THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT MOVEMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA

Umida Xolova

Researcher, Bukhara State University, Bukhara, Uzbekistan

ORCID: 0009-0003-3624-3477

Abstract. This paper analyzes the place of education and science in the Enlightenment (Jadid) movement of Central Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It argues that the Jadids regarded the reform of education not as a narrow pedagogical task but as the main instrument for the social, cultural and moral renewal of society. Drawing on the classical Eastern theory of education, the European philosophy of education and the experience of Muslim reformism, the study builds a theoretical framework for interpreting Jadid educational thought. It then examines the new-method schools, the textbooks written by the Enlighteners, the role of the periodical press, theatre and education abroad, as well as the Jadids' understanding of science as a source of national progress. The findings show that the educational ideals of the Enlighteners remain relevant for the modernization of education in contemporary Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Central Asia, Enlightenment, Jadidism, philosophy of education, science, new-method schools, textbooks, press, progress, modernization.

Introduction. At the end of the nineteenth century, Central Asian society faced a profound crisis. Colonial dependence, economic backwardness and the stagnation of the traditional educational system were increasingly perceived by the local intelligentsia as interconnected problems. The Enlighteners of the region, known as the Jadids, concluded that the root cause of this crisis was ignorance, and that the only way out was the spread of modern knowledge. For this reason, education and science occupied the central place in their program of reform [1].

The relevance of the topic is determined by two circumstances. First, the educational heritage of the Jadids has long been studied mainly from a historical and pedagogical perspective, while its theoretical and philosophical foundations have received far less attention. Second, contemporary Uzbekistan is carrying out large-scale reforms of school and higher education and of the national research system, which makes it important to understand the historical roots of the idea that education and science are the driving forces of social development. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the role of education and science in the Enlightenment movement of Central Asia and to interpret it within a broader theoretical framework.

Methodology. The study is based on the principles of historicism, the unity of the historical and the logical, and comparative analysis. The hermeneutic method was applied to the primary texts of the Enlighteners, while the comparative method was used to correlate Jadid educational ideas with the classical Eastern and European philosophy of education and with Muslim reformism in other regions. The systemic approach allowed education, science, the press and theatre to be considered as interconnected elements of a single enlightenment strategy.

Theoretical framework: education in classical Eastern thought. Central Asia had been one of the leading centres of science in the medieval Islamic world. The works of al-Khwarizmi, al-Farabi, al-Biruni, Ibn Sina and the astronomers of Ulugh Beg's observatory in Samarqand testify to a long tradition of rational inquiry, which S. Frederick Starr has characterized as the region's "lost Enlightenment" [2]. In this tradition, education was understood not merely as the transfer of information but as the path to human perfection. Abu Nasr al-Farabi linked the attainment of happiness with knowledge and virtue and argued that a just and virtuous society can be built only by people who have been properly instructed and morally trained [3]. The idea that intellectual education and moral upbringing must form a single whole became one of

the most enduring features of Eastern pedagogical thought and was later inherited by the Jadids.

In European thought, the Enlightenment gave rise to a new understanding of education as the means of forming an autonomous, rational person. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in “Emile”, insisted that education should follow the natural development of the child and cultivate independent judgement [4]. Immanuel Kant defined Enlightenment as humanity’s emergence from its self-incurred immaturity and called on people to have the courage to use their own understanding [5]. In the early twentieth century, John Dewey interpreted education as a social process through which society renews itself and prepares citizens for democratic life [6]. These approaches share a key idea: education is not only a private good but a mechanism of social transformation. As will be shown below, the Jadids arrived at a similar conclusion, but on the basis of their own cultural and religious tradition.

