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## STAGES OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF AZERBAIJAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: FROM THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO THE PERIOD OF INDEPENDENCE

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the research paper* is to study the main stages of Azerbaijan education system's historical development from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the period of independence by analyzing key educational reforms and their impact in different eras, including Tsarist Russia, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and various Soviet periods, emphasizing their contribution to the cultural and intellectual development of the nation.

*The scientific novelty* is in the comprehensive analysis of the development of Azerbaijan education system over several historical periods. Summarizing various sources and exploring little-known reforms and regional specificities, the complex relationship between political changes and educational policy is uncovered, bringing a new perspective on the evolution of the educational landscape of Azerbaijan.

*Conclusions.* The historical development of the education system in Azerbaijan has been marked by significant transformations under the influence of various political, social, and economic changes. Each stage has contributed much to the evolution of educational policy and infrastructure from the tsarist era to the period of independence. The tsarist period laid the foundation for secular education, combining traditional and up-to-date subjects. That era was marked by introducing the Russian language and culture into the local education system.

The period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic led to important reforms aimed at creating a national education system. Establishing Baku State University and supporting students studying abroad enhanced the nation's intellectual and cultural growth.

Under Soviet rule, significant progress was made in expanding access to education and increasing literacy rates. The Soviet emphasis on education led to the establishment of numerous schools and higher education institutions, although it also imposed ideological restrictions that affected the content and trends of study programs.

The collapse of the USSR necessitated the creation of a national education system free from Soviet influence, which laid the foundation for future achievements.

In general, the evolution of the education system in Azerbaijan reflects a complex interaction of external influences and internal reforms. Each historical period has contributed to forming a solid educational base, laying the foundation for further progress after gaining independence. Understanding the history is crucial for assessing the current state of education in Azerbaijan and planning its future development.

*Keywords:* Azerbaijani education, historical development, educational reforms, tsarist era, Soviet period, independence era, Heydar Aliyev

## ЕТАПИ ІСТОРИЧНОГО РОЗВИТКУ СИСТЕМИ ОСВІТИ В АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНІ: ВІД 19 СТОЛІТТЯ ДО ПЕРІОДУ НЕЗАЛЕЖНОСТІ

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### АНОТАЦІЯ

**Метою наукової роботи** є вивчення основних етапів історичного розвитку системи освіти в Азербайджані з 19 ст. до періоду незалежності шляхом аналізу ключові освітні реформи та їхній вплив у різні епохи, включаючи царську Росію, Азербайджанську Демократичну Республіку та різні радянські періоди, підкреслюючи їхній внесок у культурний та інтелектуальний розвиток нації.

**Новизна наукової роботи** полягає у всебічному аналізі розвитку азербайджанської системи освіти протягом кількох історичних періодів. Узагальнюючи різноманітні джерела та досліджуючи маловідомі реформи та регіональну специфіку, розкрито складний взаємозв'язок між політичними змінами й освітньою політикою, вносячи новий погляд на еволюцію освітнього ландшафту Азербайджану.

**Висновки.** Історичний розвиток системи освіти в Азербайджані був відзначений значними трансформаціями під впливом різних політичних і соціально-економічних змін. Від царської епохи до періоду незалежності кожен етап вніс свій внесок в еволюцію освітньої політики й інфраструктури. У царський період було закладено основу світської освіти, яка поєднувала традиційні та сучасні предмети. Ця епоха ознаменувалася упровадженням російської мови та культури в систему місцевої освіти.

Період існування Азербайджанської Демократичної Республіки призвів до важливих реформ, спрямованих на створення національної системи освіти. Створення Бакинського державного університету та підтримка студентів, які навчаються за кордоном, відіграли ключову роль у посиленні інтелектуального та культурного зростання нації.

За радянської влади було досягнуто значних успіхів у розширенні доступу до освіти та підвищенні рівня грамотності. Акцент радянської влади на освіті призвів до створення численних шкіл і вищих навчальних закладів, хоча він також наклав ідеологічні обмеження, які вплинули на зміст і напрямки освітніх програм.

Розпад СРСР зумовив необхідність створення національної системи освіти, вільної від радянського впливу, яка створила основу для майбутніх досягнень.

На завершення, еволюція системи освіти в Азербайджані відображає складну взаємодію зовнішніх впливів і внутрішніх реформ. Кожен історичний період сприяв формуванню міцної освітньої бази, закладаючи основу для подальшого прогресу в епоху після здобуття незалежності. Розуміння цієї історії має вирішальне значення для оцінки сучасного стану освіти в Азербайджані та планування її майбутнього розвитку.

**Ключові слова:** азербайджанська освіта, історичний розвиток, освітні реформи, царська доба, радянський період, доба незалежності, Гейдар Алієв

### INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this article is to examine the historical development' stages of the education system in Azerbaijan, spanning from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the period of independence. This comprehensive analysis will shed light on the significant transformations and reforms that have shaped the educational landscape of Azerbaijan over different historical periods.

The *purpose of this research paper* is to analyze the educational policies and reforms implemented during different historical periods in Azerbaijan and to discuss the impact of these reforms on the educational infrastructure and the quality of education. The author provides a detailed account of the various educational reforms and developments that occurred during key periods such as the Tsarist Russia era, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the early Soviet period, the post-World War II era, the leadership of Heydar Aliyev, and the late Soviet authority. By examining these stages, the paper aims to highlight the evolution of the education system in Azerbaijan and its impact on the nation's cultural and intellectual growth.

The study is based on a thorough examination of historical documents, archival records, government reports, and previous research studies. These sources provide detailed accounts of the educational reforms and policies implemented during various historical periods. This study will provide valuable insights into the historical development of Azerbaijan's education system, contributing to a better understanding of its current state and future prospects.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines key works that contribute to understanding the historical development of the education system in Azerbaijan. Misir Mardanov's multi-volume 'History of Azerbaijan Education' is a crucial resource, documenting educational evolution through Tsarist, Soviet, and post-independence periods with extensive use of archival records and primary sources<sup>1</sup>.

