

The Education System in The Madrasahs of The Bukhara Emirate: Achievements and Shortcomings

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to examine the educational system of madrasahs in the Bukhara Emirate by analyzing their contributions to religious and secular education, their socio-cultural influence, and their role in the formation of the scientific environment. **Method:** Utilizing a historical methodology, supported by source analysis and comparative analysis, the research investigates the institutional and pedagogical characteristics of madrasahs from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. **Results:** The findings reveal that madrasahs were central to the cultural and educational life of the Bukhara Emirate, serving both Islamic teachings and state ideology. Despite a strong tradition of religious scholarship, the system faced significant limitations, including outdated curricula and limited emphasis on applied sciences, which ultimately hindered broader scientific and societal progress. These shortcomings catalyzed the emergence of reform efforts in the madrasa system during the specified period. **Novelty:** This article offers a systematic classification of the strengths and weaknesses of the madrasa education system in the Bukhara Emirate and presents an original historical interpretation of the factors that necessitated educational reform, contributing to the broader discourse on Islamic education and modernization.

INTRODUCTION

Bukhara has long been a center of knowledge and enlightenment, and during the era of the Bukhara Emirate, preserving, continuing, and developing this tradition remained one of the key responsibilities of its rulers. This is because the progress of any state depends on the attention given to science and education. The Russian traveler N. Khanikov, who visited the Bukhara Emirate, described the development of science in Bukhara and its role as an intellectual hub as follows: Bukhara has long been the center of Islamic learning and is the homeland of world-renowned scholars such as Mirzo Ulugbek, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), and many others. It is impossible not to acknowledge this fact. Notably, Bukhara ranks first among Central Asian states in terms of scientific advancement" [1].

The analysis of historical sources and data on the history of the education system in the Bukhara Emirate at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century indicates that Bukhara madrasahs retained their status and influence within the Islamic

world during this period. Considering the level of societal development, madrasas at that time served both the ruling state policy and Islamic teachings. The educational system in madrasas remained under government supervision. In the Bukhara Emirate, madrasas, which represented the highest level of the education system, played a crucial role in training specialists for the judiciary, education, and administration, as well as in studying Islamic principles, literature, and logic. These institutions were well-known not only in Central Asia but also throughout the Muslim world. This article provides an analysis of the educational system in Bukhara Emirate madrasas, their curriculum, and the achievements and shortcomings of the subjects taught within these institutions [2].

RESEARCH METHOD

Literature review

We can observe that numerous local and foreign scholars have conducted extensive research on this issue. Local scholars such as A. Jumanazar, F. Bobojonova, Q. Rajabov, L. Asrorova, and F. Temirov have provided valuable scientific insights into the education system and the activities of madrasas in the Bukhara Emirate. Among foreign scholars, the German researcher A. F. Kugelgen and Adib Khalid have written about the traditional education system of the Bukhara Emirate, its social life, and the scientific policies of its rulers in their works [3].

Additionally, numerous sources from the Emirate period provide valuable insights into the subject. Prominent Jadid intellectuals such as Abdurauf Fitrat, Sadridin Ayni, and Sadri Ziyoy wrote extensively about the history of the emirate and the activities of madrasas in their works. The historian S. Ayni, who received his education in Bukhara madrasas, documented his observations in his work "Memories". In this work, he provides detailed accounts of the architecture of Bukhara madrasas, the transformation of madrasa cells into private property, the accommodation of students, their relationships with teachers, the curriculum and textbooks, the academic calendar, the outcomes of eighteen to nineteen years of study, and the financial relationships between students and their mentors [4].

In A. Fitrat's prose work "Debates between a European and a Bukharan mudarris on Jadid schools in India", the education system of Bukhara madrasas, their shortcomings, and the subjects taught are discussed. In his work "The story of an Indian traveler", the writer provides information on the number of madrasas in Bukhara during the emirate period, their activities, classifications, and the annual waqf income of libraries attached to these madrasas. Additionally, A. Fitrat documents the waqf income of libraries within the emirate [5].

Sadri Ziyoy, who served as Qozikalon in the Bukhara Emirate, also documented important information about the intellectual and literary environment, the education system, and the history of madrasas in Bukhara in his works [6].

