THE INTERRELATION OF WOMEN’S EDUCATION AND LABOUR IN THE BUKHARA REGION, 1925–1941: A HISTORICAL-DYNAMIC ANALYSIS

Gulhayo Axtamovna Qayumova

Teacher at General Education School No. 8 in Bukhara City

Abstract. The article examines how women’s education and women’s labour were linked in the Bukhara region between 1925 and 1941, a period that covers the Bukhara province, the Bukhara okrug (1926–1930), the period of districts under direct republican control and the Bukhara oblast created in 1938. Rather than treating schooling and employment as separate fields of Soviet policy, the study approaches them as a coupled system and traces how the direction and strength of the link changed over time. Using archive-based studies by Uzbek historians, regional museum and press materials and foreign historiography, the article identifies four stages in which the link moved from education acting as a gateway to public work, through unveiling as a joint precondition, to the subordination of schooling to production plans and, finally, to institutional consolidation. The analysis shows that labour mobilisation repeatedly outran the educational base, that teaching became the profession in which education and labour coincided most fully, and that the coupling was achieved at a high social cost.

Keywords: Bukhara okrug, Bukhara oblast, women’s education, women’s labour, literacy campaign, hujum, teacher training, kolkhoz, historical-dynamic analysis.

The transformation of women’s status in Soviet Central Asia has become one of the most debated subjects of twentieth-century history. D.Northrop interpreted the campaigns around the veil as an instrument through which Soviet power sought to remake local society [15], whereas M.Kamp demonstrated that Uzbek women themselves took an active part in the reforms and that the process cannot be reduced

to coercion from outside [14]. In Uzbek historiography, the topic has been re-examined since independence on the basis of archival documents [1; 2; 4; 7; 11].

Most of this literature, however, treats women’s education and women’s labour as two parallel lines of policy. Literacy campaigns are discussed in the history of public education, while women’s work is discussed in the history of collectivisation and industry. Yet in the sources the two appear constantly intertwined. Courses trained women for public posts, unveiling was presented as the condition for both schooling and work, and the museum propaganda of the 1930s tied the image of the educated woman directly to cotton and karakul production [5]. This suggests that the relationship between education and labour, and not only each of them separately, is the proper object of analysis.

The Bukhara region offers a particularly instructive case. Until 1920 it formed the core of the Bukhara Emirate, then passed through the period of the Bukhara People’s Soviet Republic, and after the national-territorial delimitation of 1924 became part of the Uzbek SSR. Within the Uzbek SSR it was a province until 1926 and an okrug in 1926–1930. After the okrug system was abolished in 1930, its districts were subordinated directly to the republic, and on 15 January 1938 the Bukhara oblast was formed. Strong religious and educational traditions, an economy specialised in cotton and karakul, and frequent administrative change make the region a demanding test for any general model of Soviet gender policy.

The aim of this article is to analyse the interrelation of women’s education and labour in the Bukhara region in 1925–1941 dynamically, that is, to identify how the direction, mechanisms and strength of this link changed from stage to stage.

Three groups of studies form the basis of the research. The first comprises Soviet-era works, which accumulated valuable statistics but presented the process exclusively as a record of achievement. M.M.Ziyomuhammedova’s study of the elimination of female illiteracy belongs to this tradition [9]. The second group consists of studies by Uzbek historians of the independence period. V.K.Nishonova examined the cultural aspects of the women’s question in Uzbekistan in the 1920s

and 1930s [10]. D.F.Akramov studied the place of women in Soviet education, drawing on the Bukhara press [1]. F.Kh.Bobojonova reconstructed the development of public education in Bukhara in 1925–1940 from documents of the National Archive of Uzbekistan [2]. D.Yodgoraliyev analysed the social consequences of the hujum using archival evidence [7], and A.Gulyamov and his co-authors described the pre-war activity of the Bukhara museum, including exhibitions aimed at women [5]. Researchers at Andijan State Pedagogical Institute used holdings of the Bukhara Regional State Archive (fond 546) in their study of the women’s departments [3].