The two-volume encyclopaedia on the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) provides an in-depth look at the ADR period (1918-1920), highlighting significant educational reforms and the establishment of Baku State University<sup>2</sup>.

The 'History of Azerbaijan' edited by Mahmud Ismailov and Nigar Maxwell's offers a broad historical overview, emphasizing the interplay between political changes and educational policies across different eras, including the Tsarist and Soviet periods<sup>3</sup>.

Konul Vagifgizi's 'Educational History of Karabakh' explores the unique educational challenges and developments in the Karabakh region<sup>4</sup>, while Adalat Mammadov's 'Educational History of Shamakhi' traces the evolution of education in Shamakhi, from traditional madrasas to modern schools<sup>5</sup>.

These foundational studies provide a comprehensive framework for understanding Azerbaijani education, highlighting the interplay of political, cultural, and social factors. They emphasize the importance of considering both national trends and regional specificities in the historiography of Azerbaijani education.

## THE PERIOD OF TSARIST RUSSIA (1828-1918)

Following the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, which concluded hostilities between Persia and Russia, Azerbaijan was incorporated into the Russian Empire. This significant geopolitical realignment precipitated profound changes in the region's educational framework. The Russian authorities undertook a systematic

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<sup>1</sup> Mardanov M. Azərbaycan təhsil tarixi. Bakı: Təhsil, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Mahmudov Y. (Ed.) Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyəti ensiklopediyası. Bakı: Şərq-Qərb, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> İsmayilov M., Maksvell N. (Eds.). Azərbaycan tarixi. Bakı: Elm, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Vaqifqızı K. Qarabağın təhsil tarixi. Bakı: Orxan NPM, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Məmmədov Ə. Şamaxı - təhsil tarixi. Bakı: Zərdabi LTD, 2009.

integration of Azerbaijan into their imperial educational system, fundamentally transforming local educational institutions. Traditional centers of learning, such as *madrasahs* and *maktabs*, began to coexist with newly established secular schools instituted by the Russian administration<sup>6</sup>. These secular institutions were designed to propagate the Russian language and culture, while simultaneously introducing modern subjects such as science and mathematics<sup>7</sup>. This period marked the inception of a complex and often contentious transformation of Azerbaijan's educational system, establishing the foundational groundwork for subsequent developments in the ensuing decades.

Following the occupation of Azerbaijan by Tsarist Russia in 1828, educational reforms became imperative. General A.P. Yermolov's proposal initiated this process, which aimed to familiarize the local population with the Russian language and culture<sup>8</sup>. On August 2, 1829, the first charter for schools in the South Caucasus was approved. This charter facilitated the establishment of emergency schools, which laid the foundation for secular education in Azerbaijan<sup>9</sup>. Admiral Mordvinov's appeal to the central government on June 19, 1816, is particularly illustrative of this approach. He asserted: "It is impossible to subjugate such peoples indefinitely through military force alone. In comparison to an educated populace, to govern an illiterate and ignorant people, it is essential to provide them with what they perceive as necessary. We must create new aspirations, needs, and customs among these people, and align them with our own perspectives, tastes, and requirements. Primarily, we must establish our schools in the cities of the South Caucasus. By doing so, we will not only secure their friendship but also access vast wealth that our bayonets and cannons could never reach. Spending a thousand manats on education will save millions otherwise spent on border protection and maintaining a large military presence"<sup>10</sup>.

In 1829, under the initiative of General Paskevich, the first project for Transcaucasian schools was developed. Count Paskevich expressed his commitment to advancing public education in the region in a letter to the Russian Minister of Finance, Prince Lieven: "Since I am eager to support public education in the Transcaucasian country under my administration, I gladly undertake the role of guardian for the educational institutions here and will strive to achieve the objectives set forth by the government"<sup>11</sup>.

The establishment of schools in Azerbaijan during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was primarily focused on education and the dissemination of the Russian language. In the early 1830s, *gaza*<sup>12</sup> schools began operating in various cities, including Baku, Ganja, Nakhchivan, Lankaran, and Shamakhi. The curriculum in these schools included subjects such as *Sharia*, recitation, *husn-i khat* (calligraphy), arithmetic, the Russian

<sup>6</sup> *Salamzada K.* Rusya ve Azərbaycan eğitim sistemlerinin karşılaştırmalı analizi. Çanakkale: Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi, 2023. P. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Mammadov J.* Bağımsızlık sonrası Azərbaycan eğitim sistemindeki değişim ve gelişmeler. İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2008. P. 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Mahmud I.* İstoriya Azerbaydjana. Baku: Azerneshr, 1995. P. 77.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* P. 78.

<sup>10</sup> *İsmayılov R.* Azərbaýcan tarixi. Bakı: Azərbaýcan Xalq Maarif Komissarlığı, 1923. P. 127.

<sup>11</sup> *Mərdanov M.* Azərbaýcanın təhsil tarixi. I cild. Bakı: 'Təhsil' nəşriyyatı, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> *Gaza* is an administrative territorial unit of the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree applied in the administrative territory division in the Russian Empire since 1775.

language, and the local Azerbaijani language<sup>13</sup>. In 1833, the Ganja *Gaza* School was established, holding special significance as the first public school in Azerbaijan. This school, housed in a dedicated building funded by the state, accommodated children of various nationalities alongside Azerbaijani students, marking a pivotal development in the region's educational history<sup>14</sup>.