In the analysis of sources related to the topic, the works of foreign diplomats who visited Bukhara hold significant importance. The Danish military officer and researcher O. Olufsen traveled to the Bukhara Emirate multiple times in the 1890s. His book, "The

Emir of Bokhara and His Country”, provides valuable information on the history of the emirate, with a particular focus on the activities of mosques and madrasas [7].

P. I. Demaison's work "Notes on the Bukhara Khanate" also discusses the madrasas of Bukhara. The book highlights the fame of Bukhara Emirate's madrasas throughout the entire Turkestan region, noting that students from various regions came to study there. This research applies historical methodology, source analysis, and comparative analysis techniques to provide a deeper understanding of the role of madrasas in the socio-cultural life of the Bukhara Emirate [8].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bukhara has been renowned as a center of science and knowledge since the Middle Ages. The madrasahs of Bukhara maintained their prestige in the first half of the 18th and 19th centuries. In the Bukhara Emirate, most madrasahs were built in the capital, Bukhara, and various sources provide different figures regarding their number. Based on contemporary sources, it can be concluded that more than two hundred madrasahs were in operation in the Emirate [9].

Historical sources confirm that during the Manghit era, attention was given to the social aspects of science. During this period, religious studies, philosophy, logic, historiography, poetry, and calligraphy flourished. Hundreds of works were created on historical, religious, and philosophical topics. However, in the fields of exact and natural sciences, the study was mostly limited to books written in the 9th–12th and 14th–15th centuries. As a result, these fields stagnated, and the emirate significantly lagged behind global progress. Nevertheless, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the madrasahs of the Bukhara Emirate had achieved several notable successes. Below, we will explore them [10].

Firstly, the madrasas of Bukhara played a crucial role in preserving Islamic culture. They served as educational centers for the preservation and promotion of literature and science, as well as for the study of the Quran, hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence. Thanks to the madrasas and their educational systems, Islamic traditions and culture were transmitted to future generations. The most renowned madrasas of the Bukhara Emirate in Central Asia were the Mir Arab and Kukaldash madrasas, which made a significant contribution to the development of Islamic culture. Kukaldash Madrasa was considered the largest madrasa in Central Asia. The Mir Arab Madrasa, among the madrasas in Uzbekistan, has continuously operated as an educational institution from its establishment to the present day. Many prominent religious scholars were educated at the Mir Arab Madrasa during the Bukhara Emirate period, including Bukhara Emir Amir Shohmurod, Shaykh Khudoydod, the Tatar Muslim theologian and educator Shahabuddin Marjani, the distinguished representative of Bukhara's literary environment Mujrim Obid, Islamic scholar and jurist Orunkhoja Eshon ibn Ahmadkhoja, well-known Islamic studies scholar Nurgali Hasan al-Buaviy, Jadid enlightenment figure Munavvarqori Abdurashidkhanov, progressive Bukhara scholar Muhammad Ikrom ibn Abdusalom (Mulla Ikromcha), jurist and theologian Eshon Bobokhon ibn

Abdalmajidkhon, and historian Sadriddin Aini. The madrasahs of the emirate played an essential role in the social life of the population, and madrasah teachers and scholars were highly respected among the people [11].

Secondly, due to the education system in the emirate's madrasahs, Bukhara was recognized as a major center of science and knowledge, attracting scholars and students from various regions at its peak. Madrasahs contributed to the development of various fields, including philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy. Regarding the prestige of Bukhara's madrasahs, Fayzulla Khojaev stated: "The old Arab-Persian culture held a special place in Bukhara, and numerous schools, madrasahs, philosophers, and writers once transformed Bukhara into an enlightened center of Arab-Persian culture" [4]. The role of madrasahs was invaluable in establishing Bukhara Emirate's reputation as a center of science and scholarship [12].

Third, the education system in madrasahs played a bridging role between society and the government by allowing people from different backgrounds to study. Madrasahs were closely connected to the population, providing education not only to officials and the wealthy but also to ordinary people, fostering religious, social, and general knowledge. For example, despite coming from a lower-class background, Sadriddin Aini received his education at the Bukhara madrasahs. He later wrote various works on the history of the emirate, its madrasahs, and the Jadid movement, contributing significantly to the educational system of the emirate [13].

