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## The History of the Public Education System in Vilna Governorate (the Second Half of the 19th and the Early 20th Centuries). Part 2

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### Abstract

This paper examines the public education system in Vilna Governorate in the period between the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This part of the paper analyzes the system's development in the period 1880–1908.

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 1880 to 1913, 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 certain regulatory documents.

The authors conclude by noting that during the period 1880–1908 the region witnessed a gradual increase in the number of educational institutions and students (a definite rise of at least three times). Estates-wise, the period was characterized by a sharp increase in students from rural areas and a drop in those who were the children of nobles and functionaries. In terms of students' religious affiliation, the way was led by Orthodox Christians, followed by Catholics and then Jews.

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

### 1. Introduction

Vilna Governorate was an administrative-territorial unit in the Russian Empire, with its capital being the city of Vilna (present-day Vilnius). At present, most of the area is part of Belarus, with the rest of it, including the capital, forming part of Lithuania. This paper examines the

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development of the public education system in Vilna Governorate in the period 1880–1908. The year 1908 was chosen as the upper limit for a reason – it is during that specific period that the Russian government introduced several bills aimed at instituting compulsory primary education in Russia.

## **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 1880 to 1913, 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 paucity of historiography on the public education system 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 I.P. Kornilov's ‘The Russian Cause in Northwestern Krai’ as the first ever work of this kind in the pre-revolutionary period ([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 to the analysis of related 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](#)). Coming at it from this angle 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, Volyn, 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. During the first 80 years of the operation of the Vilna Educational District, the development of the public education system in Vilna Governorate was a rather complicated process. These complications were associated with (1) the motley ethnic makeup of the region's population and (2) the peasants' stereotyped image of education as useless. Subsequent to the abolition of serfdom and based on the implementation of a series of administrative governance reforms, the situation would ultimately change, with the process of development of the education system gaining new momentum both in the region and throughout the nation.

[Table 1](#) illustrates the development of the public education system in Vilna Governorate during the period 1880–1908.

**Table 1.** Total Educational Institutions and Students in Vilna Governorate in the Period 1880–1908 (Natolochnaya et al., 2019: 661; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1885: 18; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1889: 62; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1892: 124, 126; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1898: 267-269; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1901: 26; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1913: 36)

Year	Total educational institutions	Total students	Average number of students at an educational institution
1861	145	5,728	39.5
1880	330	14,565	44.1
1883	335	16,411	48.9
1884	337	17,597	52.2
1886	738*	22,160	30.0
1888	813	28,070	34.5
1892	783	24,331	31.0
1896	1,545 <sup>†</sup>	49,153	31.8
1900	1,624	55,755	34.3
1902	1,628	62,340	38.2
1903	1,361	62,857	46.1
1904	1,491	65,349	43.8
1905	1,478	62,535	42.3
1906	1,490	63,941	42.9
1907	1,355	63,139	46.5
1908	1,529	71,374	46.6

Note that prior to 1886 the authorities did not keep statistical track of parochial schools, which explains the sharp rise in the number of educational institutions in the region at the time. In 1892, there was a drop in educational institutions and students due to reduced funding. Of note is also the fact that there was a sharp drop in students per school. The thing is that the region's parochial schools and grammar schools, which accounted for about half of all its educational institutions, were distinguished by being underfilled, whereas schools within its public education system numbered by 1908 an average of 100 students.

**Table 2.** Departmental Affiliation of Educational Institutions in Vilna Governorate in the Period 1880–1908 (Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1885: 18; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1887: 15-16; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1889: 60-62; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1892: 124, 126; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1898: 267-269; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1901: 26; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1913: 36)

Year	Directorate for Public Schools	Diocesan clergy	Department of Military Affairs
1884	332	4 <sup>‡</sup>	1
1886	474	263	1
1888	456	356	1
1892	382	399	2
1898	946	598	1
1900	845 <sup>§</sup>	778	1
1902	888	739	1
1903	880	480	1
1904	837	653	1
1905	768	709	1
1906	755	734	1

\* 259 of these being parochial schools (attended by a combined total of 4,326 students)

<sup>†</sup> 62 of these being parochial schools and 530 – grammar schools

<sup>‡</sup> exclusive of parochial schools

<sup>§</sup> inclusive of 563 specialized Jewish institutions

1907	759	595	1
1908	827	701	1

As evidenced by [Table 2](#), about half of all educational institutions in the region at the time were parochial schools and grammar schools.