During the 1850s, additional elementary schools were founded in regions such as Guba, Ordubad, and Lankaran<sup>15</sup>. In 1860, an elementary school was also established in Zagatala. The formation of these schools and the inclusion of Azerbaijani children represented a significant progressive movement. Prominent Azerbaijani intellectuals and educators, including M.F. Akhundov and H. Zardabi, received their initial education in these institutions<sup>16</sup>.

Alongside the early village schools, which offered one or two classes and provided three to five years of education, literacy schools began to emerge in rural areas, contrasting with traditional religious schools. These literacy schools, which focused solely on basic literacy, were the nascent form of national educational institutions, despite their initially superficial curricula. The first literacy schools in Azerbaijan were predominantly established in villages within the Yelizavetpol (Ganja) governorate. The curriculum in these schools comprised *Sharia*, the mother tongue, Russian, arithmetic, and calligraphy, with arithmetic and calligraphy being taught in Russian. The teaching staff typically consisted of two individuals: one science teacher responsible for secular subjects and another for *Sharia* instruction. Science teachers were often graduates of teacher's seminaries, while *Sharia* and occasionally mother tongue teachers were local intellectuals with spiritual education<sup>17</sup>.

General Sipyagin recognized the local population's enthusiasm for education and underscored the significance of schools in transforming people's lives. Sipyagin, who visited several cities in Azerbaijan, observed the local population's inclination towards attending secular schools. He wrote: "They are fond of reading, and when I was in Shusha, I was fascinated to see so many children of the Mohammedan religion engaged in learning the German language under the direction of the Basle missionaries, residing there with the Government's permission"<sup>18</sup>. The local communities actively supported the establishment of these schools. For instance, in 1828, the residents of Shamakhi raised funds for constructing a school building, a movement that subsequently gained traction in other cities. Each school was staffed with two teachers: one appointed by the director of Transcaucasian schools, and the other responsible for teaching *Sharia* and the Azerbaijani language<sup>19</sup>.

Analyzing it, it is possible to note that the *Gaza* schools marked the onset of a new era in Azerbaijan's education system. In 1835, following the approval of a new charter for Transcaucasian schools, the Ganja *Gaza* school expanded to include three classes and introduced new subjects into its curriculum. By 1869, among the 18 graduates from 13 emergency schools in Transcaucasia, a significant number were from the

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<sup>13</sup> Mərdanov M. Azərbaycanın təhsil tarixi...

<sup>14</sup> Vəysəlova V. XIX-XX əsrin əvvəllərində Gəncəbasar bölgəsində maarif və elm. 'Geostrategiya' jurnalı. 2019. № 3 (51). URL: <https://www.geostrategiya.az/news.php?id=27>

<sup>15</sup> Əhmədov H.M. XIX əsr Azərbaycan məktəbi. Bakı: Maarif, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Mərdanov M. Azərbaycanın təhsil tarixi...

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. P. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. P. 55.

Ganja *Gaza* School. Over time, these schools evolved into urban schools, continuing to expand in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The initiation of educational reforms in Azerbaijan and the establishment of emergency schools were pivotal in the development of the country's education system. These schools not only elevated the educational level of the local population but also played a crucial role in promoting the Russian language and culture.

Another significant progress in Azerbaijan's education system emerged towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of the Empress Alexandra Russo-Muslim Girls' School. This landmark event took place in Baku in 1901, initiated and supported by Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev<sup>20</sup>. As the first secular girls' school in the Muslim East, it heralded a new era for women's education. The primary goal of the school was to elevate the educational level of Azerbaijani women, empowering them to become more active members of society. The process of establishing the school, which began in 1896, encountered numerous challenges. Taghiyev commissioned architect Goslavsky to design the school building, which was constructed between 1898 and 1900<sup>21</sup>.

The school's opening in 1901 was a momentous social event, with the entire city population gathering to witness it. The 'Kaspi' newspaper vividly described the event: "The beautiful building on Nikolaevski Street was adorned with flags. At noon, the large hall on the second floor was filled with guests and prominent nobles of the city. Following speeches about the school's construction, various performances were held. The choir of girls who would study at the school performed several Azerbaijani songs. Subsequently, congratulatory telegrams sent to the school were read aloud. One such message, read by Alimardan bey and signed by Hasan bey, proclaimed: 'Long live Zeynalabdin!'"<sup>22</sup>.

This event marked a significant milestone in the development of education in Azerbaijan, particularly in advancing women's educational opportunities. Among the subjects taught at the Empress Alexandra Russo-Muslim Girls' School were Russian language, Azerbaijani language, religion, arithmetic, handicrafts, and home economics. The curriculum thoughtfully integrated traditional values with European modernism, accommodating the expectations of Muslim families. Girls commenced their education at the age of seven and studied for four years. Although the initial plan was to admit 50 students, the number of enrollees increased over time. The establishment of the school faced significant opposition from the local clergy, who deemed it religiously inappropriate for girls to receive formal education. Despite this resistance, Taghiyev and his supporters successfully ensured the school's operation<sup>23</sup>.

The school's activities resulted in a substantial number of Azerbaijani girls receiving education and actively participating in various societal fields. Among its graduates were women who played pivotal roles in the progress of Azerbaijan. The school later evolved into a girls' seminary, extending the education system to six years. During the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, this tradition was

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<sup>20</sup> Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev is an Azerbaijani philanthropist. His charity activities in the fields of education, art and health played a major role in the social progress of Baku at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>21</sup> *Süleymanov M.* Azərbaycan milyonçuları: Hacı Zeynalabdin Tağıyev. Bakı: Gənclik, 1996.

<sup>22</sup> *Cavadov C.* Azərbaycanca xeyriyyəçilik hərəkatı: (XIX əsrin sonu və XX əsrdə). Bakı: Elm, 1999. P. 97.

