



TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN TURKESTAN

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Abstract

This article discusses the reforms carried out by the Russian Empire in the education system of Turkestan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It examines the activities of Russian-native (Russo-native) schools and gymnasiums that reflected the policy of Russification during these processes, as well as the methods of involving the local population in these institutions and the consequences observed as a result of these reforms.

Keywords: Russian Empire, Turkestan, local population, Turkestan General-Governorate, Russian-native schools and gymnasiums, educational conditions, teaching aids, textbooks, local wealthy individuals, national enlighteners.

INTRODUCTION

Following the Russian Empire’s conquest of Turkestan, extensive socio-economic and cultural reforms were carried out to integrate the region into the imperial framework. A central aspect of this policy was the Russification strategy, aimed at establishing a socio-cultural class loyal to imperial authority among the local population. The implementation of this strategy commenced primarily through the reform of the education system. In the region, Russian-native schools, boys’ and girls’ gymnasiums, as well as vocational schools, were established. The first Governor-General of Turkestan, Konstantin Petrovich Kaufman, after assessing the state of local education, concluded that it was necessary to apply the principles of missionary pedagogy that had been tested in the Volga region. To this end, the renowned Orientalist and missionary educator Nikolai Ivanovich Ilminsky was invited to Tashkent. Ilminsky, who was proficient in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic languages, gained recognition as a scholar of Eastern sources.



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In 1857, he published in Kazan the work *Babur-nama* by Zahir ad-Din Muhammad Babur.

However, in the context of Turkestan, his activities were primarily associated with the development and implementation of a distinctive educational model that became an instrument of imperial national policy. The so-called “Ilminsky system,” which formed the basis of Russian-native schools, involved initial instruction in the students’ native language using the Russian script, with a gradual emphasis on the Russian language and the incorporation of elements of Russian cultural tradition. In 1873, Ilminsky proposed the transition of Turkic peoples from the traditional Arabic script to the Cyrillic alphabet[1,41]. This initiative aligned with the broader objective of transforming the cultural identity of the local population, weakening their ties to the Islamic educational tradition, and integrating them into the Russian-speaking cultural sphere.

At the same time, the policy of Russification faced criticism from representatives of the Muslim community. In 1908, State Duma deputy Gaysa Sharifovich Yenikeev sharply criticized the missionary character of Russian-native schools from the parliamentary podium. He emphasized the necessity of eliminating missionary elements from the educational system, abandoning the policy of Russification, and organizing school instruction based on scientific and pedagogical principles that accounted for the cultural and religious characteristics of the Muslim population. Thus, the educational reforms in Turkestan, officially presented as measures for the modernization and enlightenment of the region, in fact functioned as a crucial instrument of imperial cultural assimilation policy. The public education system became one of the key mechanisms for institutionalizing Russification and transforming the socio-cultural structure of Turkestani society.

It should be emphasized that, in this context, the discussion concerns schools for the Muslim population established by the Ministry of Public Education based on the Ilminsky system. As contemporaries noted, such educational institutions failed to gain the trust of the Muslim community, as they did not serve the genuine purposes of enlightenment but pursued other political and confessional objectives[2,127]. Nikolai Ivanovich Ilminsky himself was regarded as a missionary advocating the dissemination of Orthodox ideas among the peoples of



Turkestan. His pedagogical concept was closely linked to objectives of confessional influence and the cultural transformation of non-Russian populations. At the same time, the first Governor-General of Turkestan, Konstantin Petrovich Kaufman, recognized the potential risks of overt missionary activity in the region and therefore did not authorize its direct implementation, favoring a more cautious and flexible approach.

