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The History of the Public Education System in Vilna Governorate (the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries). Part 1

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Abstract

This paper examines the public education system in Vilna Governorate in the period between the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century. This part of the paper analyzes the system's development in the period 1803–1880.

In putting this work together, the authors drew upon a pool of statistical data published in Memorandum Books for Vilna Governorate in the period from the 1860s to the 1910s, as well as an array of statistical data on the Vilna Educational District published in the scholarly journal *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya*. The authors also made use of several regulatory documents.

The authors conclude by noting that the system of public education in Vilna Governorate had developed markedly distinct characteristics of its own. One of these characteristics was based on the motley ethnical and confessional composition of the area's population. As a consequence, in the period 1803–1880 the region witnessed two Polish uprisings, which would ultimately have an effect on its system of public education. At the same time, the development of the system of public education in Vilna Governorate had a set of features common to other regions within the Russian Empire as well. More specifically, there was a sharp rise in the number of educational institutions subsequent to the 1861 reform, and afterwards there was a drop in that number in the second half of the 1870s.

Keywords: Vilna Governorate, public education system, primary schools, secondary education.

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1. Introduction

Vilna Governorate was an administrative-territorial unit in the Russian Empire, with its capital being the city of Vilna (present-day Vilnius). Currently, most of the area is part of Belarus, with the rest of it, including the capital, forming part of Lithuania. This paper examines the development of the system of public education in Vilna Governorate in the period 1803–1880.

2. Materials and methods

In putting this work together, the authors drew upon a pool of statistical data published in Memorandum Books for Vilna Governorate in the period from the 1860s to the 1910s, as well as an array of statistical data on the Vilna Educational District published in the scholarly journal *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya* ([Nizshie uchilishcha, 1878](#); [Nizshie uchilishcha, 1879](#); [Srednie uchebnye zavedeniya, 1896](#); [Sbornik svedenii, 1873](#)). The authors also made use of several regulatory documents (e.g., the Edict on the Establishment of the Educational Districts ([Imennoi ukaz, 27](#))).

In conducting the research reported in this paper, the authors employed both general methods of research, including concretization and summarization, and traditional methods of historical analysis. In addition, use was made of the historical-situational method, with a focus on exploring particular historical facts within the context of the given period in conjunction with various “neighboring” events and facts.

3. Discussion

There is a relatively small amount of historiography on the system of public education in Vilna Governorate. Prior to the 1860s, the system is not mentioned even in the memorandum books. However, starting in the 1890s, along with descriptions of the education system in specific years ([O-v, 1895](#); [O-v, 1896](#); [O-v, 1898](#); [Il'in, 1905](#); [Il'in, 1905a](#)), there even emerge some real research studies on the subject. Most researchers regard as the first ever work of this kind in the pre-revolutionary period I.P. Kornilov's “The Russian Cause in Northwestern Krai” ([Kornilov, 1901](#)).

During the Soviet time, the subject was explored in the context of the history of the national republics. For instance, the subject of public education in Belarus was investigated by I.M. Il'yushin and S.A. Umreiko ([Il'yushin, Umreiko, 1961](#)). During the post-Soviet period, the subject was now investigated by scholars from two republics – Lithuania and Belarus ([Aleksandravičius, Kulakauskas, 1996](#); [Sergeenkova i dr., 2008](#); [Ershova, 2006](#)), as well as from the Russian Federation ([Korotkov, 1993](#)).

Of major significance in terms of analysis of historiography are works on the development of the public education system in other governorates, like Vologda Governorate ([Cherkasov et al., 2019](#); [Cherkasov et al., 2019a](#)), Vyatka Governorate ([Magsumov et al., 2018](#)), and Don Oblast ([Peretyatko, Zulfugarzade, 2017](#); [Peretyatko, Zulfugarzade, 2017a](#)), as well as the Caucasus ([Natolochnaya et al., 2018](#); [Magsumov et al., 2018](#); [Shevchenko et al., 2016](#)). This helps examine the issue through the prism of comparison with various regions in the country.

4. Results

The Vilna Educational District was among the first six educational districts in the Russian Empire created via Emperor Alexander I's edict of January 24, 1803 ([Imennoi ukaz, 27](#)). At the time of its establishment, the district comprised educational institutions in eight governorates: Vilna, Vitebsk, Volhynian, Grodno, Mogilev, Minsk, Kiev, and Podolia. The Major Vilna School was made the district's educational and administrative center. It would later be transformed into Imperial Vilna University via an edict of April 4, 1803.