<sup>23</sup> *Nərimanoğlu M.* Müsəlman Şərqində ilk dünyəvi qızlar məktəbi Bakıda açılıb. 'Azərbaycan' qəzeti. 2019. 22 sentyabr. P. 6.

upheld, with special emphasis on women's education<sup>24</sup>. The Empress Alexandra Russo-Muslim Girls' School holds a distinguished place in Azerbaijan's educational history, empowering women through education and enabling them to play more active roles in society. This institution was a crucial step in the development of secular education in the country and had a profound impact on Azerbaijan's educational system.

### THE PERIOD OF AZERBAIJAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (1918-1920)

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) was established in Tbilisi on May 28, 1918, becoming the first parliamentary republic in the Muslim East. During its brief existence, the ADR implemented significant reforms in national state-building and education.

On June 30, 1918, the ADR government established the Ministry of Public Education, focusing on opening new schools and restoring existing ones. Emphasis was placed on creating a national education system, with various measures taken to achieve this goal. On June 27, 1918, the ADR government declared Azerbaijani the state language, mandating that all primary schools conduct instruction in the mother tongue. The Turkish language was also made a compulsory and reinforced subject. In primary classes, one teacher often taught multiple subjects, and physical education, singing, labor lessons, sewing, and other handicrafts were deemed essential components of the curriculum. To support this initiative, the Ministry of Public Education allocated 150,000 rubles from a 20 million roubles fund for the preparation of textbooks<sup>25</sup>.

In 1919, the ADR government founded Baku State University (BSU), establishing faculties of history-philology, physics-mathematics, law, and medicine. This was a crucial step in training national personnel and advancing scientific development. The establishment of these educational institutions and reforms marked a significant advancement in the national education system, contributing to the intellectual and cultural growth of the newly independent Azerbaijan<sup>26</sup>.

The ADR government prioritized the social protection of teachers and students. Teachers' salaries were increased multiple times, and they received both monetary and food assistance. Additionally, students from impoverished families were supported, with the state covering their educational expenses<sup>27</sup>.

The educational reforms implemented by the ADR had a significant impact in a short period. The establishment of a national education system, the training of highly educated personnel, and the social protection policies represented a pivotal stage in Azerbaijan's educational history. These reforms significantly contributed to the country's cultural and intellectual advancement. The ADR's education policies laid the foundation for the development of national consciousness and the future progress of Azerbaijan<sup>28</sup>.

The ADR government took significant strides in the field of education within a

<sup>24</sup> *Mustafayeva S.* Məsəlman şərqində ilk qızlar məktəbi, yaxud maarif uğrunda mücadilə (Arxiv materialları əsasında). *Əlyazmalar yanmır/AMEA, M. Füzuli adına Əlyazmalar İnstitutu.* 2019. № 2 (9). P. 247.

<sup>25</sup> *Vəliyev N.* AXC-nin ordu quruculuğu və təhsil siyasəti. *Olaylar.* 2018. 5-7 may. P. 11-12.

<sup>26</sup> *Əhmədova F.* Azərbaycan Darülfünunun təşkili: parlament iclaslarından tarixi reportaj: Bakı Dövlət Universiteti-95. *Azərbaycan.* 2014. 18 sentyabr. P. 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Aliyev S.* Azərbaycan Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluşu. Artvin: Çoruh Üniversitesi, 2024.

<sup>28</sup> *Nəsibzadə N.* Azərbaycan Demokratik Respublikası. Bakı, 1990. P. 65.

short period, notably by providing financial support for 100 Azerbaijani students to study abroad. These students were to receive higher education in various countries and return to serve their homeland. Initially, a monthly scholarship of 300 francs was allocated for each student, which was later increased to 400 francs<sup>29</sup>.

In 1919, the ADR government made a landmark decision to send 100 students to European universities at the state's expense. In July 1919, the ADR parliament approved the allocation of 7 million roubles from the state budget for this purpose. Upon completing their studies, these students were required to work in Azerbaijan's civil service for four years. The selection process prioritized talented young individuals from impoverished families. The first group of students departed from Baku in January 1920, travelling via the Baku-Tbilisi-Batumi route to Istanbul, then to Rome, and finally to Paris. Despite encountering various challenges during their studies, many of these students successfully completed their education and returned home<sup>30</sup>.

Following the fall of the ADR, students abroad faced severe financial hardships. Some had to undertake hard labour to continue their education, while others were imprisoned. Nevertheless, some students managed to return to Azerbaijan and occupied significant positions in various fields. In the 1930s, many of the returning students faced persecution. Some were arrested and repressed on charges of 'espionage'. Despite these adversities, these students played a crucial role in Azerbaijan's educational and cultural history. Their contributions set a precedent for future generations. The initiative of sending students abroad during the ADR era significantly elevated Azerbaijan's intellectual level. Their dedication and efforts were instrumental in the country's scientific and cultural development<sup>31</sup>.

### **THE PERIOD OF THE EARLY SOVIET AUTHORITY (1920-1940)**

The establishment of the Soviet state in Azerbaijan in 1920 completely changed the education system. Following the overthrow of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1920 and the subsequent rise to power of the Bolsheviks, Azerbaijan witnessed significant changes in its education system. The new Soviet regime prioritized education, implementing large-scale reforms aimed at transforming the sector.

The Soviet authorities viewed educational development as a top priority. A decree issued on May 10, 1920, outlined the intention to replace the "old, ugly bourgeois schools" with polytechnic schools that offered comprehensive professional education<sup>32</sup>. According to the 'Regulation on Unified Labor Schools in the Azerbaijan SSR' dated May 26, 1920, the new Soviet schools were organized into two levels: a five-year course for children aged 8-13 and a four-year course for those aged 13-17<sup>33</sup>.

One of the critical challenges faced was the shortage of teaching staff. In response, short-term pedagogical courses were initiated in October 1920 in various districts,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. P. 66.