The third group is foreign historiography. M.Kamp approached the hujum from the standpoint of Uzbek women’s own agency [14], D.Northrop read the veil as a symbol of the struggle between Soviet power and local society [15], A.Edgar provided comparative material on neighbouring Turkmenistan [12], and R.Han studied local supporters of unveiling through the journal «Yangi Yo’l» for 1926–1934 [13]. None of these works offers a regional synthesis for Bukhara, and none treats the education and labour link as a dynamic system.

Methodologically, the study rests on the principles of historicism, objectivity and systematicity. The historical-dynamic approach is applied in three steps. First, the period is divided into stages according to changes in policy and administration. Second, for each stage the dominant educational channel, the dominant labour channel and the mechanism connecting them are identified. Third, the direction of the link is determined, that is, whether education led labour or labour led education. Comparative-historical and statistical methods are used throughout, and republican indicators are clearly separated from those specific to Bukhara.

1. Stage one (1925–1926): education as a gateway to public work

In the first stage, education functioned primarily as a gateway through which women entered public employment. The groundwork had been laid in the BPSR period, when two-month courses organised by the women’s department of the Bukhara Communist Party trained 55 women as volost organisers [1]. Even then the

local press acknowledged openly, in M.S.Ahroriy’s article «Xotin» in «Ozod Buxoro», that women had not achieved real equality [1].

According to F.Kh.Bobojonova’s archive-based data, in 1925 Bukhara had 55 learners in literacy schools, 20 in teacher-training courses and 10 in the Soviet party school. In 1926 their number almost tripled, and all of the learners were women [2]. The significance of this shift lies less in the absolute numbers than in the type of training. Teacher-training and party courses did not simply teach reading and writing. They prepared women for specific public positions. At this stage, therefore, the direction of the link ran from education to labour, and the educational institution itself acted as the recruiting channel for women’s employment.

2. Stage two (1927–1929): unveiling as a joint precondition

The second stage was dominated by the hujum, launched officially on 8 March 1927 after the women’s department council for Central Asia had placed women’s liberation on its agenda in September 1926 [7; 13]. Unveiling now became a precondition for both schooling and work, because a woman who could not appear in public could attend neither a course nor a collective workplace. By spring 1927 more than 100,000 women in the republic were reported to have abandoned the paranji, although scholars stress the role of party pressure in producing this figure [7]. A 1928 photograph of members of the local women’s division in Bukhara, many of whom had recently unveiled, documents the presence of this cohort in the region [16].

The coupling was costly. In 1927–1928 more than 2,500 active women in Uzbekistan, among them teachers, kolkhoz activists, mahalla leaders and literacy workers, lost their lives, and in 1928 alone 671 people were arrested for unlawful acts against women, seven of whom were sentenced to death [7]. The victims were precisely those women whose position combined education and public work. In our view, this shows that the education and labour link was not merely an administrative goal but the main point of social conflict. Opponents of reform targeted the figure of the literate, working woman because she embodied the connection between the

two spheres. At the same time, public functions such as lay judging expanded, and in 1927–1929 some 563 women served as people’s assessors in the republic [7].

3. Stage three (1930–1937): labour leads education

In the third stage the direction of the link was reversed. The abolition of the women’s departments in 1930 moved the women’s question from a separate political line into general economic campaigns [16]. Mass collectivisation turned kolkhoz labour into the main channel of women’s participation in social production, and in the Bukhara region, with its specialisation in cotton and karakul, women’s labour was directed above all to these branches [5]. Education increasingly served production needs. Literacy was required for keeping work-day records, reading plan targets and taking part in kolkhoz meetings.

The Bukhara museum’s «8 March» exhibition of the 1930s illustrates this new hierarchy vividly. Through diagrams and photographs it presented the role of the Bukhara woman in modern life, and its declared aims were anti-religious propaganda, persuading women to abandon the paranji and directing the population towards cotton and karakul production [5]. In this exhibition, the educated, unveiled woman was no longer an end in herself but a means of fulfilling economic plans.