Describing his student Nikolai Petrovich Ostroumov, Ilminsky noted that he had completed the course at the Kazan Theological Academy, where he studied Tatar and Arabic under Ilminsky's guidance, was well acquainted with Islamic doctrine and the Qur'an, and was a missionary both in conviction and in scholarly preparation. It was further emphasized that, according to Ostroumov, missionary work could only be firmly established through educational and "humanitarian" forms, primarily via the schooling system. However, the implementation of Russification policies in Turkestan faced significant obstacles. National liberation movements against Russian colonial authority, as well as resistance from representatives of the Sharia clergy, compelled the administration to adopt a more measured and cautious policy. In this context, imperial authorities chose a tactic of formal non-interference in the activities of traditional maktabas and madrasas, seeking to avoid open conflict with the local population. Moreover, in some instances, the support of religious conservatism was tolerated as a means of maintaining societal control and preventing the consolidation of anti-colonial movements. Thus, the educational policy of the Russian Empire in Turkestan combined elements of missionary strategy, cultural assimilation, and pragmatic administrative caution, reflecting the complex and ambivalent nature of imperial governance in the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Published works on this topic, conducted studies, and scientific articles, taking into account contemporary conceptual and methodological requirements, can be classified chronologically into four main groups:

1. Publications and periodical materials issued during the existence of the Russian Empire. This group of sources reflects the official stance of the imperial administration, missionary circles, and the colonial scholarly environment,



forming a discourse within which educational policy in Turkestan was interpreted as a civilizing and modernization mission.

2. Literature and scientific studies published during the Soviet period. Works of this stage are characterized by the dominance of Marxist-Leninist methodology, a class-based approach, and criticism of the tsarist colonial policy. At the same time, interpretations of Russification, missionary activities, and educational reforms were often framed through the ideological lens of the Soviet era, which shaped the specific evaluations and conceptual apparatus employed.

3. Scientific literature and studies produced during the years of independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The first group includes publications from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries, devoted to the study of everyday life, customs, and traditions of the local population within the specific colonial discourse of the period. In particular, the works of Vladimir Petrovich Nalivkin and Maria Vladimirovna Nalivkina contain valuable ethnographic data on the customs and lifestyle of the sedentary population of Turkestan. Despite an inherent orientalist perspective, their studies remain important sources for the social history of the region[3,87]. It should be noted that V.P. Nalivkin, who held the position of inspector of Muslim schools under the Administration of Educational Institutions of the Turkestan Region, conducted inspections of Russian-native schools and gymnasiums and examined the organization of the educational process in detail. Based on his observations, he identified shortcomings and systemic problems in the functioning of these institutions, which were documented in his official reports as well as in his published books and articles[4,53].

A significant contribution to the study of educational policy in Turkestan was made by Nikolai Petrovich Ostroumov. In his memoirs, he highlighted the course of reforms in public education, the activities of the first Governor-General Konstantin Petrovich Kaufman, as well as the development of Russian-native schools and the local population's attitudes toward them, drawing on specific historical facts and personal observations[5,107]. Of particular interest is the report by Senator Konstantin Konstantinovich Palen, which focuses on the state of education in Turkestan. This document provides an analysis of the functioning of the colonial education system, including the circumstances of establishing



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Russian-native schools and gymnasiums, as well as their role in implementing Russification policies in the region. The factual materials presented in the report allow for the reconstruction of the institutional mechanisms of imperial educational policy and an assessment of its significance within the context of colonial governance.[6,150]

The second group includes works published during the Soviet period. These works are characterized by an approach rooted in communist ideology, which asserted that the population of Turkestan in the pre-revolutionary period was “virtually completely illiterate.” Such interpretations aligned with the principles of Marxist-Leninist methodology and were aimed at substantiating the thesis of the “civilizing” role of socialist educational reforms[7,116]. In the speeches and publications of educational figures such as N. Arkhangelsky and Sh. Rakhimiy, problems related to teaching methods and the state of textbooks in traditional schools and madrasas inherited from the pre-revolutionary period were analyzed. Several studies also examined the formation of Russian-native schools during the Russian Empire. However, these works rarely addressed the efforts of the imperial administration to resolve systemic educational issues, or the complexity and contradictions inherent in the implemented educational policies[8,82].

