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LANGUAGE OF EDUCATION UNDER COLONIAL CONDITIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TURKESTAN EXPERIENCE WITH BRITISH INDIA AND FRENCH NORTH AFRICA

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Abstract: This article provides a comparative analysis of language-of-education policies under colonial conditions and their socio-cultural consequences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The study compares the experiences of Turkestan under the Russian Empire, British India, and the French colonies of North Africa, particularly Algeria. It examines the introduction of Russian into the educational system of Turkestan and the establishment of Russian-native schools, the relationship between English and local languages in India, and the dominance of French in administration and education in French North Africa. The findings demonstrate that in all three regions, colonial powers used the language of education as an instrument of political administration, cultural influence, and the training of administrative personnel. At the same time, local languages and traditional educational institutions were not completely eliminated; rather, they were subjected to varying degrees of control and restriction or were forced to coexist with the new colonial system. The distinctive feature of the Turkestan experience was that the policy of Russification was closely connected with schools, madrasas, and administrative governance.

Keywords: Turkestan, colonialism, language of education, Russian language, English language, French language, India, Algeria, Russian-native schools.

Introduction

In the history of colonialism, the education system was one of the important instruments of political and cultural governance. Colonial powers sought not only to establish political authority in conquered territories but also to influence the social structure, worldview, and cultural life of local societies. In this process, the language of education played a particularly important role. The language used in schools functioned not only as a means of transmitting knowledge but also as a factor shaping a sense of belonging to a particular political and cultural environment.

Following the Russian Empire’s conquest of Turkestan, new types of schools, including Russian and Russian-native schools, emerged alongside traditional schools and madrasas from the second half of the nineteenth century. One of their main purposes was to spread the Russian language among the local population and to train personnel required for the imperial administration. Studies indicate that Russian-native schools were closely connected with the Russification policy of the Tsarist colonial administration.

A similar process took place outside Turkestan. In British India, English became a means of accessing higher education, government service, and modern knowledge. The Wood’s Despatch of 1854 regarded English as an important medium for higher education, while also recognizing the necessity of using local languages at the elementary level.

In French North Africa, particularly in Algeria, French became the prestigious language of education and administration. Although the status of Arabic changed during different periods, French remained one of the important requirements for access to educational and social opportunities throughout the colonial period.

Therefore, comparing the Turkestan experience with those of India and North Africa makes it possible to identify common patterns in the relationship between language and education under colonial rule.

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Main Part

1. The Formation of Language-of-Education Policy in Turkestan

After the Russian Empire conquered Turkestan, the educational system in the region developed along two main directions. On the one hand, there were traditional schools and madrasas that had developed over centuries; on the other hand, Russian schools and Russian-native schools were established by the imperial administration.

In traditional schools, the main languages of education were local Turkic languages and Persian-Tajik, while Arabic was used in religious subjects. In madrasas, the Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, logic, and other religious and scholarly disciplines were taught in Arabic, together with explanations in local languages. The colonial administration gradually sought to place this educational system under its control.

In Russian-native schools, the Russian language became one of the main instruments of the new educational system. Some studies indicate that approximately 134 Russian-native schools were established in Syr Darya Province alone between 1867 and 1885. These schools taught Russian language and literature and were also intended to adapt the local population to the Russian administrative system.

However, this policy cannot be explained simply as the "introduction of the Russian language." One of its major objectives was to create a new social group within the local population capable of working with the imperial administration. Knowledge of Russian increasingly became an important factor for entering government service, obtaining new occupations, and gaining access to the administrative system.

At the same time, the policy of Russification contributed to the emergence of resistance and alternative educational ideas among local intellectuals. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jadids established new-method schools and sought to provide modern knowledge in the native language, create textbooks, and educate students in the spirit of national consciousness. In this sense, Jadidism in Turkestan can also be viewed as a cultural response to colonial educational policy. Modern studies demonstrate differences between Jadid schools and Russian-native schools in terms of educational content, methodology, and language.

2. English and Local Languages in British India

The issue of the language of education developed in a more complex manner in British India. The region was home to numerous languages, including English, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Tamil, Marathi, and many others. Therefore, rather than using English exclusively at all levels of education, the British administration developed a system in which different languages were used at different educational levels.