The educational infrastructure also expanded during this stage. Universal compulsory primary education was introduced across the USSR in 1930, and on 1 October 1930 the Bukhara Higher Pedagogical Institute was founded, which in the 1930s became the main base for training teachers for Bukhara and the surrounding areas [17]. Nevertheless, the data reveal a persistent lag. In Kogon, 58 per cent of girls were not enrolled in school [2], and in April 1938 the city of Bukhara still registered 4,227 illiterate and semi-literate residents [2]. Although this last figure is not broken down by sex, it shows that the educational base remained narrow at the very moment when demand for women’s labour was greatest. In our assessment, this is the central contradiction of the stage. Labour mobilisation outran education, so that a large share of women entered the kolkhoz workforce with little or no schooling

and were concentrated in manual operations such as hoeing and cotton picking, while skilled and managerial positions remained largely closed to them [14; 15].

Crafts formed a distinct, intermediate channel. Bukhara’s traditional gold embroidery was reorganised into artels and later a factory, which preserved the master and apprentice tradition and reported fulfilling its five-year plans at 110–115 per cent [8]. Here learning took place within the work process itself, and the link between education and labour took the form of vocational transmission rather than formal schooling.

4. Stage four (1938–1941): institutional consolidation

The creation of the Bukhara oblast in 1938 brought education and labour policy under unified regional administration. By the eve of the war the cumulative results were visible at the republican level. By 1937 some 273,637 Uzbek women had completed literacy courses [7], and in 1941 women made up 11,215 of the 35,296 teachers in Uzbekistan, or about 31.7 per cent, of whom 5,429 were Uzbek women [6]. Yet violence had not disappeared, as Order No. 56 of the Prosecutor of the Uzbek SSR of 2 February 1939 noted continuing attacks on women [7].

Teaching emerges from this analysis as the profession in which education and labour coincided most fully. A woman teacher was simultaneously a product of the educational system, a participant in paid public labour and an agent who reproduced education for the next generation. The fact that teacher-training courses in Bukhara were already composed entirely of women in 1926 [2], and that women formed almost a third of the republic’s teachers by 1941 [6], suggests that this dual-function profession was the most stable form of the education and labour link throughout the period.

5. A dynamic model of the link

The indicators discussed above are summarised in Table 1, and the stage-by-stage dynamics of the link are presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Key indicators of women’s education and labour, 1925–1941

Indicator	Territory	Year	Value	Source
Learners in literacy schools	Bukhara	1925	55	[2]
Learners in teacher-training courses	Bukhara	1925	20	[2]
Size and composition of course learners	Bukhara	1926	≈3-fold increase, all women	[2]
Girls not enrolled in school	Kogon	1920s	58%	[2]
Women who abandoned the paranji	Uzbekistan	Spring 1927	over 100,000	[7]
Women serving as people’s assessors	Uzbekistan	1927–1929	563	[7]
Women who completed literacy courses	Uzbekistan	by 1937	273,637	[7]
Illiterate and semi-literate residents	Bukhara city	April 1938	4,227	[2]
Women teachers (of all teachers)	Uzbekistan	1941	11,215 / 35,296 (31.7%)	[6]

Table 2

Dynamics of the education and labour link in the Bukhara region

Stage	Educational channel	Labour channel	Connecting mechanism	Direction of the link
1925–1926	Literacy, teacher-training and party courses	Public posts, teaching, organising work	Courses as recruitment	Education → labour
1927–1929	Courses and clubs open to unveiled women	Public functions, lay judging, activism	Unveiling as a joint precondition	Mutual, mediated by the hujum

1930–1937	Compulsory primary schooling, pedagogical institute	Kolkhoz labour in cotton and karakul, craft artels	Production plans and propaganda	Labour → education
1938–1941	Regional school and teacher-training network	Teaching, kolkhoz and industrial work	Regional administration	Consolidated, two-way

Table 2 shows that the link between women’s education and labour was neither constant nor one-directional. In the first stage education led and labour followed. In the second the two were bound together by the external condition of unveiling. In the third the economy dictated the pace and content of education. Only in the fourth did a relatively balanced, institutionally consolidated relationship emerge. In our view, this sequence of a gateway, a joint precondition, labour leadership and consolidation can serve as a general model for comparing Bukhara with other regions of Uzbekistan once comparable regional statistics become available.