The third group comprises scholarly works and studies produced during the years of independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan. These studies are characterized by an effort to reinterpret historical experience based on the principles of objectivity, historicism, and scientific impartiality, as established in the conceptual framework for presenting the history of Uzbek statehood. In the monographs by R. Shamsutdinova and B. Rasulov, which focus on the history of schools and madrasas in Turkestan, the evolution of the region’s traditional educational institutions is examined in detail. At the same time, the activities of Russian-native schools and gymnasiums receive comparatively less attention, reflecting a shift in research emphasis toward national and cultural forms of education[9,88].

The works of I. Shamsieva, N. Mustafaeva, and several other researchers address the development of the education system in Central Asia within a broad historical context. Within this framework, the activities of Russian-native schools and gymnasiums are analyzed fragmentarily, primarily as one element of colonial



educational policy, without a comprehensive institutional or comparative analysis of their functioning [10.6].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Russian-native schools and gymnasiums established by the Russian Empire with the aim of forming loyal subjects oriented toward serving imperial interests featured a separate organization of the educational process for boys and girls. The cultivation of “loyal citizens” was not limited to the male population; the inclusion of women was considered a priority in educational policy. The primary objective was to instill in youth—regardless of gender—a sense of loyalty to the Empire and to expand the social base of supporters of the existing authorities. To this end, specialized educational institutions for girls of various profiles were established. To attract female students from the local population, the administration relied on the mediation of Tatar women, who were linguistically, religiously, and culturally close to the indigenous Muslim population of the region.

For example, in 1861, the first “school for girls” for the local population was opened in the Kazaly district of the Syrdarya region under the direction of a Tatar teacher, offering instruction in literacy as well as sewing and weaving. However, by 1862, following the teacher’s departure to Orenburg, the school’s activities were discontinued. According to the decrees of Emperor Alexander II on March 13 and December 26, 1868, Siberian indigenous children were allowed to enroll in educational institutions from the age of fifteen, and were permitted to repeat a grade up to three times. These measures represented some of the first institutional steps in implementing Russification policies and were aimed at creating conditions for local populations to adapt to education in the Russian language.

Additionally, certain benefits applied to students of private gymnasiums. In particular, students repeating a year and achieving satisfactory quarterly grades could pay tuition at discounted rates established by the Governor-General or receive special scholarships. For instance, in 1885, ten students at the Tashkent Women’s Gymnasium were awarded special scholarships, and fifteen were exempted from tuition for the repeated year. To enhance motivation among local students, the government intentionally expanded the system of educational



privileges. Alongside Russian pupils, these benefits were also extended to Tatar girls (Umidova, Yenikeeva, Bulatova, Kochikareva, Bibisheva, Chanysheva, Bikteeva, and others), indicating the inclusion of Muslim women in the imperial educational space.

At the same time, the Governor-General's administration did not aim for the comprehensive development of public education in the region; priority was given to staffing Russian and Russian-native schools and gymnasiums with local children and systematically implementing Russification policies in the social sphere.

Uzbek educators, however, viewed the study of the Russian language as a means of accessing global scientific and technical knowledge. For example, Sattorkhon Abdugafforov, in one of his articles, emphasized the necessity of mastering Russian to engage with scientific works and practical knowledge that could benefit society. He noted that at that time, a significant portion of the population of Kokand did not recognize the importance of such reforms, perceiving the new order as foreign and unfamiliar[11,276]. Sattorkhon Abdugafforov was the first Uzbek teacher at a Russian school opened in 1873 in Shymkent. Like other representatives of the local progressive intelligentsia, he understood the pragmatic significance of acquiring proficiency in the Russian language and therefore actively participated in the work of newly established educational institutions. For many reform-minded intellectuals, command of Russian also provided access to the political discourse of the imperial administration and enabled them to formulate independent strategies for social development.