The Central Asian Enlightenment was part of a wider wave of reform in the Muslim world. In the Middle East, thinkers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh argued that the decline of Muslim societies was caused by intellectual stagnation and that the revival of Islam required the reform of education and the reconciliation of religion with modern science [7]. In the Russian Empire, Ismail Gasprinsky developed the “new method” (usul-i jadid) of teaching literacy and promoted it through his newspaper “Tarjumon”. The Jadids of Turkestan and Bukhara adopted these ideas but adapted them to local conditions, creating an original model of educational reform [8].

The most important practical achievement of the movement was the creation of new-method schools. These schools introduced the phonetic method of teaching literacy, which allowed children to learn to read and write within a much shorter period than in the traditional maktab, where learning was based largely on memorization. Alongside religious subjects, the curriculum included arithmetic,

geography, history, natural sciences and the native language. Classes were organized according to a fixed timetable, pupils were divided into grades, and desks, blackboards and maps were introduced. Munawwar Qari Abdurashidkhanov opened such a school in Tashkent at the beginning of the twentieth century and wrote textbooks for it, including “Adibi avval” and “Adibi soniy”.

Textbook writing became one of the main forms of the Enlighteners’ intellectual activity. Abdulla Avloni created textbooks such as “Birinchi muallim” and “Turkiy guliston yoxud axloq”, in which literacy training was combined with moral education [9]. The appearance of textbooks written in the local language and adapted to children’s age was a genuine innovation: it made knowledge accessible to broad sections of society and laid the foundations of a national system of education. The Jadids also raised the question of education for girls, which was a bold step for the society of that time.

For the Jadids, science was not an abstract body of knowledge but a practical force capable of changing the life of society. They emphasized that the prosperity of European nations was based on the development of the natural sciences, technology and economics, and they urged their compatriots to master the “sciences of the age”. Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, in his article “Ikki emas, to‘rt til lozim”, argued that young people needed to know several languages, including Russian, in order to gain access to modern knowledge and to defend the interests of their people. In this way, the Jadids connected the acquisition of science with national self-preservation and economic independence [10].

Abdurauf Fitrat gave this idea a philosophical and religious justification. In “Munozara”, written in the form of a dialogue between a Bukharan teacher (mudarris) and a European, he criticized the stagnation of the madrasa curriculum and showed that the study of geography, mathematics and the natural sciences does not contradict Islam. In “Rahbari najot” he argued that true religion calls a person to reason, labor

and the pursuit of knowledge [11]. Thus, the Jadids sought to overcome the artificial opposition between religious and secular knowledge, viewing both as necessary for the well-being of the individual and society.

The Jadids regarded the periodical press and theatre as forms of public education addressed to adults. Newspapers and journals, including Behbudi's journal "Oyina", published materials on geography, history, economics, hygiene and the achievements of other nations. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" helps explain the significance of this activity: the printed word created a shared space of communication in which readers began to perceive themselves as members of a single national community [12]. Behbudi described theatre as an "ibratxona", a house of instruction, and his drama "Padarkush" showed the tragic consequences of ignorance. In Bukhara, the reformers organized a society that sent young people to study in Istanbul; Fitrat, who studied there, later became one of the most influential thinkers of the movement [10].

For the Enlighteners, knowledge had moral and civilizational as well as practical significance. Avloni emphasized that education without moral upbringing is incomplete, describing upbringing as a matter of "life or death, salvation or destruction, happiness or disaster" for the nation [9]. This position continues al-Farabi's idea of the unity of instruction and moral training and, at the same time, is consonant with Dewey's view of education as a means of social renewal [3; 6]. The Jadids therefore understood education and science as a unity of intellectual development, moral perfection and civic responsibility, aimed at the common good of society [13].

The Jadids' educational activity encountered serious resistance both from conservative circles, who saw the new schools as a threat to tradition, and from the colonial administration, which feared the political consequences of mass education. Later, in the Soviet period, most of the Enlighteners became victims of repression, and their works were withdrawn from circulation for decades [14]. Nevertheless, the

educational model they created had a lasting impact on the development of education in the region.