First, in the Bukhara region in 1925–1941 women’s education and labour formed a coupled system rather than two parallel policies, and the museum, the press and the courses consistently presented the educated woman and the working woman as one figure.

Second, the direction of the link changed over time. Education led labour in 1925–1926, unveiling bound them together in 1927–1929, labour led education in 1930–1937, and the relationship was institutionally consolidated in 1938–1941.

Third, labour mobilisation repeatedly outran the educational base. The 58 per cent of unenrolled girls in Kogon and the 4,227 illiterate residents of Bukhara city in 1938 indicate that many women entered collective labour with minimal schooling, which confined them to manual work.

Fourth, teaching was the profession in which education and labour coincided most fully, and it became the most stable outcome of the period, with women forming nearly a third of the republic’s teachers by 1941.

Fifth, the coupling was achieved at a high social cost, since the women who embodied the link between schooling and public work were the main targets of violence. Further research should reconstruct sex-disaggregated statistics for the Bukhara okrug and oblast from the holdings of the Bukhara Regional State Archive, which would allow the proposed dynamic model to be tested quantitatively.

REFERENCES

1. Akramov D.F. Sovet boshqaruvi davrida O’zbekiston maorifida xotin-qizlarning o’rni // Ўтмишга назар. – Тошкент, 2022. – № 4. – B. 18–24.
2. Бобожонова Ф.Х. Бухорода 1925–1940 йилларда халқ таълими масалаларига доир амалга оширилган ишлар // Buxoro davlat universiteti ilmiy axboroti. – 2025. – № 6 (123). – B. 120–124.
3. O’zbekiston xotin-qizlar bo’limlarining tashkil etilish tarixi va ularning ilk sovet davridagi faoliyat natijalari // ADPI Ilmiy xabarnomasi. – 2024. – № 2. – B. 4–7. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12176369.
4. Nabiyeva M. Cultural and educational life in Uzbekistan: traditions and transformational processes (the 1920s–1930s) // Jamiyat va innovatsiyalar. – 2026. – Special Issue 05. – P. 221–226.
5. Gulyamov A., Srojeva G., Haqqulov M. Buxoro muzeyining II jahon urushigacha bo’lgan davrdagi faoliyati // Modern Science and Research. – 2025. – Vol. 4, № 2. – B. 92–99.
6. Siddiqov M. Ikkinchi jahon urushi yillarida O’zbekiston SSRda xalq ta’limi holati. – DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15486988.
7. Yodgoraliyev D. 1927–1930-yillardagi «Hujum» harakati va paranji tashlash jarayonining ijtimoiy oqibatlari // Modern Science and Research. – 2025. – Vol. 4, № 10. – B. 714–716.
8. Utayeva F.X. Buxoro zardo’zlik fabrikasi tarixi // Buxoro davlat universiteti ilmiy axboroti. – 2025. – № 6 (123). – B. 132–[...].

9. Ziyomuhammedova M.M. [Ayollar savodsizligini tugatish tarixidan] // Sovet maktabi. – 1978.
10. Nishonova V.K. [1920–1930-yillarda O’zbekistonda xotin-qizlar masalasining madaniy jihatlari]: dissertatsiya. – 1998.
11. O’zbekistonning yangi tarixi. 2-kitob. O’zbekiston sovet mustamlakachiligi davrida. – Toshkent: Sharq, 2000.
12. Edgar A. Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924–29 // The Russian Review. – 2003. – Vol. 62, № 1. – P. 132–149.
13. Han R. The Unveiling Campaign in Uzbekistan and Its Local Support // Avrasya İncelemeleri Dergisi. – 2025. – Vol. 14, № 1. – P. 39–58.
14. Kamp M. The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism. – Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.
15. Northrop D. Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia. – Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
16. Khusankhodjaeva Sh. A Century Apart: Two Official Visions of Uzbek Womanhood // The Times of Central Asia. – 19.08.2026. – URL: https://timesca.com/a-century-apart-two-official-visions-of-uzbek-womanhood/