In 1870, the Ministry of Public Education, under the leadership of Minister Dmitry Andreyevich Tolstoy, developed a plan to expand the network of primary schools in the Urals, Siberia, and Crimea. The plan was grounded in the policy of integrating non-Russian populations into the imperial socio-cultural framework and promoting their gradual incorporation into the "Russian nation." One of the principal instruments for achieving this objective was the enrollment of non-Russian children in Russian and so-called Russo-native schools, as well as the organization of joint instruction for Russian and non-Russian pupils within the same classrooms. According to the authors of the project, such measures were



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expected to accelerate the acquisition of the Russian language and facilitate administrative integration.

The plan placed particular emphasis on expanding Russian and Russo-native schools among the nomadic populations of Kazakhstan in order to curtail the influence of Islamic educational institutions. The staffing of these schools was to be ensured through graduates of the Turkestan Teachers' Seminary [12, 45-49]. Thus, the educational policy of the Russian Empire in Turkestan combined elements of social mobility, gender inclusion, cultural assimilation, and administrative pragmatism, thereby forming a complex and multi-layered system of colonial governance in the sphere of education. According to the law adopted in 1875 by the central authorities of the Russian Empire, Russian and Russo-native schools and gymnasiums, as well as subordinate local educational institutions, were placed under the direct jurisdiction of the Turkestan Governor-Generalship. At the same time, Muslim madrasas and traditional maktabas remained outside direct state supervision.

Governor-General Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman pursued a policy of non-interference in the activities of Muslim educational institutions, assuming that the traditional system of religious schooling would gradually lose its relevance and decline independently. The curricula of these institutions were focused primarily on religious literacy and were considerably detached from the socio-economic and intellectual demands of the period. Scholars examining the condition of traditional education in Turkestan have noted the near absence of secular subjects, highlighting the discrepancy between the content of instruction and the evolving socio-cultural and economic needs of the region [13,23-25].

In 1883, the first congress of teachers of Russian educational institutions in the Turkestan region was convened in Tashkent. Among the participants was the honorary trustee of the Russian school in Kokand, Sattorkhon Abdugafforov [10, p. 82]. His participation illustrates the engagement of representatives of the local educated elite in the institutional and methodological development of Russo-native education. A significant contribution to the pedagogical advancement of Russo-native schools was made by the enlightener Saidrasul Saidazizov, who in 1902 published the first primer entitled *Ustodi Avval*. This textbook was designed for primary instruction and constituted the first systematically structured teaching



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manual adapted to the cultural and linguistic context of the indigenous population, while simultaneously aligning with the objectives of imperial educational policy.

The local enlighteners of that period were also fully aware of the essence of the reforms carried out by the Russian Empire and drew timely conclusions. They contributed to creating favorable conditions for the education of indigenous children studying in Russo-native schools by publishing textbooks and methodological materials adapted to the needs of these students. For Russian-language groups, S. Gramenitsky prepared and published the textbooks *The First Reading Book*, *The Second Reading Book*, and *The Third Reading Book*, dedicating their publication to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of Russo-native schools [14,61].

As of 1 January 1886, the following types of educational institutions established by the Russian Empire operated in the Turkestan region:

1. Boys' gymnasiums;
2. Girls' gymnasiums;
3. Teachers' seminaries;
4. Urban schools established in accordance with the Statute of 1872;
5. Confessional (religious) schools;
6. Russo-native schools;
7. Private schools [15,239].

Schools and gymnasiums were organized for Russian children, as well as seminaries for the training of teaching staff. Within these seminaries, the Russian administration approved a statute permitting instruction in the languages of the local population—Uzbek and Tajik. However, Governor-General Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman proposed that, instead of Uzbek and Tajik, the Kazakh language be introduced, alongside instruction in Russian, and that the local population be taught literacy using the Cyrillic script. The aim of this proposal was to accelerate the process of Russification of the indigenous peoples [16,32]. Despite the opportunities provided, Russo-native schools experienced a shortage of pupils. For example, in his 1895 report, Gramenitsky, Chief Inspector of Educational Institutions of the Syr-Darya Region, noted that among school-age children in rural areas, only 62% were Russian children. In comparison with the



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proportion of Russian children within the Russian Empire as a whole, this was considered a relatively high figure. The Russian government regarded this as a means of maintaining the economic and social dominance of Russians over the local population and strengthening the position of the Russian nation [17,86].