Another example is Shamsiddin Shohin, who faced severe financial difficulties during his studies and had to work to cover his educational expenses. His elderly father struggled to support the family and pay for his son's education. Despite these hardships, some scholars and officials of the time recognized Shohin's extraordinary talent and dedication to learning, occasionally providing him with financial assistance. To support his impoverished family, Shohin copied books and manuscripts for money. After completing his madrasah education, he struggled to find suitable employment and worked for some time as an imam in mosques. Later, in 1885, he became a secretary to Abdulqodir Parvonachi, an official under Emir Abdullah Khan. Parvonachi highly respected Shohin's talent and knowledge, offering him financial support [14].

Fourth, specific curricula were developed for madrasahs. The general framework of the madrasah curriculum was established between the 10th and 12th centuries and was gradually refined over time. The education system included a diverse curriculum that was advanced for its time, incorporating religious studies, logic, rhetoric, and even elements of natural sciences. In the madrasahs of the Bukhara Emirate, lectures were conducted in large groups of about 70 students, while practical lessons were held in smaller groups of 10-15 students [15]. This structure enhanced the effectiveness of education and allowed students to gain in-depth knowledge. The development and continuous improvement of specialized curricula indicate that the madrasahs of the Bukhara Emirate operated at a high academic level [16].

Fifth, the influence of Bukhara madrasahs on future generations was profound. These institutions produced many prominent scholars and religious figures who

contributed to the region's intellectual heritage. Historical sources mention that Emir Haydar personally arranged for books to be brought from Istanbul (Ottoman Empire) for students. In 1815, he sent officials Eshmuhammad Devonbegi and Mirzo Muhammad Yusuf Qo'rchiboshi to Istanbul with a letter requesting religious books from Sultan Mahmud II. In response, Mahmud II sent a collection of 32 volumes to Bukhara through his envoy Hasan Chalabi [6]. This account further demonstrates Bukhara's esteemed status in the academic world. Many of the Jadids who fought for educational reforms and broader modernization had also received their education at Bukhara madrasahs [17].

The educational system of the Bukhara madrasahs had both achievements and significant shortcomings. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was an increasing tendency toward educational reform. These shortcomings were primarily highlighted in the works of *Jadid* intellectuals and reformists. Several specific factors contributed to the stagnation and decline of Bukhara madrasahs, preventing them from keeping pace with progress [18].

Firstly, the limitations of the curriculum hindered the progress of education. The focus was primarily on religious sciences, particularly Islamic theology and jurisprudence, while secular subjects such as mathematics and literature received less attention. This narrow curriculum restricted students from gaining broader knowledge and developing critical thinking skills. The exclusive emphasis on religious sciences sometimes failed to adapt to the changing needs of society or to incorporate modern scientific advancements, leading to a rigid and outdated educational program. For centuries, the madrasahs of Bukhara were among the most esteemed centers of learning in the Islamic world [19]. They produced highly skilled specialists in various fields. Initially, in addition to religious sciences, subjects like arithmetic, medicine, and geometry (*handasa*) were considered fundamental disciplines in madrasah education. However, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a decline in scientific learning was observed in the madrasahs of the Bukhara Emirate, and they became almost exclusively dedicated to religious studies. The excessive focus on *hashiyachilik* (commentary writing and interpretations) in the curriculum made even religious sciences difficult to grasp. Students spent 7 to 10 years memorizing numerous commentary books (*hashiya*), but not only the students—even many of the *mudarris* (teachers) themselves struggled to fully understand them. As a result, madrasahs in the Middle East, Central Asia, and even Muslim regions within the Russian Empire had already abandoned these books, realizing they were of little practical use. Nevertheless, in many Bukhara madrasahs, significant emphasis continued to be placed on them [20].

Secondly, studying in madrasahs involved several financial difficulties. In some cases, students had to pay fees to secure a place in a madrasah or to study independently, including paying tuition to the *mudarris* (teacher), purchasing books, and covering other educational expenses. To afford these costs, many students had to work hard to sustain themselves during their studies. Often, their families could not bear the financial burden of education. Additionally, difficulties in securing accommodation for students

negatively impacted the quality of education and limited access to learning for many aspiring scholars [21].