It is worth remembering that when the Vilna educational district was created the region's system of public education featured specialized schools in the charge of the Department of Religious Affairs and major and minor public specialized schools*. As at 1803, the region's major and minor public specialized schools had 767 students, and specialized schools in the charge of the Department of Religious Affairs had 5,820 students ([Il'yushin, Umreiko, 1961](#)).

* Major and minor schools were part of the European system ([Rajović et al., 2018](#); [Rajović et al., 2018a](#); [Mamadaliyev et al., 2018](#)).

One of the first projects by the Russian Administration was the unification of schools within Vilna Governorate. Under the University Statute of 1804, within the Vilna Educational District the authorities established a set of four-grade district specialized schools, as well as one-grade and two-grade parochial specialized schools in the charge of the Department of Religious Affairs. A new reform, launched in 1828, would change the system of public education in the region. From there on out the primary education system would feature parochial and educational specialized schools, while the secondary one would include gymnasias.

In the period 1830-1831, the region witnessed a Polish uprising. The unrest involved a group of students and instructors at Vilna University, which resulted in the facility closing down in 1832 and the Vilna Educational District getting disbanded. The educational facilities were placed into the charge of the Belarus Educational District. This state of affairs lasted up until 1850, when the Belarus Educational District was disbanded as well, with the Vilna Educational District restored in its place. Over that period, the Russian Administration carried out a tremendous amount of work on training new personnel, both for the specialized schools and for Vilna University.

By 1848, the Vilna Educational District had 27 two-grade public specialized schools with 1,792 students (1,240 boys and 552 girls). There were 109 primary public one-grade specialized schools, with a combined 3,053 boys and 1,935 girls enrolled in them (Nizshie uchilishcha, 1879: 64).

By 1855, the Vilna, Grodno, Minsk, Mogilev, and Vitebsk governorates had a combined 19 five-grade and eight 8 three-grade district specialized schools, 89 parochial specialized schools in the charge of the Ministry of Public Education, 89 schools in the charge of the Department of State Property, seven specialized schools in the charge of churches representing foreign faiths, and three female schools. There also were schools in the charge of the Holy Synod.

Back to Vilna Governorate. As at 1861, the system of public education in the city of Vilna had quite an extensive network of schools (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1. Educational Institutions in the Capital of Vilna Governorate

	Educational institution	Number of facilities	Total number of students	
			Males	Females
	A. Institutions in the charge of the Vilna Directorate for Specialized Schools:			
1	Gymnasium with parallel classes	1	559	-
2	Reception (preparatory) class		46	-
3	Real department		80	-
4	Valuation surveyor classes		36	-
5	Progymnasium	1	260	-
	Parochial specialized schools:			
6	Ostrobramskoe	1	31	-
7	Zarechnoe	1	17	-
8	Zamkovoe	1	24	-
9	Two-grade school	1	25	-
10	Evangelical Lutheran school for both sexes	1	9	10
11	Specialized school at a foster home for both sexes	1	13	22
	B. Institutions in the charge of the Directorate of the Vilna Institute for Nobles:			
12	Institute for Nobles	1	162	-
13	Public magnet boarding school for females	1	-	51
14	Private boarding schools for females	7	-	234
15	Parochial schools for females	2	-	35
	C. Institutions in the charge of the Directorate of the Vilna Rabbinical Specialized School:			
16	Rabbinical specialized school	1	348	-
17	Former public real specialized school	1	55	-

18	First-rate public Jewish specialized school	1	70	-
19	Talmud-Torah school*	1	69	
	Yeshivas, run by:			
20	Iochelson	1	25	-
21	Margolis	1	52	-
22	Female boarding school run by Zilverovich	1	-	20
	Female schools, run by:			
23	Perel	1	-	96
24	Hermeise	1	-	60
25	Schreiber	1	-	95
26	Sabbatical festal trades school	1	-	100
27	D. Specialized school for non-resident females under the Supreme Patronage of Her Majesty the Empress Maria Aleksandrovna	1	-	89
	E. Department of Military Affairs			
28	Alexander Cadet Corps	1	383	-
	F. Institutions in the charge of the Department of Religious Affairs for those raised in the Orthodox faith:			
29	Seminary	1	182	-
30	District religious specialized school	1	125	-
31	Specialized school for the daughters of the Orthodox clergy	1	-	30
	For those raised in the Roman Catholic faith			
32	Seminary	1	118	-
33	Sunday school	1	70	-
	Total	40	3,601, including 767 females	

Note. Data from (Sbornik, 1868: 151-153).