The ideas expressed by Thomas Macaulay in 1835 strengthened the position of English in higher education, while the Wood's Despatch of 1854 proposed a more complex language policy. The document recognized the importance of local languages in mass education and recommended the use of vernacular languages at the elementary level. At the same time, English was viewed as a means of accessing higher education and European science.

As a result, a two-level educational environment developed in India. The first level involved the use of local languages in mass education, while the second involved the dominance of English in higher education, government service, and social mobility. Consequently, Indians who acquired English had greater opportunities to obtain higher positions within the colonial state apparatus.

In this respect, the Indian experience was similar to that of Turkestan. In both regions, the colonial state linked language proficiency with social opportunities. However, an important difference was that in British India, the role of local languages in education was more explicitly recognized in official policy documents. In Turkestan, by contrast, Russian

was promoted through Russian-native schools as an important element of the imperial administrative and cultural system.

3. French Language Policy in French North Africa

One of the clearest examples of language policy in French North Africa is the experience of Algeria. France governed Algeria as a colony for an extended period and strengthened the position of French within the educational system.

In Algeria, Arabic was not only a means of communication but also a major element of Islamic and local cultural identity. Therefore, French colonial policy had a complex relationship with Arabic language, religious education, and local cultural institutions. Studies indicate that the French attitude toward Arabic was not uniform throughout the colonial period, and in certain periods there were limited opportunities for its study and teaching.

Nevertheless, French became the primary language of government administration, modern education, and social prestige. Knowledge of French was associated with access to higher social and educational opportunities in colonial society. Thus, the language of education became not merely a pedagogical issue but also a matter of political power and social inequality.

Another characteristic of French colonial policy was the attempt to influence cultural identity through language. Some studies emphasize that the privileged position of French over Arabic and Amazigh languages in Algeria was closely connected with the cultural policies of colonial rule.

4. Comparative Analysis of the Three Regions

A comparison of the experiences of Turkestan, British India, and French North Africa reveals several common features.

First, in all three regions, colonial language policies strengthened the relationship between education and state administration. Knowledge of Russian, English, and French became an important means of obtaining employment in the administrative system and gaining access to new social opportunities.

Second, colonial governments did not always seek to completely eliminate local languages. In some cases, they maintained them under controlled conditions. In India, the Wood's Despatch explicitly recognized the importance of local languages in elementary education. In Algeria, Arabic was not completely eliminated because of its religious and cultural significance, although French enjoyed a higher social status.

Third, language policies contributed to the emergence of new intellectual movements among local elites. In Turkestan, Jadidism; in India, various national and educational movements; and in North Africa, movements defending Arabic and local culture connected questions of education and language with national awakening.

Fourth, linguistic hierarchies established during the colonial period continued to influence the postcolonial period. In Algeria, after independence, Arabization policies were introduced in an effort to move away from the French colonial legacy. In India, however, English retained an important position in science, higher education, and government administration even after independence.

Turkestan also experienced the long-term influence of the position of Russian established during the colonial period. Throughout the twentieth century, Russian played a significant role in education, science, technology, and public administration. Therefore, colonial language policies should not be viewed only as historical phenomena; they are also important for understanding modern relationships between language and education.

Conclusion

Under colonial conditions, the language of education was not merely a pedagogical instrument but also an important mechanism of political power, social stratification, and cultural influence. The experiences of Turkestan, British India, and French North Africa demonstrate this phenomenon in different forms.

In Turkestan, Russian was introduced into the educational system through Russian-native schools and contributed to the adaptation of the local population to the imperial administrative system. Studies particularly emphasize the role of these schools in the policy of Russification. In British India, English dominated higher education and government service, while local languages retained an important position in elementary and mass education. In French North Africa, particularly Algeria, French acquired a superior political and social position in competition with Arabic and Amazigh languages.

The most important common feature of all three experiences was that knowledge of the colonial language was often connected with access to new social opportunities. As a result, language became one of the indicators of social stratification. In response, local intellectuals increasingly viewed the protection of the native language, national education, and cultural heritage as important components of national awakening.

Thus, the Turkestan experience can be understood as a distinctive Central Asian manifestation of broader processes in the history of colonialism. Its comparative study with India and North Africa provides an opportunity to better understand the complex relationship between education, language, colonialism, and national identity.

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