<sup>30</sup> *Sadiqova S., Həsənlı-Qəribova Ş. Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyəti və milli ədəbidilin inkişaf tarixi (1918-2018)*. Bakı: 'Avropa' nəşriyyatı, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> *Hacıbəyramlı N. Bolşevik işğalı və mübarizəmiz*. Bakı: Qanun, 2020. P. 35-36.

<sup>32</sup> *Azərbaycan SSR Nazirlər Sovetinin İşlər İdarəsi. Azərbaycan Sovet Sosialist Respublikası Hökuməti Qərarları külliyyatı*. Bakı, 1937.

<sup>33</sup> *AzSSR Xalq Maarif Komissarlığı. AzSSR-nın ibtidai, natamam orta və orta məktəblərində daxili intizam qaydaları*. Bakı: Azərnəşr, 1937.

including Baku, Sabunchu, Shusha, Gazakh, Nukha, and Ganja. By 1921, the number of these courses had increased to 40, and one-year higher pedagogical courses were also established. By 1923, eight teachers' seminaries with 2,064 students were operating in Azerbaijan<sup>34</sup>.

The expansion of the school system was rapid. In 1924, Azerbaijan had 990 first-class schools with 90,587 students and 2,987 teachers, and 37 second-class schools with 4,736 students and 307 teachers<sup>35</sup>. By 1925, there were 1,303 schools serving 129,000 students. The growth continued, and by 1928, there were 1,378 first-class schools with 139,294 students and 4,161 teachers, and 35 second-class schools with 10,222 students and 557 teachers<sup>36</sup>.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Azerbaijan SSR experienced significant transformations in the field of education. One of the foremost initiatives was the abolition of illiteracy. The first literacy courses, known as 'likbez', were established in 1923. By 1926, 25% of the population had achieved literacy, and this figure rose to 51% by 1933. In the mid-1930s, a nationwide campaign to eradicate illiteracy was launched, marked by the issuance of the 'Five Years of Literacy Bond'<sup>37</sup>.

Higher education also saw considerable advancements. Baku University, known as Azerbaijan State University from 1922 to 1989, introduced faculties in medicine, history, physics, mathematics, oriental studies, pedagogy, and law. Additionally, several specialized institutions were founded: the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical Institute in 1921, the Women's Preschool Education Institute in 1924, the Azerbaijan Polytechnic Institute, and the Baku Music Academy. In 1929, the Azerbaijan Agricultural Institute commenced operations in Ganja.

Labor faculties, or 'rabfacs', were another significant development. These were established in Baku in 1920 and in Ganja and Nukha in 1924. By the 1932-33 academic year, approximately 8,000 workers were receiving education in eight different factories<sup>38</sup>.

In the realm of science and education, the Azerbaijan branch of the Transcaucasia Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR was established in 1932, based on the Azerbaijan State Scientific Research Institute. Under the leadership of R. Akhundov, this department nurtured talented scientists, including B. Sobanzade, A. Taghizade, and Salman Mumtaz<sup>39</sup>. The Communist Party played a pivotal role in these educational reforms, actively promoting literacy, involving women in public life, and challenging ignorance and fanaticism. Educational and cultural institutions were instrumental in these efforts.

The allocation of funds to education from the state budget during the 1920s also reflected the government's emphasis on education policy. In 1924-1925, the per capita expenditure on education was 5 roubles 46 kopecks, which increased to

<sup>34</sup> Xalq Təsərrüfat Uçotu Azərbaycan İdarəsi. ASŞC sosialist quruluşu statistika külliyyatı. Bakı: AzXTUİ Soyuzorquçot, 1935. P. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. P. 11.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. P. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Azərbaycan SSR XMK-nın Yaşlılar Təhsili İdarəsi. Savadsızlığın ləğvi üzrə məktəb və qruppaların komplektləşdirilməsini necə aparmalı. Bakı: Azərb. XMK nəşri, 1939. P. 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. P. 9-10.

<sup>39</sup> Azadlıq. 30-cu illər repressiyasının qurbanı olan daha bir ziyalı: Böyük ədəbiyyatşünas alim Salman Mümtaz. *Azadlıq*. 2011. 5-6 iyun. P. 14.

11 roubles 39 kopecks by 1928-1929<sup>40</sup>. The educational reforms implemented during Soviet rule in the Azerbaijan SSR, particularly those aimed at eradicating illiteracy and developing higher education, significantly enhanced the country's intellectual and cultural landscape. These advancements laid a robust foundation for the future development of Azerbaijan, contributing invaluable progress to its educational and cultural heritage.

In May 1928, a decision was made to introduce a primary general education system in Azerbaijan, which was implemented across all regions by 1932-1933. However, this transition encountered significant challenges, particularly due to a shortage of school buildings and teaching staff. To mitigate the lack of school buildings, mosques and churches were repurposed for educational use, a move that caused considerable dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, measures to address the shortage of teaching staff resulted in a significant increase in their numbers, from 5,617 in the 1928-1929 academic year to 10,432 by 1932-1933<sup>41</sup>.

In the 1930s, the introduction of a general primary compulsory education system was achieved. By the 1930-1931 academic year, 8-, 9-, and 10-year-old children were enrolled in compulsory primary education in all urban areas of Azerbaijan, extending to all regions by 1931-1932<sup>42</sup>.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet government in Azerbaijan implemented extensive educational reforms. The establishment of a new education system, the training of pedagogical personnel, and the development of school infrastructure brought significant changes to Azerbaijan's education system. During this period, the widespread accessibility of education and improvements in its quality were made possible through the invaluable efforts of Azerbaijani intellectuals.

