



SOVIET IDEOLOGY AND EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY IN UZBEK SCHOOL CURRICULA (1924–1991)

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Abstract: This article examines the impact of Soviet ideology on the education system in Uzbekistan between 1924 and 1991, with a particular focus on how ideological principles were embedded into school curricula. During this period, education was not only a tool for literacy and knowledge acquisition but also a mechanism for shaping political consciousness and loyalty to the Soviet state. Uzbek schools were required to adopt centralized programs that emphasized Marxist-Leninist philosophy, the history of the Communist Party, and the promotion of socialist values. At the same time, while education contributed to the modernization and increased literacy rates among the Uzbek population, it also limited intellectual freedom by restricting access to alternative worldviews. The research highlights both the achievements and contradictions of Soviet educational policy in Uzbekistan, demonstrating how ideology influenced teaching methods, subject content, and students' worldview. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between politics and education in Soviet Central Asia.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Soviet ideology, education system, school curricula, Marxism-Leninism, political indoctrination, literacy, Soviet Union, Central Asia, history of education.

The history of education in Uzbekistan during the Soviet period (1924–1991) cannot be separated from the broader political and ideological framework of the USSR. From the earliest years of Soviet rule, schools were considered one of the most important instruments for transmitting ideology, fostering loyalty to the Communist Party, and shaping a new socialist identity among the diverse peoples of Central Asia. The Uzbek education system, while modernized and expanded in unprecedented ways, was simultaneously subordinated to the strict ideological requirements of Moscow.

The introduction of universal literacy campaigns, the establishment of Uzbek-language textbooks, and the expansion of access to schooling were among the most notable achievements of this period. However, these reforms were deeply tied to the promotion of Marxism-Leninism and Soviet patriotism. School curricula were carefully designed to emphasize the superiority of the socialist system, glorify the role of the Communist Party, and present history through a





strictly ideological lens. Subjects such as literature, history, and social sciences became vehicles for political indoctrination, while even mathematics and natural sciences were taught within the framework of serving socialist progress.

At the same time, Soviet education in Uzbekistan created significant contradictions. On one hand, it played a major role in eradicating illiteracy, expanding access to modern knowledge, and training specialists for various sectors of the economy. On the other hand, it limited critical thinking, suppressed national and cultural identity, and replaced independent inquiry with political conformity. Thus, the Soviet legacy in education remains complex, embodying both modernization and ideological control.

This study explores how ideology shaped the Uzbek school curriculum, analyzing the mechanisms through which political narratives were imposed and the consequences they had on the intellectual and cultural development of Uzbek society.

The integration of Soviet ideology into the Uzbek school system between 1924 and 1991 was not accidental; it was a carefully orchestrated process that reflected the larger ambitions of the Communist Party to unify diverse nations under a single socialist identity. The Uzbek SSR was regarded as a laboratory for the Soviet experiment in “cultural revolution,” and schools became the central mechanism for shaping the worldview of young generations.

One of the main strategies was the systematic revision of curricula. History lessons, for example, presented the past through a class-struggle perspective, minimizing or even ignoring the pre-Soviet intellectual and cultural heritage of Uzbekistan. National heroes were either redefined in line with socialist ideals or replaced with figures who represented loyalty to the Soviet cause. The Great October Revolution, the role of Lenin, and the achievements of the Communist Party were repeatedly emphasized as turning points in human progress. This ideological framing left little room for alternative historical interpretations.

Literature also played a vital role in promoting ideology. Textbooks highlighted Soviet writers and poets while selectively including Uzbek authors whose works aligned with socialist realism. Creative expression was encouraged only within the limits of the ideological framework, with themes of collective labor, industrial development, and patriotism dominating school reading lists. As a result, generations of students were introduced to a literary canon that was simultaneously educational and politically restrictive.

Even in subjects such as geography, biology, and mathematics, ideology was subtly embedded. Geography lessons highlighted the economic integration of





Uzbekistan into the Soviet Union, often stressing its role as a supplier of cotton, minerals, and labor for the collective good of the USSR. Scientific progress was attributed to the superiority of socialism, with Soviet achievements in space exploration, industry, and agriculture presented as evidence of the system's success.

The ideological saturation of school curricula, however, came at a cost. Critical thinking and independent intellectual exploration were discouraged. Students were trained to memorize political slogans and reproduce official narratives rather than engage in free discussion or debate. Moreover, the suppression of national traditions, language variations, and cultural memory created tensions within society. While Uzbek language instruction was permitted, it was heavily standardized and aligned with Moscow's directives, limiting the organic development of local cultural identity.

Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to view Soviet educational policies only as a form of ideological oppression. The expansion of literacy, the establishment of scientific institutions, and the creation of professional cadres in Uzbekistan were undeniable achievements. The Soviet system opened opportunities for women, rural populations, and marginalized groups to participate in education for the first time in history. This dual legacy—modernization combined with indoctrination—defines the paradox of Soviet schooling in Uzbekistan.

The Soviet approach to education in Uzbekistan between 1924 and 1991 demonstrates the dual function of schools as both instruments of progress and vehicles of ideological control. On the one hand, the Soviet state succeeded in eliminating widespread illiteracy, introducing modern scientific knowledge, and creating a generation of professionals who contributed to the social and economic transformation of the republic. Access to education expanded significantly, including for women and rural populations, which marked a profound social shift compared to the pre-Soviet period.

On the other hand, these achievements were inseparable from a strict ideological framework. School curricula were carefully designed to cultivate loyalty to the Communist Party, glorify Soviet achievements, and marginalize alternative perspectives, including much of Uzbekistan's rich cultural and intellectual heritage. The emphasis on socialist realism in literature, the reinterpretation of history through class struggle, and the politicization of even technical subjects reflected the pervasive reach of ideology in education.

This legacy remains complex. For many, Soviet schooling provided valuable opportunities and access to knowledge that transformed their lives. Yet it also





left behind a system that limited independent thought, suppressed cultural diversity, and tied education to political conformity. The challenge for contemporary Uzbekistan lies in acknowledging this history honestly—recognizing both the progress made under Soviet education and the restrictions it imposed—while building an educational system rooted in national values, critical thinking, and global openness.

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