Madrasa cells (*hujras*) were often granted as property to religious scholars and their relatives, meaning students who wished to study had to obtain these rooms from the existing owners. In smaller madrasahs, students could sometimes stay in *hujras* without payment, but in return, they had to serve as apprentices to the room owners and assist them in their duties. In larger madrasahs, students had to provide a financial deposit (referred to as *istiqomat garovi*), meaning they paid a sum to the room owner in exchange for access to the waqf funds linked to the *hujra* [22]. Over time, these madrasa *hujras* became private property and were increasingly concentrated in the hands of wealthy individuals. As a result, poor students could not benefit from the available accommodations and waqf funds. Educational opportunities were often reserved for certain social classes, particularly government officials and religious families. Many individuals, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, faced significant barriers to higher education, reinforcing social inequalities. Those with limited financial means typically completed their studies at traditional elementary schools (*maktabs*) and could not pursue further education. Even those who managed to enroll in madrasahs frequently had to abandon their studies due to financial difficulties. The historian Sadriddin Ayni, in his memoirs, mentions Amir Shohmurod's decree regarding the renovation of madrasa *hujras*: "*Each student who restores a madrasa hujra at their own expense and effort will have the right to reside in it. When the student decides to leave, they may transfer the hujra to another student by receiving compensation for the renovation costs. This measure led to the rapid restoration of madrasa hujras in Bukhara and Samarkand within two to three years. For some time, the transfer of hujras between students was solely based on the actual renovation costs, ensuring that non-students could not acquire these residences.*" While this decree initially ensured the regular maintenance of madrasa buildings and provided students with stable accommodations, over time, the *hujras* became commodities for trade, shifting away from their original educational purpose [23].

Thirdly, many madrasahs in the Emirate lacked essential facilities and resources such as libraries and educational materials. One of the major shortcomings of these institutions was the insufficient number of books in their libraries. Although there were about twenty libraries in Bukhara, the high cost of book printing and the limited demand for manuscripts—mostly from a small group of knowledge-seeking individuals—led to a decline in the availability of books. Additionally, funds allocated for libraries and books through waqf endowments were often misused for other purposes. With the arrival of Russians and some Europeans in the emirate, rare manuscripts were either sold or given away as gifts. The Jadid intellectual A. Fitrat also mentioned in his works that the shortage of books was further exacerbated by religious scholars hoarding many valuable texts [24].

Fourthly, the outdated teaching methods also hindered the progress of madrasahs. The pedagogical approaches used in many madrasahs were largely based on traditional education, focusing more on memorization rather than critical analysis or practical

application of knowledge. This method did not encourage independent thinking or creativity among students. In Bukhara madrasahs, students were required to study numerous religious-philosophical and religious-legal books, manuals, commentaries, and reinterpreted annotations over a period of 18–20 years. However, it was nearly impossible for a madrasah student to fully master all these texts [25]. Instead, students mainly memorized selected passages or provided explanations for certain sections. The main challenge and burden of higher education in madrasahs lay in this approach. Mastering the Arabic language and studying commentaries on texts took a significant amount of time. As researcher D. H. Ziyaeva pointed out, "*With the exception of exceptionally gifted students, studying in Arabic – a language that was not commonly used in daily communication but was strictly applied during lessons – made the learning process significantly more difficult for most students*" [26].

Fifthly, efforts to reform and introduce innovations in the madrasah education system of the Bukhara Emirate were met with persistent resistance. Conservative elements within society, who viewed changes as a threat to traditional values and religious authority, strongly opposed educational reforms. This opposition hindered the implementation of modern teaching practices and curricula. For instance, Abu Nasr Kursavi, a Tatar scholar educated in Bukhara madrasahs, developed a reform program for the Bukhara education system. He proposed removing *Aqeedah* and *Kalam* from the madrasah curriculum and emphasized studying Islam solely through the *Qur'an*. However, this idea provoked strong opposition from Bukhara's religious scholars, who insisted that a comprehensive understanding of Islam required studying all religious texts. In 1807, upon his arrival in Bukhara, Kursavi engaged in heated debates with conservative scholars who supported traditional religious education. To clarify the stance of religious authorities on Kursavi's views, a council was convened in April 1808, attended by Emir Haydar (1800–1826) himself [27]. The scholars and muftis present at the council did not support Kursavi's ideas. Only one participant, Tursunbaqo ibn Abdurahim al-Bulghari, expressed agreement with Kursavi. As a result, the council issued a *fatwa* stating that any Muslim who did not study seven or eight religious books would be considered an apostate and sentenced to death. Kursavi was subsequently arrested. However, Shaykh Niyozqul appealed to the emir for his disciple's release, and soon after, Kursavi was freed and left the city [28]. Shihabuddin Marjani studied and taught at the Sherdor Madrasah in Samarkand from 1843 to 1845. In 1845, he returned to Bukhara and enrolled in the Mir Arab Madrasah. After years of madrasah education, Marjani openly criticized the outdated higher education system in Bukhara's madrasahs. Along with Domla Fazil, Mominxo'ja Vobkandi, and Mulla Khudoyberdi Boysuni, he developed a reform program for madrasahs, which included the following key proposals:

