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THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SURKHANDARYA REGION AND THE FORMATION OF THE PUBLIC EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article examines the establishment of Surkhandarya region as a separate administrative unit within the Uzbek SSR on 6 March 1941 and the concurrent formation of the public education administrative system in the region. Drawing on archival evidence and existing scholarly literature, the study reconstructs the institutional and pedagogical context in which the regional educational apparatus took shape during the brief pre-war period — a period that lasted only three and a half months before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War on 22 June 1941. The article analyses three interrelated dimensions: (1) the administrative and territorial preconditions for the formation of the region, including the transition from the okrug (district) system of the 1920s through the period when southern districts were directly subordinated to the republican centre; (2) the structural organisation of the three-tier educational management system (Republican Commissariat of Education — Regional Education Department [oblon] — District Education Department [rayono]); and (3) the initial pedagogical infrastructure of the region, including the Termez Pedagogical College as the principal source of teaching personnel. The author argues that although the



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regional public education system was established under conditions of severe constraints — the unfinished transition from the Latin to the Cyrillic alphabet, a shortage of qualified pedagogical personnel, and limited material resources — it laid the institutional foundation upon which the system functioned throughout the war years and the subsequent post-war reconstruction. The study contributes to the historiography of Soviet educational policy in the peripheral regions of Central Asia and demonstrates that even in a short pre-war window, the regional educational apparatus achieved a measure of administrative coherence that proved essential to its later resilience.

Keywords: Surkhandarya region; Uzbek SSR; public education; educational administration; regional history; Termez Pedagogical College; Soviet education policy; pre-war period; Central Asia.

The formation of regional administrative units and the establishment of corresponding sectoral management systems represent one of the central themes in the institutional history of the Soviet Union. In Central Asia, where the boundaries of national republics were drawn during the national-territorial delimitation of 1924–1925, subsequent administrative restructurings of the 1930s and early 1940s shaped the territorial and institutional architecture that, in important respects, has persisted into the post-Soviet period. The establishment of Surkhandarya region of the Uzbek SSR on 6 March 1941 belongs to this broader process. Located in the extreme south-east of Uzbekistan, bordering Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, the region acquired its present administrative form precisely on the eve of the Great Patriotic War, which began



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on 22 June 1941 and fundamentally reshaped the conditions under which all newly established Soviet institutions had to operate.

The formation of the region was inseparable from the construction of its sectoral administrative apparatus, including the system of public education management. The establishment of a regional education department (oblastnoy otdel narodnogo obrazovaniya, oblonno) and a network of district education departments (rayonniy otdel narodnogo obrazovaniya, rayono) signalled the regional articulation of the broader Soviet educational system. This process, however, has not received sustained scholarly attention. While general histories of Soviet education in Uzbekistan exist, and while the wartime and post-war periods have been examined in regional studies of the neighbouring Kashkadarya, Bukhara, and Samarkand regions, the institutional emergence of public education administration in Surkhandarya has not been the subject of a focused historical analysis.

This article aims to fill that gap by reconstructing the institutional context in which the public education administrative system of Surkhandarya region was established and began to function in the first months of its existence. The research questions guiding the analysis are threefold. First, what administrative and territorial preconditions made the establishment of the region in 1941 both possible and necessary? Second, what was the structural design of the public education administrative system, and how did it relate to the broader institutional architecture of the Uzbek SSR? Third, what was the state of pedagogical infrastructure — schools, teacher-training institutions, and pedagogical personnel — at the moment when the regional system began to operate?

The administrative history of the territory that would become Surkhandarya region is long and complex. Until 1920 the region formed part of the Emirate of



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Bukhara, after which it was incorporated into the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic. Following the national-territorial delimitation of 1924, the region became part of the newly established Uzbek SSR. On 29 June 1925, Surkhandarya okrug was formed as one of the ten okrugs of the Uzbek SSR, with its centre at Termez. This was the first time that the territory was organised as a single administrative unit within the Soviet system.

Demographic and economic context. At the time of its establishment, Surkhandarya region covered approximately 20,100 km² and included a number of districts: Termez, Sherabad, Baysun, Denov, Sariosiya, Jarkurgan, Shurchi, Kumkurgan, and others. The population was multi-ethnic, with Uzbeks forming the majority and significant Tajik, Turkmen, and Russian minorities. The economy was predominantly agrarian, with cotton cultivation, livestock breeding, and rain-fed farming in the foothills constituting the main occupations. Termez, as a Soviet–Afghan border city and a railway hub since 1915, played a strategic transportation and commercial role.

The demographic and economic profile of the region had direct implications for the formation of its public education system. The predominantly rural character of the population (with the rural share approaching 80 percent), the presence of multiple ethno-linguistic communities, the mountainous geography of several districts (Baysun, Sariosiya), and the agrarian economic base all shaped the demands placed on the regional educational apparatus. The system had to provide instruction in multiple languages, reach scattered rural settlements, and accommodate the seasonal labour rhythms of an agrarian society.

The establishment of Surkhandarya region in March 1941 was accompanied by the parallel formation of its sectoral administrative organs. In the field of



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education, this took the form of a Regional Department of Public Education (oblono), which acted as the regional branch of the People's Commissariat of Education (Narkompros) of the Uzbek SSR. The oblono was responsible for the coordination, supervision, and methodological guidance of all educational institutions in the region — primary, incomplete secondary (seven-year), and secondary general schools, kindergartens, boarding schools, evening schools, vocational schools, and pedagogical colleges.

The result was a three-tier vertical administrative structure: People's Commissariat of Education (republican level) — Regional Education Department (oblono) — District Education Department (rayono) — School. This structure mirrored the general administrative architecture of the Soviet state and reproduced, at the regional level, the institutional logic that governed Soviet sectoral administration more broadly. Information, instructions, and inspection moved downward; statistical reports, complaints, and personnel matters moved upward.