### THE PERIOD OF POST-WWII (1945-1969)

In 1941, with the Soviet Union's entry into the Second World War, the field of education was largely neglected. From that point until the 1950s, when the effects of the war began to subside, no significant educational reforms were implemented, and there were no notable advancements in the sector. The education system in the Soviet Union underwent significant transformations in the 1950s, a period marked by both consolidation and innovation following the disruptions of World War II. The decade saw the implementation of reforms aimed at restructuring the educational landscape, which were influenced by the broader socio-political objectives of the Soviet regime.

In the aftermath of World War II, the Soviet Union faced the formidable task of rebuilding its educational infrastructure. The war had devastated many schools, with over 82,000 schools destroyed, resulting in the loss of approximately 18 million school places<sup>43</sup>. This severe disruption necessitated immediate efforts to restore basic educational facilities and resume the normal functioning of schools. A pivotal development in the 1950s was the introduction of the 1958 Law, commonly referred to as the *Khrushchev Reforms*. These reforms sought to extend compulsory education and integrate polytechnical education into the curriculum. The basic school structure

<sup>40</sup> Teterev A. Məktəb müvəffəqiyyətlərinin hesaba alınması haqqında. Bakı: Azərnəşr, 1930. P. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Mərdanov M. Azərbaycanın təhsil tarixi... P. 192.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. P. 193.

<sup>43</sup> Даринский А.В. Некоторые проблемы народного образования в СССР (по материалам переписи населения 1970 г.). *Советская педагогика*. 1971. № 11. С. 62.

was altered from a seven-year course to an eight-year course, with an extension to an eleven-year school for those continuing to secondary education<sup>44</sup>. This change was designed to address the growing demand for both general and vocational education, reflecting the Soviet emphasis on linking education with practical and industrial needs. Azerbaijan was also affected by these issues in the USSR.

The 1950s also witnessed significant growth in higher education in Azerbaijan. The number of students enrolled in higher education institutions increased dramatically, reflecting the state's commitment to producing a highly educated workforce capable of supporting its ambitious industrialization goals. This period saw a substantial rise in the number of vocational-technical schools, secondary specialized schools, and adult education programs. Despite these advancements, the Azerbaijani education system faced several challenges during this period. One major issue was the persistent shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas and in subjects like science and technology. The system's centralization, while ensuring uniformity, also posed difficulties in effectively implementing policy decisions across the vast and diverse regions of the USSR. Additionally, the quality of education varied significantly, with urban schools often better equipped and staffed compared to their rural counterparts. Nonetheless, the achievements of the 1950s were notable. Literacy rates continued to improve, and the introduction of compulsory primary education laid a solid foundation for future educational progress. The emphasis on polytechnical education aimed to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, preparing students for the demands of an industrial society. The integration of ideological education also ensured that the curriculum aligned with the broader goals of fostering a committed and ideologically aligned citizenry.

Thus, the 1950s were a transformative decade for Azerbaijani education, marked by significant reforms and expansion efforts. Despite facing numerous challenges, the Soviet Union made substantial progress in rebuilding its educational system and aligning it with the state's socio-economic and ideological objectives. The reforms of this period laid the groundwork for future developments and underscored the central role of education in the Soviet project of societal transformation.

1960s saw a continuation and refinement of the policies initiated during the Khrushchev era, with a focus on expanding access to education, improving the quality of instruction, and integrating vocational and technical training with general education. One of the most notable developments in the 1960s was the Soviet government's commitment to achieving universal secondary education. By the mid-1960s, substantial progress had been made towards this goal, with significant increases in enrollment at all levels of education. The emphasis on universal education was formalized in a 1966 resolution by the Communist Party Central Committee and the Council of Ministers, which set the target of completing the introduction of universal secondary education by 1970<sup>45</sup>.

The 1960s also saw significant changes in the curriculum in Azerbaijan, driven by the ideological imperative to align education with the needs of a socialist industrial society. The principle of polytechnical education, which aimed to combine general education with practical training in industrial and agricultural production, was a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. C. 64.

<sup>45</sup> *Jefferies S.C. Sport and Education: Theory and Practice in the USSR. Quest. 1984. Vol. 36 (2). P. 164-176.*

central feature of these reforms. Students were expected to gain firsthand experience of production processes through school workshops, experimental plots, and work placements in factories and farms.

However, the implementation of polytechnical education faced practical challenges. Many schools lacked the necessary facilities and resources to provide meaningful practical training, leading to criticisms that much of the work experience was ineffective and sometimes counterproductive. In response, the Soviet authorities sought to rationalize and improve the content and delivery of vocational training, while maintaining the broader goal of integrating education with life and work.

A persistent issue throughout the 1960s was the shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in the sciences and technical subjects in Azerbaijan. To address this, the Soviet government implemented extensive teacher training programs, including short-term courses and in-service training, aimed at upgrading the qualifications of existing teachers and attracting new entrants to the profession. Despite these efforts, regional disparities in teacher availability and quality continued to pose challenges, with some areas experiencing acute shortages of qualified personnel.

In addition to academic and vocational training, the Soviet education system placed a strong emphasis on ideological education. The curriculum was designed to inculcate socialist values and Soviet patriotism from an early age. Political theory, though formally introduced in the later years of secondary education, was reinforced throughout a child's schooling through subjects like history and social studies, which were taught from a Marxist-Leninist perspective. This ideological education aimed to produce loyal and committed citizens, aligned with the broader goals of the Communist Party.

