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The First Muslim Education Congress Of 1918 In Tashkent And Problems Of Primary Education (Based On The Materials Of The Newspaper “Ulug‘ Turkiston”)

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Abstract

The article analyzes the organization, procedure and decisions of the First Muslim Education Congress held in Tashkent in August 1918, based on the 1917–1918 issues of the newspaper “Ulug‘ Turkiston”. The aim of the study is to determine the course of the congress, its relations with government bodies, and the views on primary schools and textbooks. Historical-descriptive, content-analysis and comparative source-study methods were used. The results show that the congress took place without financial support and under pressure concerning the party affiliation of delegates and the representation of Tashkent teachers. It formed five sections, a thirteen-member editorial board and a twelve-member Education Board, and its decision on seven-year primary schools was confirmed by the Commissariat of Education. A shortage of teachers, curricula and textbooks was named as the main problem of primary education. In conclusion, the congress was an attempt to build a national education system, but the implementation of its decisions depended on government control. The findings can be used in further research on the history of education and source studies.

Keywords: Education congress, 1918, Turkestan, primary school, textbook, Jadid schools, Education Council, Muslim People’s University, newspaper “Ulug‘ Turkiston”, history of education.

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1. Introduction

In the early twentieth century, the Jadid movement, which advocated the introduction of new-method (usuli jadid) schools, gained momentum in Turkestan, seeking to reform elementary education [1]. Following 1917, the administration of education gradually came under the authority of new governmental institutions, namely the Commissariat of Education and the Education Council. During this transitional period, tensions emerged between the aspirations of the nation to establish its own educational system and the government’s efforts to exercise control over it. One of the most significant events that brought educational issues into public debate was the First Muslim Educational Congress, which opened in Tashkent on 16 August 1918[2]

Information concerning the congress’s preparations, sessions, elected bodies, and resolutions has been preserved primarily in the pages of the newspaper Ulug‘ Turkiston. Alongside the organizational and political aspects of the congress, the newspaper’s articles also

addressed issues related to the elementary school curriculum, teacher training, and the development of textbooks [1].

The aim of the study is to identify, based on materials published in the newspaper Ulug‘ Turkiston, the organization, proceedings, and resolutions of the 1918 Tashkent Muslim Educational Congress, as well as contemporary views on elementary schools and textbooks.

To achieve this aim, the following research objectives were established: (1) to describe the organizational process of the congress; (2) to systematize the resolutions adopted and the bodies elected; (3) to analyze opinions concerning the elementary school curriculum and textbooks; and (4) to examine the resolutions of the Muslim Section of the Education Council and the students’ demonstration within the context of the congress.

2. Literature Review and Methodology

The source base of the study consists of five items published in the newspaper Ulug‘ Turkiston: issue No. 28 (1917), which reported on a general curriculum for elementary schools; issue No. 106 (1918), concerning a demonstration by elementary school pupils; issue No. 124 (1918), featuring X. Abdiyev’s article “Elementary Schools and Textbooks”; issue No. 129 (1918), containing X. Abdiyev’s report on the opening and first session of the congress; and issue No. 135 (1918), covering the final proceedings of the congress and the resolutions of the Muslim Section of the Education Council. It is evident that X. Abdiyev authored three reports on the congress. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account that the information presented reflects the perspective of a single author.

The study employs historical-descriptive, content analysis, chronological analysis, and comparative source-critical methods. Since the sources were published in the orthography of the period, quotations have been rendered in a form approximating modern Uzbek Latin script. The study has several limitations: the beginning of the material published in issue No. 135 is missing; the report in issue No. 28 (1917) appears twice in the collection and has therefore been counted only once; and the newspaper reports have not been compared with official documents. Accordingly, the conclusions are formulated cautiously and are based on the evidence provided by the sources.

3. Analysis and Results

1. Opening of the Congress and Organizational Proceedings: The congress was scheduled to open on 15 August. However, because the expected delegates had not yet arrived, the formal opening was postponed by one day.[1] On 15 August, at 6:00 p.m., an introductory meeting of the delegates was held. The meeting was opened by Toshxo‘ja Ashurxo‘jayev, Commissar for National Affairs. Orif Kelilev was elected chairperson, and Shokirjon Rahimiy was elected chief secretary[2].

Financial Issues. According to the chairperson’s statement, the government had initially promised to allocate sufficient funds for the congress but subsequently withdrew its commitment after the congress had been convened. The Commissar of Education rejected the request for funds to cover the delegates’ accommodation and food expenses, recommending instead that the money be taken from the funds allocated to the Commissariat for National Affairs[2].

Requirement of Party Affiliation. It was stated that, for the congress’s resolutions to receive official recognition by the government, delegates had to belong to one of two political parties: the Bolsheviks or the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (Left SRs). The proposal was put to a vote, following which the delegates split into two groups[2].