Of considerable interest is also the development of specialized Jewish education in Vilna Governorate. By departmental affiliation, the region's Jewish schools were part of the Directorate for Public Schools. The distribution of Christian and Jewish schools in Vilna Governorate at the time is illustrated in [Table 3](#).

**Table 3.** Distribution of Christian and Jewish Schools in Vilna Governorate in the Period 1891–1908 ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1901: 40](#); [Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1913: 36](#))

Type of educational institution	Total educational institutions across the years														
	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1902	1903	1905	1907	1908
Public schools	187	187	190	190	191	193	194	197	207	221	245	267	278	384	474
Cheders	90	85	78	614	614	638	635	591	545	496	507	480	342	275	255

**Table 4.** Distribution of Students across the Estates in Vilna Governorate in the Period 1884–1898 ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1885: 18](#); [Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1889: 63](#); [Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1892: 124-125](#); [Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1898: 264](#))

Estate / Year	1884	1888	1892	1898
Children of nobles and functionaries	2,337	2,621	2,862	3,156
Those in holy orders	562	470	594	567
Urban dwellers	5,422	7,162	7,668	7,947
Rural dwellers	9,128	12,122	11,074	14,397
Those of military rank	29	27	127	82
Foreigners and raznochintsy	119	67	84	76
Total	17,597*	22,469	22,409	26,225

As evidenced from [Table 4](#), during the period between the 1880s and early 1890s about 50 % of all students at schools run by the Directorate for Public Schools were rural dwellers. Around 35 % were urban dwellers, and a little less than 15 % were the children of nobles and functionaries. At the latter end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the region witnessed a redistribution of students. Specifically, there was a sharp drop in children of nobles: from 19.5 % in 1898 to 13.9 % in 1899 and to 4.1 % in 1900. There also was a drop in urban dwellers: 1898 – 26.5 %, 1899 – 25.6 %, and 1900 – 11.9 %. At the same time, there was a sharp rise in rural dwellers: 1898 – 54 %, 1899 – 60.5 %, and 1900 – 84 % ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1901: 37](#)).

\* Exclusive of students at parochial schools.

**Table 5.** Distribution of Students across the Religions in Vilna Governorate in the Period 1884–1900 (Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1885: 18; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1889: 63; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1892: 125; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1898: 264; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1901: 38)

Religion \ Year	1884	1888	1892	1898	1900
Orthodox Christians	6,464	7,875	8,130	9,619	23,054
Schismatics	108	128	146	245	463
Catholics	6,590	8,187	7,777	9,995	15,341
Protestants and Lutherans	259	263	305	359	467
Jews	4,118	5,953	5,959	15,866	16,351
Karaites	7	9	23	29	434
Muslims	51	54	69	112	36
Total	17,597	22,469	22,409	26,225	55,755

As evidenced from [Table 5](#), during the period spanning the 1880s and 1890s, the numbers of Catholics and Orthodox Christians at schools run by the Directorate for Public Schools were about the same (around 35 % each), with these two groups followed by Jewish students (around 25 %). In [Table 5](#), data for the year 1900 includes students at parochial schools and grammar schools. Based on this, the percentage of Orthodox Christian students in the region reached 40 %.

In the 1880s, wide use was made of Sunday and gala readings. This type of activity could draw up to 200 participants on Sundays and gala days in many of the areas where Orthodox Christians resided. Unfortunately, in some schools situated in areas with a predominantly Roman Catholic population, on account of nonchalance on the part of Roman Catholic clergy, readings of this kind were mainly avoided by the adult population – to only be attended by public school students.

Apart from the region's Directorate-run schools, the cause of public education in the governorate continued to be propelled by parochial schools and grammar schools. These schools, especially at the very outset of their operation, had met with numerous difficulties and challenges. However, thanks to support from the Diocesan School Council and funding from the government, the situation would later improve. As of 1888, the Diocesan School Council was in charge of 352 schools, with 24 of those being two-grade schools and the rest being grammar schools ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1889: 65](#)).

Of definite interest is the issue of school attendance among the region's children of school-going age. [Table 6](#) displays the data for the year 1900.