In 1890, the Chief Inspector of Educational Institutions of the Turkestan region, O. Kerensky, in his report following an inspection of Russo-native schools in the Samarkand Region, wrote: “During the inspection of Russo-native schools in the Samarkand Region, it was established that the number of pupils is extremely small. Many of the registered children scarcely attend classes. In some cases, teachers conduct lessons with three or four pupils. Thus, on 7 October of the current year, during my personal visit to the Russo-native school in the city of Jizzakh, no pupils were present at all” [18,6].

In order to facilitate the enrollment of local children—Uzbeks and Tajiks—in Russo-native schools, Governor-General Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman appointed affluent and socially respected representatives of the indigenous population who were proficient in Russian to honorary positions as guardians and mentors. Through these measures, local children were encouraged to attend Russo-native schools. Within the framework of this policy, the administration of Russo-native educational institutions in Tashkent was likewise entrusted to wealthy merchants and authoritative figures within the local community [19,64-68].

In rural areas, the influence of affluent and respected individuals was particularly strong, and the majority of the population tended to follow their directives.

In 1891, in order to strengthen oversight of Muslim educational institutions, the position of Third Inspector of Public Schools of Turkestan was introduced within the Administration of Educational Institutions of the Turkestan region under the supervision of the orientalist Vladimir Petrovich Nalivkin [20,124]. The official occupying this position exercised supervisory authority over traditional schools and madrasas, as well as over Russo-native schools and gymnasiums across the region.

The state allocated only 700 rubles annually for the maintenance of each Russo-native school, an amount that was insufficient in light of the socio-economic conditions of the period. The majority of these schools lacked purpose-built



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facilities and operated either in rented courtyards belonging to prosperous local residents or in two or three additional rooms within private homes. In rural areas, Russo-native schools functioned under particularly difficult circumstances, while teachers performed their duties for comparatively low remuneration.

According to the minutes of the meeting of the Andijan municipal administration dated 5 March 1901, and pursuant to the order of 18 January of the same year following an inspection of Andijan district, schools were instructed to provide the necessary instructional materials and appropriate infrastructure. Owing to the absence of a suitable building for the Andijan city school, the Ministry of Public Education recommended the allocation of 550 rubles. Simultaneously, taking into account the challenging economic conditions, the Andijan municipal administration proposed increasing the monthly salary of local teachers employed in Russo-native schools from 10 to 20 rubles, which would amount to 240 rubles annually. At the conclusion of the minutes, the administration petitioned for authorization to allocate funds for the construction of a religious school and to designate an appropriate land plot for this purpose [21,13].

In this regard, according to the minutes of the meeting of the Kokand City Council dated 11 March 1902, following consideration of the report of the Fergana Regional Administration of 26 February of the same year, it was noted that the monthly salary of a teacher at a Russo-native school was equivalent to the monthly wage of the school's watchman. The document emphasized the necessity of increasing teachers' annual salaries to 240 rubles. This decision reflected the consequences of the government's Russification policy, as the low remuneration of teachers instructing Uzbek pupils significantly reduced the effectiveness of the educational process and demonstrated a systematic form of discrimination against the local population. Archival sources indicate that the indigenous population was consistently subjected to underestimation and marginalization [archival materials].

A report by the head of the administrative department of Namangan district proposed raising the annual salary of teachers at Russo-native schools from 120 to 300 rubles. However, an examination of archival documents demonstrates that this proposal was not approved by the government, and the salary increase was not implemented.



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Instruction for Uzbek groups in Russo-native schools continued under conditions comparable to those of traditional primary schools. After completing lessons in the Russian classes, pupils moved to adjacent classrooms under the supervision of an Uzbek teacher. The Uzbek instructor taught all subjects prescribed by the curriculum of the former local (traditional) school. In practice, the Uzbek teacher neutralized the instructional materials and pedagogical methods employed by the Russian teachers.