Thus, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the education system in the Azerbaijan SSR evolved within the framework of Soviet ideology. The Soviet government undertook significant measures in the field of education to bolster its political and economic power. Educational programs were revised to promote communist ideology, resulting in the Russification of schools and the reduction of hours allocated to Azerbaijani history lessons. Azerbaijani history textbooks were heavily falsified, presenting the 'history of the USSR' as the overarching narrative, thereby marginalizing the distinct history of Azerbaijan. Despite these ideological distortions, Azerbaijan developed a comprehensive and multifaceted educational network, achieving significant progress<sup>46</sup>. In 1966, the transition to a general education system was initiated, and industrial training in the upper grades was discontinued. Instead, technical-vocational schools were expanded, offering both vocational and secondary education. This shift aimed to align educational outcomes with the needs of an industrial society. Further reforms came with the adoption of a new education law in 1984, which sought to integrate vocational education with general education<sup>47</sup>. This legislation aimed to provide students with a well-rounded education that included both academic and practical skills, preparing them for the workforce while maintaining a broad educational foundation. These developments reflected the

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<sup>46</sup> İbrahim E. Rusiya Federasiyasının Azsayılı Türk Xalqlarına Qarşı Dil Siyasəti. *Uluslararası Türk Lehçe Araştırmaları Dergisi* (Türklad). 2020. Vol. 4 (2). P. 206-228.

<sup>47</sup> SSRİ Dövlət Texniki Peşə Təhsili Sistemi Kadrların Marksizm-Leninizm Təhsili Üzrə Şura. Ümumtəhsil və peşə məktəbi islahatı- inkişaf etmiş sosializmin təkmilləşdirilməsinin tərkib hissəsidir. Bakı: Maarif, 1984.

ongoing efforts to adapt the education system to the evolving socio-economic context of the Soviet Union.

### **THE PERIOD OF HEYDAR ALIYEV AS A FIRST SECRETARY (1969-1982)**

The period from 1969 to 1982 is considered a renaissance in the educational and cultural life of Azerbaijan, coinciding with the leadership of Heydar Aliyev. During these years, substantial progress was made in preserving and developing national and moral values, as well as advancing all areas of education. Under Heydar Aliyev's leadership, numerous reforms were implemented in the Azerbaijani education system, significantly improving the quality of education and modernizing its infrastructure.

During this period, the number and quality of higher education institutions increased markedly. New faculties and specializations were introduced, and existing universities were expanded. Baku State University saw the establishment of new faculties and the operation of scientific research institutes, enhancing the academic and research landscape. The network of technical-vocational schools was also expanded, contributing significantly to the training of qualified personnel across various fields. By integrating training with production, these institutions ensured that students acquired both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. In secondary education, numerous innovations were implemented. The application of modern teaching methods and the preparation of new textbooks led to improved teaching quality. Special attention was given to constructing schools in rural areas and equipping them with modern facilities, thereby increasing educational opportunities for the rural population.

Heydar Aliyev's education policy placed great emphasis on the protection and development of national and moral values. Measures were taken to strengthen the Azerbaijani language within the educational system. The volume of instruction in Azerbaijani was increased in both schools and higher education institutions. The 1978 Constitution of the Azerbaijan SSR included a special article declaring Azerbaijani as the state language, playing a crucial role in preserving and developing the national language. Special attention was also given to teaching national values, history, and culture in schools. This initiative aimed to instill a sense of national consciousness and patriotism in the younger generation. Azerbaijani history and culture were incorporated into textbooks and school programs, allowing students to explore their national identity more deeply.

During Heydar Aliyev's leadership, the material and technical base of the education sector saw significant improvements. New schools were built in cities and villages across Azerbaijan, equipped with modern teaching tools and laboratories. The construction of schools in rural areas received particular focus, greatly enhancing the educational opportunities available to the rural population. The number of public libraries was increased, and these libraries were stocked with modern books and textbooks. Additionally, new textbooks and teaching materials were prepared for educational institutions, further supporting the advancement of education in Azerbaijan.

Between 1969 and 1982, the number of preschool educational institutions increased from 1,600 to 1,875, with the number of children enrolled rising from 110,000 to 147,000. The coverage level for preschool education grew from 12% to 19%. During this period, the material and technical base of preschool institutions was

significantly strengthened, with new nursery-kindergarten buildings providing 35,200 additional seats<sup>48</sup>.

In 1972, decisions were adopted to transition young people to general secondary education and further develop general education schools. By 1973, additional measures were taken to improve the working conditions of rural general education schools. The number of general education schools increased more than threefold, reaching 2,117 in 1979 and 4,267 in 1982. The student population in general schools grew from 368,000 in 1970 to 710,000 in 1980. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, 1,191 new school buildings were constructed, accommodating 683,100 students, which significantly improved school attendance rates<sup>49</sup>.

In 1970, Azerbaijan had 76 vocational schools educating 40,900 students. By 1980, the number of vocational schools had increased to 173, with 99,800 students enrolled. In 1982, the number of vocational schools reached 184, offering 230 professions to 110,000 students<sup>50</sup>.

From 1970 to 1982, five new higher education institutions were established in Azerbaijan, with hundreds of new specialties introduced. Departments and problem laboratories began operating, enhancing the academic environment. By 1982, there were 21 higher education institutions with 136 faculties and 530 departments in Azerbaijan. The student population in higher education institutions rose from 70,000 to 100,000 during this period<sup>51</sup>.

### **THE PERIOD OF THE LATE SOVIET AUTHORITY (1982-1991)**

In this period, Gorbachev's policies aimed at modernizing the Soviet economy and society, which extended to the education sector. These reforms sought to increase efficiency, reduce bureaucracy, and introduce more practical and modern curricula. There was a shift towards more practical education, with an increased emphasis on science, technology, and vocational training. The curriculum began to incorporate more contemporary global knowledge and technological advancements, aiming to make Soviet education more competitive on an international scale.

From 1982 to 1987, under Heydar Aliyev's leadership, education policy and reforms in the former USSR saw significant development, impacting education quality throughout the Soviet Union, including Azerbaijan. In 1984, Aliyev played a pivotal role in developing mechanisms to determine and implement the main directions of general and vocational education reforms, as well as improving the operations of boarding-type institutions. During this period, he proposed that general education should begin at age six and extend for 11 years<sup>52</sup>.