As evidenced from Table 1, the governorate's capital, Vilna, had around 40 educational institutions with a large number of students, 3,601, i.e. an average of 90 individuals per educational institution.

To provide a general insight into the situation, let us examine it through the prism of the system of public education in the governorate exclusive of the city of Vilna (Table 2).

Table 2. System of Public Education in Vilna Governorate, Exclusive of Its Capital, Vilna, as at 1861

	Educational institutions	Number of facilities	Total number of students	
			Males	Females
	In the Vilna District			
	A. Institutions in the charge of the Vilna Directorate for Specialized Schools:			
1	Parochial rural specialized school in the estate of Pavlovo	1	27	-
2	Cheders [†] in the cities of Lida and Ashmyany and the borough of Merkinė in the Trakai District	20	73	
	In Lida and the Lida District			

* Talmud-Torah schools were Jewish religious educational institutions for boys.

[†] The cheder was a Jewish primary school for boys.

3	Lida three-grade district specialized school for nobles	1	41	-
4	Reception (preparatory) class		23	-
5	Shchuchyn parochial two-grade specialized school	1	32	-
6	Lida public Jewish first-rate specialized school	1	28	-
	In the city of Ashmyany and the Ashmyany District			
7	Ashmyany parochial specialized school	1	34	
8	Private female one-grade boarding school in the city of Ashmyany	1	-	12
9	Ashmyany public Jewish first-rate specialized school	1	35	-
10	Jewish private female school in Ashmyany	1	-	10
	In the city of Trakai and the Trakai District			
11	Trakai parochial specialized school	1	23	-
12	Public Jewish first-rate specialized school in the borough of Merkinė	1	23	-
	Institutions in the charge of the Švenčionys Directorate for Specialized Schools:			
	In the city of Švenčionys			
13	Gymnasium	1	130	-
14	Reception (preparatory) class		10	-
15	Public Jewish first-rate specialized school	1	32	-
	In the city of Dzisna			
16	Two-grade parochial specialized school	1	49	-
17	Public Jewish specialized school	1	27	-
	In the borough of Maladziečna in the Vileyka District			
18	Progymnasium	1	93	-
19	Reception (preparatory) class		13	
20	One-grade parochial specialized school	1	6	-
21	Public Jewish first-rate specialized school	1	12	-
	In the borough of Budslau			
22	Parochial specialized schools	1	31	-
	In the cities of Švenčionys, Vileyka, and Dzisna			
23	Cheders	33	79	
24	Talmud-Torah school	3	35	-
25	Specialized schools in state peasants' villages in the charge of the Department of State Property	28	1,249	-
	Total	105	2,127	

Note. Data from (Sbornik, 1868: 155-156).

Exclusive of the capital, Vilna Governorate had 105 educational institutions with a combined 2,127 students enrolled in them, i.e. there were 20.2 individuals per educational institution in the area. When combined with the capital, the figure would rise to 39.5. It is worth taking into account that over 30 % of the area's educational institutions were accounted for by Jewish institutions of primary learning – cheders, which each had an average of 2.8 individuals enrolled in them, i.e., in essence, these facilities provided education on an individual basis.

If we add up the numbers in Tables 1 and 2, the total number of students in Vilna Governorate in 1861 was 5,728. Given that the governorate's population at the time was around 902,000, there was one student per 174 residents. Understandably, the shares were not equal for the various estates. For instance, for nobles the figure was one to 20 (for males one to 16, and for females one to 71), and for the clergy it was one to 17 (for males one to 10, and for females one to

63). The figure was the highest with freemen and merchants – one to 12 (for males one to 22, and for females one to 9). The figure was the lowest with peasants – one to 433 ([Sbornik, 1868: 158](#)).

Following the Polish uprising of 1863-1864, which involved a group of instructors and students, the region witnessed a massive slash in the number of instructors who were Polish and Catholic. The authorities closed down the Vilna Institute for Nobles, which provided the instruction in the Polish language. The measures undertaken helped curtail the reactionary, nationalistic environment in the system of public education in Vilna Governorate. The abolition of serfdom, as well as the zemstvo self-government reform, provided a powerful impetus for the development of regions in the Russian Empire. Vilna Governorate was no exception, with its system of public education enjoying dynamic development.

