in 1925 with the organization of the state agency Nīst bād bīsawādī (Down with Illiteracy); by the end of that year this agency had established forty-seven schools for adults. Five years later there were 1,111 schools, attended by about 80,000 men and women. Classes were often held outdoors or in open *čāy-kānas* (q.v.). The campaign gained momentum in the 1930s, when students and teachers were actively recruited in almost every village. Because there was a shortage of teachers, each ministry, trade union, and communist organization was required to provide a certain quota. Students were sent to villages to teach during their vacations, and many volunteers were recruited. Outstanding teachers were rewarded with money or public recognition. Attendance at literacy classes rose to a peak of 296,000 in 1936. Clerical opposition to this campaign, resulting from the conversion of many mosques into schools and from the atheistic content of teaching, proved ineffective. Reported literacy for the group aged nine to forty-nine years jumped from 3.8 percent in 1926 to 82.8 percent (87.4 percent of men, 77.5 percent of women) in 1939 (Shorish, 1972, pp. 170-86). Two changes in alphabet, from Persian Arabic to Roman in 1929 and then to Cyrillic in 1940 (Borjian), must have taxed the abilities even of people who were already literate. Nevertheless, literacy was reported at 92.6 percent in the 1959 census and above 99 percent in 1970, including men and women in both urban and rural areas (*Narodnoe obrazovanie, nauka*, p. 22; personal interviews). The magazine *Jehān-e now* (New World) and other periodicals introduced more effective teaching methods to teachers and provided texts for students, as well as promoting Soviet “patriotism” and the latest social and economic plans of the Communist party (Shorish, 1972, p. 184). A remarkable example of the textbooks used in the 1930s is *Panj dar čār*, referring to the completion of a five-year government economic plan in four years, owing to the hard work of ordinary citizens.

During the first two decades of Soviet rule the emphasis was on universal primary education. Although a great majority of children had received elementary education by 1940, few continued on to secondary schools ([Table 1](#)). Secondary-school enrollment rose rapidly in the following decades, however, and the numbers of schools and teachers increased. Enrollment increased even more rapidly when laws were passed making seven and then ten years of schooling compulsory, in the mid-1950s and mid-1970s respectively (Rakhimov et al.; Iusufbekov; Nove and Newth, pp. 69-72).



In the late 1920s and the 1930s a network of vocational and “specialized” secondary schools was created on the Russian model, in order to train skilled workers and technicians for rapid industrialization and mechanization of agriculture in Tajikistan. The first teachers’-training institutions (*dār al-mo‘allemīn*) were opened in the 1920s in Tashkent and Samarkand, both now in Uzbekistan. The first on what is now Tajik territory was established in Dushanbe in 1925. Between 1931 and 1954 teachers’ training was consolidated in five higher pedagogical institutes in Dushanbe, Kōjand (Leninabad), and Kūlāb. Two of them, in Dushanbe and Kōjand, were at first exclusively for women but were merged with their male counterparts in the late 1950s (Shorish, 1972, pp. 287-331). By 1980 seven more institutions of higher education had opened in Dushanbe, including the State University of Tajikistan, inaugurated in 1948 (Table 2). The number of students attending institutions of specialized and higher education increased sharply after the early 1960s, with the spread of correspondence and evening courses designed to permit workers to continue at their jobs while completing their education (Pennar et al., pp. 62-67; Thompstone). The percentage of employees in Tajikistan with either specialized secondary or higher education grew from 9.5 in 1960 to 22.8 in 1987 (*Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul’tura*, p. 16).

Women’s education in Tajikistan was particularly successful, at least in quantitative terms. Whereas girls comprised less than 2 percent of all students in 1927 (Shorish, 1972, p. 211), in the academic year 1988-89 47 percent of students in specialized secondary education and 41 percent in institutions of higher learning were women. Most women studied education, hygiene, and home economics. Women constituted 38 percent of all schoolteachers (63 percent in urban areas, 29 percent in rural areas; *Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul’tura* pp. 139, 176, 227).

The educational system encompassed nursery schools and kindergartens; elementary schools; academic, vocational-technical, and specialized secondary schools; and institutions of higher education. Education at all schools from the elementary level on up was free, and at specialized and higher levels stipends were available; fees might be charged for meals and lodging at boarding schools, however. Although nursery schools (*šīrḳvārestānhā*) and kindergartens (*bāḡčahā-ye bačagān*) are neither free nor compulsory, they were heavily subsidized by the state from the early Soviet period (Panachin; Kashin). Children under the age of three years attended nursery schools, and those from three to seven years of age attended kindergartens. In 1989 there



were 894 nursery schools and kindergartens in Tajikistan, with a total enrollment of 153,000, 79 percent in urban areas, yet in 1988 only 16 percent of all children in the republic received preschool education. There was thus a significant disparity between urban and rural areas. In Dushanbe (q.v.), where the population was predominantly Russian, the figure was 56 percent, but in rural areas, where more than three-quarters of ethnic Tajiks lived, it was only 5 percent (*Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura* pp. 29-36).