Composition of the Delegates. According to the credentials committee, a total of 23 delegates arrived from outside Tashkent (Table 1)

Table 1

Number of Delegates Arriving from Outside Tashkent (as of 15 August 1918)

Region	Number of Delegates
Namangan	4
Andijan	2

Region	Number of Delegates
Kazaly	5
Chimkent	5
Aulie-Ata	1
Ak-Mechet	1
Katta-Kurgan	4
Kokand	1
Total	**23**

Source: Compiled by the author based on information published in Ulug‘ Turkiston, 1918, Issue No. 129.

Representation of Tashkent Teachers. Ashurxo‘jayev insisted that the number of delegates representing Tashkent’s teachers should be limited according to a prescribed quota. The chairperson, however, maintained that it had previously been agreed that all members of the Tashkent Teachers’ Society would have the right to participate as voting delegates, a position that was also supported by the majority. Ashurxo‘jayev stood firm on his demand, arguing that otherwise the congress would not be recognized as a congress representing the entire region and its resolutions would not be taken into consideration by the government. The debate escalated into a heated dispute. Ultimately, Ashurxo‘jayev’s demand was accepted, and it was decided that only a limited number of delegates from Tashkent’s educational institutions would be admitted to the congress [2].

The First Official Session (16 August): The session was opened on Friday, 16 August, at 3:00 p.m. in the building of the Muslim People’s University Council (Musulmon xalq dorulfununi shurosi). The congress was opened by Uspensky, the Commissar of Education. In memory of those who had sacrificed their lives in the struggle for freedom, the participants stood in silence as a mark of respect, after which Usmon Qori recited verses from the Qur’an [2]. The source also states that the session was opened by Ashurxo‘jayev, meaning that the precise details of the opening are not clearly distinguished in the newspaper report.

The following agenda and schedule of proceedings were adopted: plenary sessions were to be held daily from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., and sectional meetings from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The delegates were to be divided into five sections to consider eleven agenda items: (1) public schools and compulsory education; (2) vocational schools and extracurricular education; (3) textbooks for schools and madrasas; (4) the administration of reformed madrasas and schools; and (5) the organization of pupils and teachers [2].

The following members were elected to the presidium: Ismoil Haqqiy, Toshxo‘ja Ashurxo‘jayev, Abdurauf Fitrat, Murodxo‘ja Solihxo‘ja o‘g‘li, Shokirjon Rahimiy, and Muxtor Bakir. Sodiq Abdusattorov was appointed chief secretary of the Muslim section. A thirteen-member editorial board was also elected to oversee the congress’s documentation and record-keeping. After Muxtor Bakir resigned due to his newspaper-related commitments, Husayn Makoyev was elected in his place. In addition, a resolution expressing allegiance to the Central Turkestan Committee was drafted, and Shoh Ahmad Valilin, Esanali Muhammadaliyev, and Abdulvohid were appointed to deliver it [2].

The Final Proceedings of the Congress: At the final session, a decision was adopted to elect a Muslim deputy to the position of Deputy Commissar of Education. Of the two candidates, Orif Kelibliyev and Nazir To‘raqulov, Orif Kelibliyev was elected by a majority vote.[1] To implement the resolutions adopted by the congress, a twelve-member Education Board (Maorif hay’ati) was established, comprising two representatives from each region (Table 2) [3].

Table 2

Composition of the Education (Board by Region)

Region	Members of the Board
Tachkent	Munavvarqori, Shokirjon Rahimiy
Tachkent	Abdulloh begi, Ismoil Haqqiy (candidates: Ibrohim Usmonov, Orif Olporov)
Syr Darya	Sodiq Abdusattorov, Valixon Umarov
Samarkand	Abdurauf Fitrat, Mulla Abduqayum Qarabiy
Semirechye	Muhammad Said, Abduvahhob Murodiy
Transcaspian Region (Zakaspiy)	Lutfiy Oqberdin, Ko‘sh Ali Boriyev

Source: Compiled by the author based on information published in Ulug‘ Turkiston, 1918, Issue No. 135.

The Board was entrusted with the responsibility of implementing all the resolutions adopted by the congress. The congress was brought to a close with a recitation by Abdusami Qori, followed by a prayer offered by Abduvohid Qori [3].

Elementary Schools, Curricula, and Textbooks: In his article, X. Abdiyev describes the textbook as the “body” of a school and the teacher as its “soul.” He emphasizes that there can be no school without a teacher, just as there can be no teacher without books[1]. In the author’s view, no suitable textbooks for elementary schools had been written over the preceding 25–30 years. Capable individuals had paid little attention to this task, while authors producing substandard textbooks had emerged instead [1].

According to the article, the All-Russian Congress of Muslim Teachers held in Kazan had established a six-year duration for elementary schools; however, no textbooks corresponding to the new curriculum had been produced. The Tashkent Congress, in turn, resolved that seven-year elementary schools should be established throughout Turkestan beginning in the autumn, and this decision was approved by the Commissariat of Education [1].