Based on 1872 data, the governorate had the following educational institutions in place:

- those in the charge of the Department of Religious Affairs: two seminaries* (143 students), a district religious specialized school (110 students), and a specialized school for the female children of the clergy (94 students);

- those in the charge of the Department of Military Affairs: a cadet infantry specialized school (232 students);

- those in charge of the Department of Civil Affairs: two gymnasia (for males – 593 students, for females – 284 students), a Mariinsky higher female specialized school (274 students), a teacher's seminary (73 students), a primary specialized school at the seminary (70 students), six district two-grade specialized schools, 26 parochial schools, 331 public schools (9,807 students), five Christian private female boarding schools and schools for both sexes, a Rabbinical specialized school (transformed in 1873 into the Jewish Teacher's Institute) (414 students), 6 public Jewish first-rate specialized schools, and 12 other Jewish specialized schools. There were a total of 384 institutions, with 42 of these being in Vilna, with a total of 15,279 students enrolled in them (with 4,328 of these being in the city of Vilna) ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1874: XVIII](#)). The total number of students relative to the number of residents in the governorate was one to 68, or 1.45 % ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1874: XVIII](#)).

In 1873, the number of educational institutions increased by one to reach 385, thanks to the establishment of a progymnasium in Vilna. At the same time, the total number of students reached 15,850. The total number of students relative to the governorate's population was one to 66, or 1.48 % of the population ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1875: XIX-XX](#)).

By 1875, the number of educational institutions reached 397, with 44 of these being in Vilna. The total number of students reached 17,093. The total number of students relative to the total number of residents was one to 64 ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1876: XVIII](#)).

In 1876, the number of educational institutions dropped to total 361, with 45 of these being in Vilna. With that said, the number of students almost did not change, totaling 17,001 people ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1877: XX](#)).

In 1877, the number of educational institutions in the governorate continued to drop, totaling 340, with 45 of these being in the capital. With that said, there was quite a significant drop in the number of students – to 16,007 people ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1878: XVII-XVIII](#)). Based on data from the scholarly journal *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya*, by January 1, 1878, the number of students dropped even more, totaling 14,328 people, with 13,237 of these being boys and 1,091 being girls ([Nizshie uchilishcha, 1878: 53](#)).

By 1878, the number of educational institutions continued to drop, totaling 336, with 44 of these being in the capital. The total number of students was a bit up, reaching 14,537 ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1879: XVIII](#)).

In 1880, the number of educational institutions dropped to 330, with 44 of these being in Vilna. The total number of students, compared with 1878, remained virtually the same, totaling 14,565 people ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1879: XIX](#)).

The annual figures in Table 3 can provide a better idea of the positive and negative dynamics of the development of the public education system in the region.

* One of the seminaries was Lithuanian, and the other was Roman Catholic ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1875: XIX](#)).

Table 3. Development of the System of Public Education in Vilna Governorate in the period 1861–1880

Years	Number of educational institutions	Number of students	Average number of students in one educational institution
1861	145	5,728	39.5
1872	384	15,279	39.7
1873	385	15,850	41.1
1875	397	17,093	43.0
1876	361	17,001	47.1
1877	340	16,007	47.1
1878	336	14,537	43.2
1880	330	14,565	44.1

Table 3 illustrates Russia's nationwide consistent pattern with regard to a rise in the number of educational institutions. It is worth noting that in the first decade following the 1860s reforms, the governorates witnessed a major increase in the number of schools. Schools were established on a wide scale with financial support from the zemstvo self-governments, with peasants often exempted from paying for school. They were also established in a private manner, thanks to the efforts of the local clergy, without any funding provided for the purpose whatsoever (Cherkasov et al., 2019a: 422). The 1860s euphoria was followed by a period in the 1870s when running a wide network of educational institutions became financially costly to the self-governments, with a portion of the schools coming under the charge of the Ministry of Public Education and the rest having to close down altogether. The largest number of schools in Vilna Governorate opened up in 1875, which was followed by a slump. Regarding the average number of students in a single educational institution, as evidenced by Table 3, there was growth virtually throughout, with the only exception being the year 1878, when there occurred a sharp drop in the number of students in Vilna Governorate.

5. Conclusion

The system of public education in Vilna Governorate had developed markedly distinct characteristics of its own. One of these characteristics was based on the motley ethnical and confessional composition of the area's population. As a consequence, in the period 1803–1880 the region witnessed two Polish uprisings, which would ultimately have an effect on its system of public education. At the same time, the development of the system of public education in Vilna Governorate had a set of features common to other regions within the Russian Empire as well. More specifically, there was a sharp rise in the number of educational institutions subsequent to the 1861 reform, and afterwards there was a drop in that number in the second half of the 1870s.

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