Policy environment. The regional education department began its work in a policy environment defined by several major decrees. The 1930 decree on universal compulsory primary education, the 1934 measures on the introduction of incomplete secondary (seven-year) education, and the 1940 law on the transition from the Latin to the Cyrillic alphabet for the Uzbek language all formed the legislative framework within which the new regional system had to operate. Of these, the alphabet transition was particularly consequential: at the moment the region was established, the conversion had only just begun, and very few textbooks, primers, and pedagogical materials in the new Cyrillic-based Uzbek alphabet were available. This created a serious methodological problem



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for schools in the region — one that would be aggravated, rather than resolved, by the outbreak of war.

A regional public education system can function only if it is supplied with qualified teachers. The principal institution for training pedagogical personnel within the region itself was the Termez Pedagogical College (pedagogicheskoye uchilishche), located in the regional capital. Established in the early 1930s, well before the formation of the region, the college trained primary-school teachers and, in later years, certain categories of secondary-school teachers. By 1941, it had already become an established pedagogical institution and was, in effect, the regional centre of teacher training.

However, the capacity of the Termez Pedagogical College alone was not sufficient to staff the entire network of schools in the region. Additional sources of pedagogical personnel included the higher pedagogical institutions of the Uzbek SSR — the Tashkent Pedagogical Institute, the Samarkand State University, the Bukhara Pedagogical Institute, and, later, the Bukhara Teachers' Institute (which would play a significant role during the war years). Graduates of these institutions were distributed to regions through the centralised personnel assignment system of the People's Commissariat of Education. Surkhandarya region, as a newly established and relatively peripheral administrative unit, depended heavily on this centralised distribution mechanism for its supply of secondary-school teachers, especially in scientific and language disciplines.

Initial state of the school network. At the moment of the region's establishment, the school network included primary schools (four-year), incomplete secondary schools (seven-year), and a small number of full secondary schools (ten-year). The bulk of schools were located in district centres and large rural settlements;



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more remote villages, especially in the mountainous districts of Baysun and Sariosiya, were served by smaller primary schools or were inadequately covered. The material conditions of the schools varied widely: buildings ranged from purpose-built schoolhouses in the regional centre to adapted dwellings in remote villages. Equipment, textbooks, and teaching aids were chronically in short supply, partly because of the general scarcity in the Soviet educational system of the period and partly because the recent alphabet transition had rendered existing Uzbek-language textbooks obsolete.

The institutional formation of the public education system in Surkhandarya region during the first months of 1941 acquires particular significance when viewed against the background of the wartime and post-war developments that followed. The outbreak of the Great Patriotic War on 22 June 1941 imposed conditions of acute resource scarcity, mass mobilisation of male personnel (including male teachers), the influx of evacuated populations from the western parts of the Soviet Union, and a general redirection of state resources toward defence. Under such conditions, the existence of a functioning, if newly established, regional educational apparatus proved essential for maintaining the continuity of schooling, even in highly attenuated forms.

Several features of the pre-war foundation merit particular emphasis. First, the three-tier administrative structure (republican Commissariat — regional oblon — district rayono) gave the system a vertical integration that allowed instructions and resources to move efficiently between levels. Even when individual elements of the system came under severe stress during the war years, the structure as such did not disintegrate. Second, the existence of the Termez Pedagogical College provided the region with an in-house source of teacher training that could be expanded during and after the war to compensate for personnel losses. Third, the



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formal incorporation of the region into the centralised personnel distribution system of the People's Commissariat of Education enabled the region to draw on graduates of neighbouring higher pedagogical institutions during the wartime emergency.

At the same time, the constraints under which the pre-war system was established left enduring marks on its subsequent trajectory. The unfinished alphabet transition meant that, throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s, the methodological and textbook base of Uzbek-language instruction remained weak. The shortage of qualified teachers at the moment of the region's establishment was structurally inherited and was exacerbated by the wartime mobilisation. The geographical and demographic features of the region — its scattered rural population, mountainous terrain, multi-ethnic composition — continued to shape the trajectory of educational development for decades afterwards.

Conclusion

The establishment of Surkhandarya region on 6 March 1941 marked the formal beginning of an autonomous public education administrative system in the south-eastern periphery of the Uzbek SSR. Based on the analysis presented in this article, the following conclusions can be drawn.

First, the formation of the region was the culmination of a long administrative trajectory that began with the establishment of Surkhandarya okrug in 1925, passed through the period of direct republican subordination after 1930, and was completed with the elevation of the territory to full regional (viloyat) status in 1941. The specific timing of the regional formation reflected both general Soviet administrative rationalisation and the particular strategic and economic considerations associated with the south-eastern border region.



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Second, the public education administrative system of the region was organised on the standard Soviet three-tier model, with the Regional Education Department (oblon) at the regional level and District Education Departments (rayono) at the district level. This structural organisation provided the institutional framework within which the educational policies of the Soviet state could be implemented at the regional level.

Third, the pedagogical infrastructure of the region at the moment of its establishment was anchored by the Termez Pedagogical College as the principal local source of teacher training, supplemented by the distribution of graduates from the higher pedagogical institutions of the Uzbek SSR. While this infrastructure was institutionally sound, it was substantively insufficient for the demands placed on it, especially under wartime conditions.

Fourth, the policy environment in which the regional system was established — particularly the unfinished Latin-to-Cyrillic alphabet transition — created methodological problems that the regional administration was unable to resolve in the brief pre-war period and that would persist throughout the 1940s and beyond.

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