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The Jadidism Movement and The Development of Primary Education

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Abstract: The Jadidism movement arose in the late nineteenth century among Muslim communities of the Russian Empire, advocating comprehensive reform of traditional maktab systems through the introduction of the *usul-i jadid* ("new method") pedagogy. This study employs a systematic review of periodicals, pedagogical manuals, archival decrees and contemporary scholarship to trace the evolution of primary education under Jadid influence. Findings reveal that Jadid schools expanded rapidly in urban centers between 1905 and 1917, replacing rote Qur'anic memorization with phonetic reading, interactive dialogue, and a secular curriculum encompassing literacy, arithmetic, geography and hygiene. Teacher training seminars and local print culture underpinned the movement, while funding from merchant patrons facilitated institutional growth. Despite conservative ulama opposition and logistical constraints in rural areas, Jadid innovations were later assimilated into Soviet and post-Soviet educational reforms. This article illuminates how Jadid pedagogy not only enhanced literacy rates but also fostered critical engagement with modern social issues, laying foundational elements for Central Asian national consciousness.

Keywords: Jadidism; usul-i jadid; primary education; maktab reform; phonetic teaching; Central Asia.

Introduction: The term “Jadidism” derives from the Arabic *jadid*, meaning “new,” and refers to a progressive cultural and educational reform movement among Muslim populations of the Russian Empire circa 1880s–1920s. Jadids, who self-identified as *taraqqiparvarlar* (progressives) or *ziyalilar* (intellectuals), contended that the prevailing maktab system—centered on rote memorization of Qur’anic texts in Arabic without comprehension—had failed to equip pupils with practical literacy or critical faculties. In response, Crimean Tatar intellectual Ismail Gasprinsky (1851–1914) pioneered the phonetic usul-i jadid methodology in 1884, emphasizing sound-based reading and writing, vernacular instruction, and secular subjects alongside religious studies.

From Crimea, these pedagogical innovations spread slowly into Central Asia, where figures such as Mahmud Khoja Behbudiy and Sadriddin Ayni established demonstration classes in urban maktab. By the early twentieth century, Jadids had established networks of new-method schools that sought to rejuvenate Islamic belief through engagement with modern knowledge systems and European-modeled pedagogies.

This article investigates the development of primary education under Jadid auspices, focusing on curricular innovations, institutional expansion, teacher training, and the socio-cultural impact of these reforms. By examining both archival materials and secondary analyses, the study elucidates how Jadid pedagogy reshaped literacy practices and contributed to emergent civic identities in Central Asian society.

A qualitative, historical methodology underpins this investigation. Primary sources included pedagogical manuals authored by Jadid educators, decrees from Tsarist educational authorities, periodical publications (1905–1917), and contemporaneous memoirs. Archival documents were consulted in digital repositories of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and university collections. Secondary literature comprised scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed articles, and electronic resources accessed via academic databases. The review protocol involved thematic coding of materials to identify key pedagogical features (e.g., phonetic instruction, curriculum breadth), patterns of school proliferation, and recorded literacy outcomes. Institutional data—such as the number of new-method schools founded—were extracted from periodical surveys and official reports.

To triangulate findings, the study cross-referenced quantitative enrollment figures with qualitative accounts of classroom practices and community reception. All electronic resources were accessed and archived as of May 4, 2025, ensuring consistency in referencing.

Between 1908 and 1916, the number of usul-i jadid schools in major Central Asian cities rose precipitously, with Tashkent alone reporting over fifty new-method maktab by 1914. These institutions departed from traditional maktab by replacing syllabic and letter-memorization techniques with phonetic reading exercises conducted in the local Turkic vernacular. Classrooms featured benches, blackboards and printed primers that introduced secular subjects such as arithmetic, geography and hygiene, thereby broadening the educational scope beyond purely religious instruction. Educators employed interactive dialogues and oral recitation drills to reinforce comprehension, fostering an environment in which pupils were encouraged to question and discuss rather than passively memorize.

Concomitantly, Jadid leaders organized teacher-training seminars that emphasized modern pedagogical theories imported from the Volga region and the Ottoman Empire. Manuals circulated in print media—including periodicals produced in Bombay and Istanbul—standardized lesson plans and instructional sequences, thereby elevating professional norms for maktab instructors. Merchant and artisan patrons funded school establishment and organized community demonstrations to publicize the new methods, legitimizing Jadid pedagogy among conservative families.

Quantitative indicators suggest that literacy rates in urban areas experienced modest but meaningful gains. Contemporary Tsarist surveys recorded average reading fluency improvements of twenty to thirty percent among pupils enrolled in Jadid schools compared to counterparts in traditional maktab. Writing proficiency, measured through composition assignments in vernacular, similarly advanced, indicating that phonetic methodologies facilitated functional literacy.

The Jadidism movement’s pedagogical reforms signified a pivotal moment in the modernization of Muslim societies in Central Asia. By challenging rote religiosity and advocating a balanced curriculum, Jadids laid the groundwork for emergent civic consciousness. Phonetic instruction empowered pupils to engage directly with texts, fostering analytical skills that transcended ritual learning. Moreover, the integration of secular subjects aligned educational content with practical societal

needs, preparing students for participation in a rapidly transforming socio-economic landscape.

However, widespread adoption faced challenges. Conservative ulama resisted perceived encroachments on religious authority, denouncing new-method maktabas as secularizing threats. In rural locales, where patronage was scarce and transport infrastructure limited, traditional maktabas remained dominant, thus circumscribing the movement's rural reach. Additionally, recurrent funding shortfalls led to uneven teacher compensation and periodic school closures, undermining long-term stability.

Despite these constraints, the legacy of Jadid pedagogy endured. Soviet educational reforms of the 1920s and 1930s institutionalized phonetic reading, secular curricula and state-sponsored teacher colleges, effectively nationalizing erstwhile Jadid innovations. In independent Central Asian republics, these foundations enabled rapid expansion of universal primary education and the development of national curricula that continue to reflect Jadid principles of interactive learning and curricular diversity.

The movement's print culture also produced a burgeoning vernacular literature, periodicals and textbooks, catalyzing intellectual exchange and contributing to the rise of national literatures. Thus, Jadidism's impact extended beyond primary schooling to the broader cultural sphere, shaping early twentieth-century debates on identity, modernity and the role of religion in public life.

CONCLUSION

The Jadidism movement fundamentally transformed primary education in Central Asia by introducing the *usul-i jadid* pedagogy, which combined phonetic teaching, interactive methods and a secular-religious curriculum. Jadid maktabas proliferated in urban centers, delivering measurable literacy improvements and fostering critical engagement among learners. Teacher training initiatives and a robust print culture underpinned these reforms, even as conservative opposition and resource limitations constrained rural penetration. Ultimately, Jadid innovations were subsumed into Soviet and post-Soviet educational frameworks, underscoring the enduring influence of this early twentieth-century reform movement on Central Asian schooling and national development.

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