**Table 6.** School Attendance in Vilna Governorate in 1900 ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1901: 38](#))

Religion	Total children of school-going age (boys and girls combined)	Of these, total children who went to school	Percentage
Protestants	467	467	100
Karaites	443	443	100
Jews	24,577	16,351	66.5
Orthodox Christians	42,577	23,054	51.9
Schismatics	2,376	463	19.5
Catholics	100,375	15,341	15.3
Moslems	388	36	9.3
Total	170,636	55,755	32.6

Note that in 1893 Vilna Governorate had one public school per every 194 km<sup>2</sup> and every 5,188 residents (males and females combined). As a result, only 8 of the region's children went to school ([O-v, 1895: 3](#)). In 1896, the figure dropped a little – one school per every 4,798 residents and one student per every 76 residents ([O-v, 1898: 140](#)).

Considerable attention in public schools in Vilna Governorate, just like across the rest of Russia at the time, was devoted to vocational training. The governorate had in place a system of training in crafts and horticulture.

In terms of extracurricular activities, wide use was made of solemn literary-vocal social gatherings and gala readings. In 1896, the Head of the governorate's Directorate for Public Schools wrote in a report that gala readings had the greatest success in areas with a predominantly Orthodox Christian population (O-v, 1898: 179). By tradition, of major significance were libraries. At year-end 1896, Vilna Governorate had 89 libraries with a combined collection of 6,552 volumes. In that year, the libraries lent out a total of 8,637 volumes, with most of the readers being literate peasants, former public school students. Most of the literature borrowed was related to religion, history, and natural history (O-v, 1898: 179).

So what were the outcomes achieved by the public education system by 1908? As commonly known, no census was conducted during that period – so the only source covering the matter in 1908 might be a pool of annual military conscription data on total literate recruits\*. Data of this kind are available on Vilna Governorate as well (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Literacy Levels across the Districts within Vilna Governorate in the Period 1902–1908 (based on materials from the Vilna Governorate Office for Military Conscription) (Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1913: 38)

Conscription year	Vilna	District							Across the governorate
		Vilna District	Vileyka District	Dzisna District	Lida District	Ashmyany District	Švenčionys District	Trakai District	
1902	65.7	39.0	61.7	63.9	58.4	45.5	50.3	36.5	50.5
1903	72.1	34.7	46.0	47.6	43.2	45.9	41.2	31.3	43.5
1904	65.2	15.6	51.9	45.9	45.3	51.1	55.8	28.3	50.6
1905	89.5	63.2	78.5	68.0	69.0	78.8	79.5	69.9	74.0
1906	67.1	40.1	63.8	58.7	49.3	54.2	48.3	36.8	52.9
1907	67.1	40.7	69.9	37.5	56.6	55.0	51.7	37.5	51.3
1908	87.1	57.1	72.5	63.2	55.7	57.9	53.9	41.0	60.3

As evidenced by Table 7, the percentage of the literate not only varies significantly across the region's districts and within a given year but appears to vary sharply for each district as well. A percentage of the literate this impermanent and unstable may be testimony to an unstable public education system in the region, which may have been the case in the region due to the following factors:

- 1) the region's schools not being distributed evenly enough among its population;
- 2) quite commonly, difficulty enrolling in a school due to its being overfilled.

It should be noted that the above data on literacy rates in the region may lack formal validity, as most were gathered by way of surveys of newly-enrolled learners.

As regards the region's teaching workforce, the bulk of this group in Vilna Governorate was made up of teacher's seminary graduates. Specifically, at year-end 1896 teacher's seminary graduates accounted for 80 % of all teachers in the governorate, with 5.5 % of the workforce being graduates from a secondary educational institution and 14.5 % being certified primary school teachers. There were no teachers with a higher education in the region at the time (O-v, 1898: 156).

\* In 2011, researcher A.A. Cherkasov, too, drew extensively upon the materials on military conscription (when investigating the efficiency of the public education system in the Russian Empire) (Cherkasov, 2011).

## 5. Conclusion

During the period 1880–1908, the region witnessed a gradual increase in the number of educational institutions and students (a definite rise of at least three times). Estates-wise, the period was characterized by a sharp increase in students from rural areas and a drop in those who were the children of nobles and functionaries. In terms of students' religious affiliation, the way was led by Orthodox Christians, followed by Catholics and then Jews.

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