General education was divided into three phases: elementary (grades 1-3), intermediate (*mīāna-ye nāporra*, grades 4-8), and secondary (grades 9-11); before 1980 fourth grade was part of the elementary level. Full-time attendance was compulsory through the eighth grade, after which there were several options: three years of academic training in preparation for higher education, three to four years of technical training in specialized secondary school (providing additional general education, along with technical training for the certificate of “specialist with intermediate qualifications”), two to four years of practical skills training in vocational-technical school (to qualify as technician or skilled laborer), and immediate entry into the labor force (with the obligation of completing the required ten years of schooling in an evening or correspondence program). During the 1980s the ratio of applications to admissions for both specialized secondary schools and institutions of higher learning was approximately 3 to 1 (*Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura*, pp. 180, 230).

The quality of schools varied considerably with location. In Dushanbe several had the benefit of well-trained instructors, many of them Russian. On the other hand, unsatisfactory buildings, shortages of equipment and textbooks, and poorly trained teachers have been persistent problems in rural areas. In those areas children were generally able to attend only elementary grades, after which they had to continue at boarding schools, which charged fees. Some secondary schools operated seasonally in villages and on collective farms (Sheehy; Rakhimov et al.). The language of instruction also varied; it could be one of the local languages or Russian (Figure 1, Figure 2). During the academic year 1988-89 66 percent of students attending general day schools (grades 1-11) were taught in Tajik, 22.9 in Uzbek, 9.7 in Russian, 1.1 in Kirgiz, and 0.3 in Turkmen (*Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura*, p. 91). These figures correspond closely to the proportions of language groups in the republic overall. Russian-language schools were also attended by native students, as in most fields access to higher education was impossible for those who did not



know Russian (Bilinsky). In those schools the main foreign language taught was English, though it was also possible to study French and German; the study of Tajik was optional. In other schools courses in Russian were provided from the first grade (from the second grade before the 1970s; Shorish, 1976; Rakowska-Harmstone, 1970, pp. 241-50). Instruction in Russian was generally of poor quality in rural areas, owing to the poor training of the instructors.

A few schools in Dushanbe also offered, in the fourth through eighth grades, optional courses in Persian as a language different from Tajik and using the Persian Arabic alphabet. Some textbooks, particularly those on Tajik language, literature, and history, were in Tajik, and some Russian textbooks were translated into Tajik. The quality of textbooks in Tajik was generally poor, however, owing to both inferior materials and the low level of language used in them. The subjects taught in the schools of Tajikistan corresponded to those taught in other Soviet republics, except that Tajik literature and history were added to standard Russian and Soviet literature and history. Textbooks on Tajik literature included passages from classical Persian poetry and prose, as well as from works by Tajik writers. In history textbooks the Tajiks were presented as a distinct people with roots in the distant past, and a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of their history was given, following the model of B. G. Gafurov's *Tadzhiki. Drevneishaya, drevnyaya i srednevekovaya istoriya* (Moscow, 1972; tr. as *Tojikon [Tājikān]* 2 vols., Dushanbe, 1983-85).

Both specialized secondary schools (*maktabhā-ye mīāna-ye maḵṣūs*) and vocational-technical schools (*āmūzešgāhhā-ye kasbhā-ye tekhnīkī*, which were introduced in the late 1950s and flourished in the 1960s) were known as “technicums.” In these institutions professionals from local industries taught specialized courses in agronomy, accounting, pharmacy, nursing, art, elementary-school teaching, and other fields. Individual ministries, state enterprises, and collective farms supported technicums, particularly vocational-technical institutes, and exerted considerable influence over the curricula. There were eighty-two such schools in the academic year 1988-89, with a total enrollment of 48,300 (Sheehy; Holmes, 1984; *Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura*, pp. 148-49).