It is worth noting that the Six-Year Elementary School Curriculum, published by the Central Bureau of Muslim Teachers of All Russia, comprised approximately 55 pages and covered both religious and secular subjects, recommended textbooks, and a three-year Russian language course [5].

Abdiyev points out that Russians were establishing teacher-training courses and preparing textbooks, whereas Muslims lacked both qualified teachers and textbooks. He proposes that the task of writing textbooks be entrusted either to a special committee comprising individuals knowledgeable in the theory and practice of education and well acquainted with the psychology of children, or be carried out through a competition and examination conducted in accordance with publicly announced criteria [1].

Resolutions of the Muslim Section of the Education Council (27 August): According to the report published in Issue No. 135, the section adopted resolutions on twelve agenda items. Among these, the most significant decision concerning educational content related to the scope of textbooks. Textbooks were being prepared in accordance with the six-year curriculum of the Muslim Teachers of All Russia. However, since the Turkestan Congress had resolved that textbooks should correspond in scope to those used in Russian schools, it was decided that, where the differences were minor, the Russian model should be followed, while the areas of divergence would be revised at a later stage[3].

The organizational resolutions included establishing procedures for appointing male and female teachers in the Old City; renewing the membership of the Economic and Financial Sections; and requesting the City Executive Committee to appoint an equal number of Muslim representatives to the Tashkent Education Council, given that Russians constituted the majority of its members [3].

Responsibility for implementing the section's resolutions was assigned to the Muslim Commissar of Education and the chief secretary. Salim Taloxonov served as Commissar, while Abduqayyum Ramazon held the position of chief secretary [3].

Demonstration by Elementary School Pupils: According to the report published in Issue No. 106, the Muslim People's University (Musulmon xalq dorulfununi) had adopted a resolution prohibiting the admission of children under the age of fifteen to its university schools. After the schools opened, however, large numbers of younger pupils sought admission, but the school principals turned them away. Sixty-four young pupils expelled from the Khadra School submitted a written petition and marched to the university administration building carrying red flags. They declared that they would refuse to leave the school and threatened to break the doors and windows if their demand was not accepted. The university administration eventually granted their request, allowing them to attend classes and promising to establish a kindergarten for them [4].

The Status of the Congress and Its Relations with the Authorities. The sources provide several indications that the congress's independence was constrained. These include the refusal to provide financial assistance, the requirement that delegates belong to one of two political parties, and Ashurxo'jayev's insistence on imposing restrictions on the representation of Tashkent teachers [2]. At the same time, the congress adopted a resolution pledging allegiance to the government [2]. This situation may indicate, on the one hand, that the organizers sought to secure official recognition of the congress's resolutions and, on the other, that they were compelled to reach a compromise under external pressure. This interpretation is based solely on newspaper reports and therefore requires verification against archival documents.

Scope of Representation. The arrival of only 23 delegates from outside Tashkent and the postponement of the formal opening may have been among the factors that affected the congress's ability to represent the region as a whole. At the same time, the report also notes that the arrival of delegates from Samarkand raised the morale of the congress [2].

Curriculum and Staffing Issues. In his article, Abdiyev identifies the curriculum (whether six or seven years in duration), teachers, and textbooks as the three interrelated core issues facing elementary education [1]. The Requirement for "Conformity with the Russian Standard" in the Resolutions of the Education Council [3] may indicate a tendency towards aligning the content of national education with the broader educational system; however, further sources are needed to substantiate this interpretation.

Institutional Structure and Implementation. The formation of the Education Board on the basis of two representatives from each region appears to have been an attempt to ensure the implementation of the resolutions through regional representation.[3] However, the sources do not provide information on the outcomes of the Board's activities.

Pupils' Demonstration. This episode indicates that there was strong demand for education and that organizational regulations, such as age restrictions, could be quickly revised in practice in response to such demand [4].

Limitations of the Study. The analysis is based on materials from a single newspaper, and the newspaper reports may reflect the positions of both the author and the publication. The full text of the congress's resolutions (11 articles), together with official archival documents, should be examined comparatively in future research.

4. Conclusion

– Materials published in Ulug' Turkiston indicate that the August 1918 Tashkent Muslim Educational Congress represented an attempt to reform the education system, although it took place under financial and political constraints: funding was not provided, and pressure was exerted regarding the delegates' party affiliation and the number of representatives from Tashkent.

– The congress established five sections, a thirteen-member editorial board, and a twelve-member Education Board. The source also indicates that the resolution on establishing seven-year elementary schools was approved by the Commissariat of Education.

– The main challenges facing elementary education were identified as the shortage of teachers and quality textbooks, as well as questions concerning the duration (six or seven years) and scope of the curriculum. The establishment of a special committee or the organization of a competition and examination was proposed as a means of producing textbooks.

– The resolutions of the Muslim Section of the Education Council reflect an effort to increase Muslim representation in educational administration. In future

research, it would be advisable to compare newspaper reports with archival documents and scholarly literature.

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