The economic decline of the Soviet Union during the late 1980s led to severe resource constraints. Budget cuts and economic instability resulted in reduced funding for educational institutions. This affected the maintenance of school infrastructure, the availability of teaching materials, and the provision of adequate

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<sup>48</sup> Heydər Əliyev: Təhsil, Bilik, Mənəviyyət, İctimai Tədqiqatlar Mərkəzi. Heydər Əliyev: mənəviyyət, mənəvi dəyərlər, mənəvi tərbiyə. Bakı: Müəllim, 2011. P. 449.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. P. 451-452.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. P. 453.

<sup>51</sup> Azərbaycan təhsilinin inkişafında ulu öndər Heydər Əliyevin tarixi xidmətləri. *AZƏRTAC*. 20.10.2022. URL: <https://bit.ly/40fk2fd>

<sup>52</sup> Xudiyev N. Heydər Əliyev və Azərbaycan dili. Tehran: 2001.

salaries for educators. Many schools and universities struggled to operate under these challenging conditions, leading to a decline in the quality of education.

By 1990, Azerbaijan had 4,534 general education schools and 182 technical-vocational schools. A specialized republican boarding school named after Nakhchivanski was established for military personnel training. There were 1.409 million students enrolled in general education schools and 96,000 students in technical-vocational schools. The higher education system also advanced, with 17 higher education institutions operating in the country by 1990<sup>53</sup>.

The last years of the USSR, particularly the late 1980s and early 1990s, were a period of significant change and turbulence that deeply affected education in Azerbaijan. As the Soviet Union faced economic difficulties, political upheaval, and eventually dissolution, these factors influenced the educational landscape in Azerbaijan in several ways.

During this period, there were also moves towards decentralizing the education system, granting more autonomy to local educational authorities in Azerbaijan. This allowed for greater flexibility in addressing local needs and preferences. Reforms were introduced to modernize the curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment systems, aligning them more closely with the evolving socio-economic context of the region.

In the context of Azerbaijan during the late Soviet period (1985-1991), the incorporation of Western educational materials and methodologies played a crucial role in modernizing the curriculum and aligning it more closely with global standards, particularly in scientific and technological fields. This shift was part of the broader educational reforms initiated under Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, which aimed to enhance efficiency and openness across the USSR. For Azerbaijani students, these changes meant access to more contemporary and relevant knowledge, allowing them to keep pace with rapid advancements worldwide. Subjects such as computer science, engineering, and modern physics saw significant updates, providing students with skills that were increasingly in demand on the global stage. However, the introduction of Western ideas also created significant ideological tensions. The Soviet education system had long been rooted in Marxist-Leninist principles, and the sudden influx of Western concepts often clashed with these established ideological foundations. This clash was particularly pronounced in subjects like social sciences and humanities, where Western perspectives on democracy, individualism, and economic theory diverged sharply from Soviet teachings. For educators and students in Azerbaijan, this period was marked by a complex balancing act. Teachers had to navigate between the old and new paradigms, often without clear guidance or sufficient resources, leading to confusion and inconsistency in educational delivery. Additionally, the broader socio-political landscape of Azerbaijan, with its rising national consciousness and desire for greater autonomy, added another layer of complexity. The tension between embracing modern, globally relevant education and maintaining ideological loyalty to Soviet principles mirrored the broader struggles of Azerbaijani society during this transformative period. Despite these challenges, the integration of Western methodologies ultimately laid the groundwork for a more dynamic and flexible

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<sup>53</sup> Azərbaycan Respublikası Təhsil Nazirliyi. Təhsil Xəbərləri: məlumat-informasiya məcmuəsi. Bakı: 1991.

education system, which would continue to evolve following Azerbaijan's independence in 1991.

The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 brought about a dramatic shift in the political and economic landscape. For Azerbaijan, this meant the transition to independence and the need to establish a national education system free from Soviet influence. The immediate post-Soviet period was marked by significant challenges, including the need to develop new educational policies, curricula, and governance structures to support the newly independent state.

## CONCLUSION

The historical development of the education system in Azerbaijan has been marked by significant transformations, influenced by various political and socio-economic changes. From the Tsarist era to the period of independence, each stage has contributed to the evolution of educational policies and infrastructure. During the Tsarist period, the foundation of secular education was established, blending traditional and modern subjects. This era saw the introduction of Russian language and culture into the local education system, setting the stage for future developments.

The brief yet impactful period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic brought about crucial reforms aimed at creating a national education system. The establishment of Baku State University and the support for students studying abroad were pivotal in enhancing the intellectual and cultural growth of the nation.

Under Soviet rule, particularly during the early Soviet period, significant strides were made in expanding access to education and improving literacy rates. The Soviet government's emphasis on education led to the establishment of numerous schools and higher education institutions, although it also imposed ideological constraints that affected the content and direction of educational programs.

The post-World War II period focused on rebuilding and modernizing the education system, with an emphasis on integrating polytechnical education. Despite the challenges of resource constraints and ideological rigidity, the education system continued to expand and improve.

The era of Heydar Aliyev's leadership as a First Secretary saw a renaissance in education, with substantial investments in infrastructure, the establishment of new institutions, and an emphasis on preserving national values. His policies significantly improved the quality and accessibility of education across Azerbaijan.

The late Soviet period and the transition to independence presented both challenges and opportunities. The incorporation of Western educational materials and methodologies during the *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* reforms helped modernize the curriculum, despite ideological tensions. The dissolution of the USSR necessitated the creation of a national education system, free from Soviet influence, setting the stage for future advancements.

In conclusion, the evolution of the education system in Azerbaijan reflects a complex interplay of external influences and internal reforms. Each historical period contributed to shaping a robust educational framework, laying the foundation for continued progress in the post-independence era. Understanding this history is crucial for appreciating the current state of education in Azerbaijan and planning for its future development.

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