Establishments of higher education in Tajikistan, all in Dushanbe except for the aforementioned teachers'-training institutes, included institutes of agriculture, medicine, engineering, physical education, arts, and Russian language and literature, as well as three pedagogical institutes and Tajikistan State University (Rakhimov et al.). In 1988 the university had an enrollment of



11,400 students (51 percent day, 19 percent evening, 30 percent correspondence) in its colleges of physics, mathematics and mechanics, chemistry, biology, geology, history, Tajik language and literature, Russian language and literature, Oriental languages, law, and economics (*Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura*, p. 224; *Entsi-klopediyai* VII, p. 489). Of all students at institutions of higher education in 1988-89, 65 percent were studying in fields related to education, 12 percent in health, 11 percent in industry and construction, and 9 percent in agriculture; the remainder studied arts, economics, and law (*Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura*, p. 209). Instruction in both institutions of higher education and technicums was primarily but not exclusively in Russian; those specializing in teachers' training and Tajik (or occasionally Uzbek) language and literature of course studied in those languages (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1975). A great majority of Tajik and Uzbek students concentrated on the humanities and social sciences, whereas Russian and other Slavic students were more attracted to the sciences and technical fields. In the academic year 1988-89 students training to become teachers numbered 35,000, 26,700 in higher pedagogical institutions, the rest in specialized secondary schools (*Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura*, pp. 140, 142).

In 1988-89 about half the 556 postgraduate students in Tajikistan were attending institutions of higher education (*Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura*, p. 250), the other half scientific institutes affiliated with the Soviet Academy of Sciences. From 1951 the Academy directed research activities in both humanities and sciences (history, astronomy, seismology, medicine, and agriculture and animal husbandry, which, in the Soviet system, were included in the natural sciences).

The primary agencies for channeling Soviet propaganda into schools were two communist youth organizations, Pioneriya (Pioneers) and Komsomols (Young Communist League). Both were formed in the 1920s with a view toward training the future builders of a communist society, and their memberships were drawn from families that had shown loyalty to the communists. At first the Pioneriya recruited members from among students aged nine to fourteen years, later ten to fifteen years. Komsomol membership included youths in their later teens and twenties. These organizations proved effective in the effort to eradicate illiteracy, in organizing students to work on crop harvests and construction projects, and ultimately in preparing them for party membership (Medlin et al., pp. 195-210). Particularly during the early Soviet period the Komsomols sought to spread antireligious propaganda by



organizing local associations like *Ḳodānāšenāsān* (lit., “nonbelievers in God,” or atheists; Shorish, 1972, p. 157). Subsequently youth organizations opened membership to all young people within specified age groups. During the school year and at summer camps, as well as in the “Pioneer palaces” (*qaṣrḥā-ye pionerān*), they organized extracurricular activities like theater programs, sports, music, chess, clubs for young naturalists and engineers, and discussion groups, as well as sponsoring children’s libraries and museums. These organizations published three periodicals: the thrice-weekly *Komsomoli Tojikiston* (founded 1930, now *Javononi Tojikiston*), of which 124,000 copies were printed in Tajik and 35,500 in Russian in 1980; *Pioneri Tojikiston* (1932), a biweekly with 281,000 copies printed in 1983; and *Mašʿal* (1952), a monthly for elementary-school children, with 105,000 copies printed in 1981 (*Entsiklopediyai* III, p. 421; V, p. 603; VI, pp. 227-28).

Since Tajikistan obtained its independence in 1991 the educational system developed by the Soviets has remained unchanged in essentials. The number of schools in which Russian is the language of instruction has declined sharply, owing to emigration of Russian residents. The Tajik government has mandated that Tajik again be taught in the Persian Arabic alphabet. The Tajik ministry of education continues to produce the educational weekly *Omūzgor* (*Āmūzgār*), formerly *Gazetai muallimon* (*Gazeta-ye moʻallemān*), which has provided guidance for teachers since 1932, though its cycle of publication has been altered several times and is now irregular.

In 1996 the educational system comprised four years of elementary school and seven years of secondary school (though many students entered the work force after five years); a twelfth grade has been introduced in a few selected schools. Although initial steps toward introducing a private educational system have been taken, no reliable data are available (World Bank, pp. 173-77). New teachers’-training institutes have been opened in Qorḡan Tepe and *Ḳāroḡ* (the capital of Badaḡšān province) and a medical school in *Ḳojand*.

Nevertheless, civil war and economic hardship since independence (see dushanbe) have had detrimental effects on education. Such indicators as enrollment, number of teaching hours, ratio of available textbooks to number of students, class size, and number of teachers in training all suggest that the quality has declined. Judging by student-teacher ratios, which dropped from 16.1 in 1985 to 12.2 in 1992 (World Bank, p. 174), enrollment has fallen sharply, particularly in the higher secondary grades and among girls in rural areas. Owing to imposition of a curfew and the lack of public transport,



correspondence courses have become more popular. Nevertheless, in 1992 nearly 1.3 million students were attending the 3,320 schools in Tajikistan, compared to 1.1 million in 1986. This absolute growth reflects rapid population increases, especially in rural areas. In the 1990s the Tajik government was spending approximately a quarter to a fifth of its budget on education, partly to maintain employment for 125,000 educational personnel (ranging from preschool teachers to university professors). Nevertheless, real income had dropped sharply, owing to inflation (figures for 1992; World Bank, pp. 173-77).

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