1. Individuals should have the freedom to interpret religious matters in the *Qur'an* independently. Blind adherence to others' opinions should be strictly prohibited.
2. Superficial and unproductive subjects, such as commentaries (*hashiya*) and annotations (*sharh*), which provided no real benefit to madrasah students and consumed 8–10 years of their time, should be removed from the curriculum.

3. Madrasahs should teach *Qur'an*, *hadith*, their translations, and Islamic history.
4. There should be no opposition to the inclusion of secular subjects such as arithmetic, history, geography, medicine, geometry, logic, and philosophy.
5. Islam should be restored to the cultural principles that existed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

This reform program faced significant opposition from the majority of religious scholars. As a result, Shihabuddin Marjani and his associates were subjected to persecution. Marjani was forced to leave Bukhara, while Domla Fazil, Mominxo'ja, and Mulla Khudoyberdi were arrested, sentenced to 75 lashes, and dismissed from their teaching positions. Although attempts were made to reform the madrasa system in the Bukhara Emirate, none of these efforts were successfully implemented [29].

Sixthly, the educational system of the Bukhara Emirate was heavily influenced by rulers and officials, with strong political interference. The education system was often interconnected with political power, which led to the promotion of specific ideologies rather than a balanced educational approach. Many of the rulers' decisions regarding education were not aimed at improving literacy among the population but rather at appeasing religious scholars and consolidating their own authority [30]. As a result of such policies, numerous madrasahs were built, and endowed lands (*waqf*) were allocated for their use. However, the dominance of the ruling ideology negatively affected the quality of education. In many cases, teachers (*mudarris*), administrators (*mutawalli*), and other educational officials appointed by rulers and local governors prioritized financial benefits and personal status over education itself. Fitrat, in his works, highlighted that the appointment of madrasa teachers was sometimes based on bribery. He stated: "*That is, whoever flatters the most, visits the authorities three times a day to bow, show reverence, or even prostrate before them, will have their name recorded in the register by the qadi. Within a few days, they will receive an official decree in their name, and if fortune favors them, they will become a madrasa teacher or mufti* [31]." This practice further contributed to the decline in the quality and integrity of the education system in the Emirate.

Seventhly, educational opportunities for girls were limited in the madrasahs of the Emirate. Madrasa education was primarily accessible to boys. This disparity restricted women's access to education, their participation in social life, and their role in governance. The main reason for women's lack of higher education was the belief that they should focus on household duties and marriage at a young age. Due to these factors, women in the Emirate were not enrolled in madrasa education.

Tatar enlightenment figure Shihabuddin Marjani attempted to reform the education system by including women's education in his curriculum. However, after his program failed, women's access to education remained restricted [32].

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This study concludes that madrasahs in the Bukhara Emirate were central to the cultural, educational, and social fabric of the society, aligning with both Islamic values and state ideology; however, their stagnation in the 19th and

early 20th centuries was primarily due to outdated curricula, restricted access, and limited responsiveness to societal transformation. **Implication** : These findings underscore the importance of aligning religious educational institutions with broader socio-economic developments to ensure their continued relevance and contribution to national progress. **Limitation** : The study is limited by the availability of historical records and primarily focuses on institutional analysis, with less emphasis on student and teacher experiences. **Future Research** : Further studies should investigate the micro-level dynamics within madrasahs, explore comparative cases in other Islamic regions, and assess how contemporary reforms draw from or diverge from historical precedents in Islamic education.

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