A comparative analysis of the traditional maktab and the new-method school makes it possible to identify the main pedagogical principles of the Jadids. First, they replaced mechanical memorization with conscious understanding: the pupil was expected not only to repeat a text but to grasp its meaning. Second, they introduced the principle of gradualness, moving from simple to complex material and taking into account the age of the child. Third, they emphasized the native language as the language of instruction, believing that knowledge acquired in an understandable language becomes the property of the whole nation. Fourth, they connected learning with life, including practical subjects useful for trade, crafts and public service [1; 8].

The Jadids also formulated a new image of the teacher. In their view, a teacher was not merely a transmitter of ready-made knowledge but an educator responsible for the moral and intellectual development of pupils and, ultimately, for the future of the nation. Avloni stressed that the teacher must be a model of good conduct, since children learn not only from words but from example [9]. This understanding of the teacher's mission resonates with Rousseau's and Dewey's view of the educator as a guide who creates the conditions for the independent growth of the learner [4; 6].

Equally important was the Jadids' attitude to the scientific heritage of the past. They did not reject the classical works of Eastern scholars; on the contrary, they presented them as evidence that the people of the region were capable of great scientific achievements. By reminding their contemporaries of the legacy of al-Khwarizmi, al-Biruni, Ibn Sina and Ulugh Beg, the Enlighteners sought to awaken national self-confidence and to show that the mastery of modern science would mean a return to the region's own best traditions rather than a betrayal of them [2; 13].

The ideas of the Jadids acquire new significance in the context of the reforms carried out in contemporary Uzbekistan. State policy aimed at improving the quality of

school education, expanding access to higher education, supporting research and developing foreign language learning is consonant with the Enlighteners' conviction that the future of the nation depends on knowledge [15]. At the same time, the Jadid legacy reminds us that education must not be reduced to the acquisition of technical skills: it must also cultivate moral values, critical thinking and civic responsibility.

Conclusion. The study shows that education and science were the core of the Enlightenment movement in Central Asia. Theoretically, the Jadid approach to education combined the classical Eastern ideal of the unity of knowledge and virtue with ideas shared by European Enlightenment pedagogy and Muslim reformism. In practice, the Jadids created a new model of schooling, wrote the first modern textbooks in the local languages, used the press and theatre as instruments of public enlightenment and invested in the education of young people abroad. Their conviction that the progress of the nation depends on knowledge, and that knowledge must be combined with morality, remains highly relevant for the ongoing reforms of education and science in Uzbekistan.

References

1. Khalid A. The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia. – Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
2. Starr S.F. Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane. – Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
3. Abu Nasr Farobiy. Fozil odamlar shahri. – Toshkent: Abdulla Qodiriy nomidagi xalq merosi nashriyoti, 1993.
4. Rousseau J.-J. Emile, or On Education / Transl. by A. Bloom. – New York: Basic Books, 1979.
5. Kant I. An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? // Kant I. Practical Philosophy / Transl. and ed. by M.J. Gregor. – Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 1996.

6. Dewey J. Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. – New York: Macmillan, 1916.
7. Hourani A. Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939. – London: Oxford University Press, 1962.
8. Allworth E.A. The Modern Uzbeks: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present: A Cultural History. – Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990.
9. Avloniy A. Turkiy guliston yoxud axloq. – Toshkent: O‘qituvchi, 1992.
10. Carrère d’Encausse H. Islam and the Russian Empire: Reform and Revolution in Central Asia. – Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
11. Fitrat A. Tanlangan asarlar. I jild. – Toshkent: Ma’naviyat, 2000.
12. Anderson B. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. – London: Verso, 1983.
13. Qosimov B. Milliy uyg‘onish: jasorat, ma’rifat, fidoyilik. – Toshkent: Ma’naviyat, 2002.
14. Khalid A. Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present. – Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.
15. Mirziyoyev Sh.M. Yangi O‘zbekiston strategiyasi. – Toshkent: “O‘zbekiston”, 2021.