Conditions in the Uzbek classes remained at the level of the traditional school: while pupils in the Russian classes sat at desks, those in the Uzbek classes were seated on felt mats (kirgiz) and namats. Textbooks, teaching aids, and instructional equipment were absent, and lessons were conducted according to the old method—through rote memorization of Arabic religious texts.

Thus, despite the formal presence of the Russo-native educational system, the actual instruction of Uzbek pupils retained an archaic character and failed to meet contemporary pedagogical standards. This situation reflected the contradictions between the proclaimed objectives of Russification and the practical realities of the educational process for the indigenous population.

In schools under the jurisdiction of the government of the Russian Empire, cases were observed in which non-Russian children were unable to master the curriculum and remained in the same grade for up to three years. Concerned about the reputation of these institutions, the Department of Public Education adopted special resolutions on 21 July 1883 and 15 November 1888. According to these decisions, non-local pupils who had been allowed to repeat a year but failed to complete the curriculum during that period were subject to expulsion, with a prohibition on transferring to another educational institution as underperforming students [22,3].

In 1876, one boys' and one girls' school were opened in the cities of the Fergana region. In 1878, two-class schools with a five-year course of study were established in Yangi Margilan, Namangan, Kokand, and Osh, and in 1879 in Andijan. These institutions represented some of the earliest practical efforts to implement the policy of Russification. In 1877, a seven-year gymnasium was opened in Tashkent, and in 1879 gymnasiums for boys and girls were established in Ashgabat. Until 1887, gymnasiums with Russian-language instruction operated



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in Tashkent, while no private Russian schools existed. In 1900, gymnasiums for boys and girls were opened in Samarkand and Yangi Margilan.

In 1903, 1905, and 1907, the private gymnasiums “Mikhailovka” and “Gorizdro” in Tashkent, along with other private institutions, offered co-educational instruction for boys and girls and prepared students for admission to secondary specialized schools. One of the prominent schools in Tashkent was the private girls’ gymnasium “L. Gorizdro.” In 1914, Laylo Yenikeyeva, from a military family, graduated from this institution, followed in 1916 by Annal Asfandiyarova, both receiving formal certificates. Graduates of this gymnasium subsequently pursued pedagogical careers in gymnasiums and Russo-native schools as teachers [archival sources].

The girls’ gymnasium in Samarkand was considered one of the most prestigious government-administered educational institutions in the region. Bibi-Oysha Kulchanova graduated in 1904, and Mariam Levina in 1906, receiving certificates qualifying them as home teachers. At the girls’ gymnasium in Verny, during the 1911–1912 academic year, Maria Boygulova, from a military family, and Nadezhda Kolpakovskaya, daughter of a state secretary, graduated. Graduates of local girls’ gymnasiums of Tatar origin continued pedagogical work either as private tutors or in Russo-native schools.

The Chief Inspector of Educational Institutions of the Syr-Darya Region, Gramenitsky, conducted an investigation into the activities of Russo-native schools in the region, focusing on the organization of the educational process and student attendance. Observations during September–October revealed low attendance, which increased several times in December, January, and February, then declined again in March and April. Gramenitsky recommended establishing clear schedules for student arrival and class duration to improve discipline and ensure regular attendance.

CONCLUSION

Overall, following the incorporation of the Turkestan region into the Russian Empire, reforms were implemented to advance the policy of Russification. These reforms encompassed the educational system, including the establishment of Russo-native schools and gymnasiums. Various measures and initiatives were



undertaken to attract children of the local population to these institutions, with the goal of fostering loyalty to the empire and increasing its support base among indigenous communities.

However, the educational reforms implemented during this period did not achieve the expected outcomes. Economic difficulties and organizational constraints became evident. While some local families enrolled their children in Russo-native schools, the majority preferred educational institutions established by local reformers, including madrasas and *usul-i jadid* (new-method) schools.

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