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## NATIONAL MINORITY VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS ON RIGHT BANK UKRAINE IN THE 1920S AND EARLY 1930S

### Summary

Vocational education in Ukraine is currently in a challenging condition. Despite the fact that the job market is in severe need of skilled workers, former technical schools are failing to make ends meet. From a modern perspective, it is vital to analyze the difficulties surrounding the establishment and operation of vocational schools for national minorities in Right Bank Ukraine in the 1920s – 1930s.

The purpose of this article is to provide a detailed research and analysis of the history of vocational schools for national minorities in a multinational region such as Right Bank Ukraine during the korenization period. The study incorporates general scientific and special historical methods alongside with the fundamental principles of historical research: historicism, scientificity, objectivity, and systematicity.

The Soviet government prioritized vocational education as part of its korenization agenda. Vocational schools with Hebrew, Polish, German, and other languages of teaching trained specialists in a variety of specialties. However, this process was fraught with challenges, including a lack of material assistance from the authorities. Vocational schools aided in the formation of a new Soviet type of an individual.

**Keywords:** vocational education, korenization, national minorities, vocational schools

### Introduction

In light of the Soviet program of korenization (nativization), the authorities made secondary, vocational, political, and social education a top priority for both the main ethnic

group and representatives of national minorities. The Bolshevik national policy included a number of measures aimed at meeting the cultural and educational needs of ethnic minorities. In this regard, as well as in terms of ideological policy, directive authorities emphasized vocational education and, in particular, vocational schools as the primary institutions offering a diverse variety of working specialties. Vocational education in Ukraine is currently in a challenging condition. Despite the fact that the job market is in severe need of skilled workers, former technical schools are failing to make ends meet. In this regard, it is critical to go back to the past, to the history of vocational education. During the rule of tsarist Russia, Right-bank Ukraine was densely populated by representatives of numerous national minorities and was part of the so-called Jewish “settlement zone”. From a modern perspective, it is vital to analyze the difficulties surrounding the establishment and operation of vocational schools for national minorities in the 1920s, as well as how the Soviet authorities addressed the problem of a skilled worker shortage by involving representatives of various nationalities in vocational education.

### **Purpose, subject and research methods**

The purpose of this article is to provide a detailed research and analysis of the history of vocational schools for national minorities in a multinational region such as Right Bank Ukraine during the korenization period.

The methodology of the study incorporates general scientific and special historical methods alongside with the fundamental principles of historical research: historicism, scientificity, objectivity, and systematicity. The principles of historicism and scientificity have contributed to the complex representation of a network of vocational education institutions serving the needs of national minorities of Ukraine against the background of korenization processes. The principles of systematicity and objectivity have enabled the author to critically examine archival documents and statistical data, which contributed to the author’s holistic and impartial account of Ukrainian vocational education in the 1920s and early 1930s.

### **Research results**

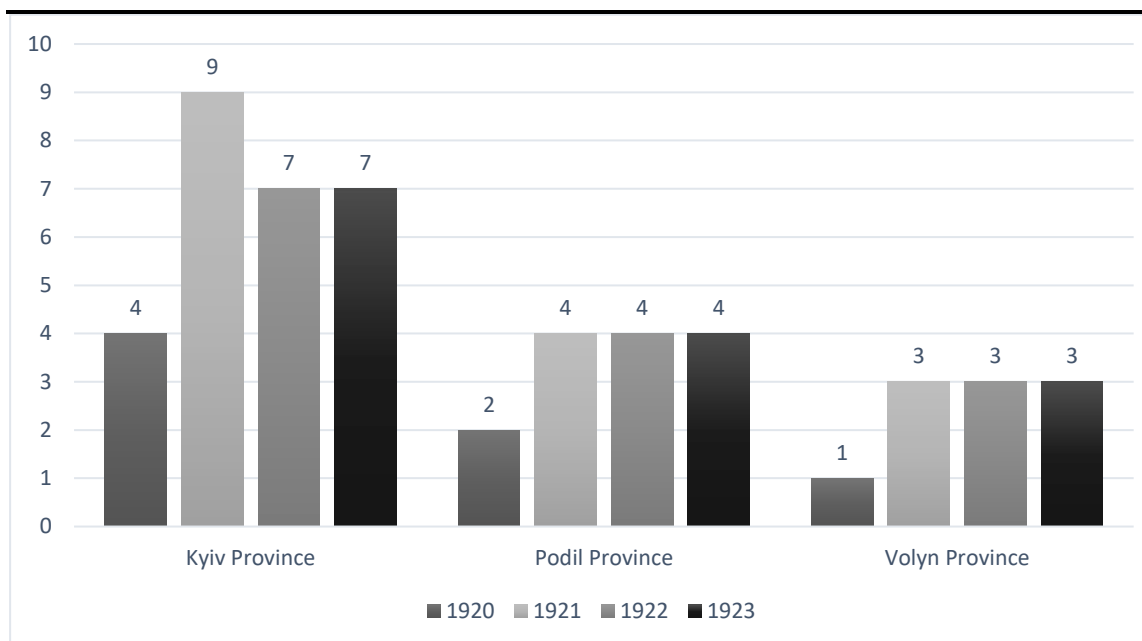
Direct participants in the implementation of the korenization program, such as M.O. Avdienko, Ya. P. Ryappo, A. Glinsky, and others [1], were the first to draw attention to the field of education of Ukraine’s national minorities in their research. When it comes to

vocational schools, however, these authors are limited to broad comments and specific statistics. It should be noted that virtually all works on national minority education published during the study period were not scientific in nature, but rather propaganda-driven. M. Galiy and B. Novytsky's [2] study is richer in content, including information on the national composition of vocational schools. During Ukraine's independence, there has been a surge in interest in the history of national minorities who have long coexisted with the dominant ethnic group. Scholarly interest in education has concentrated on issues such as the establishment of secondary schools for different nationalities and the structuring of the educational process in these institutions. However, questions related to vocational schools remain unaddressed, determining the study's value in the context of the greater problem of vocational education for national minorities in Ukraine in the 1920s-1930s.

The cornerstone of all Soviet pedagogy was the combination of study and work, which, according to governing bodies, fostered the formation of a special Soviet kind of personality. Production workshops for various professions were organized at minority schools. The schools were provided with land (where possible) for students to work in agriculture. Animal traction, greenhouses, and apiaries were also available at schools.

At the end of the 1920s, 78% of schools of various ethnicities in Ukraine were covered by cooperatives. For example, in the Antonov district of the Shepetivka district, 33 schools out of 44 had cooperatives. According to the pedagogical councils, a significant percentage of graduates entered vocational schools and colleges for professional and pedagogical professions [3].

Considerable growth in the number of Jewish schools and labor education in them has led to a high increase in Jewish graduates, who faced the problem of where to continue their education in their native tongue. However, there were very few vocational schools that could accommodate everyone who wanted to study. By 1925, there were 16 Jewish vocational schools, and by 1926, three new vocational schools and one agricultural school had been opened due to the existing problem.



**Figure 1. Dynamics of the number of Jewish vocational schools on the Right Bank.**

Source: [5]

In the early 1920s, neither Poles nor Germans had any vocational schools, and they only began to appear in the second half of the decade. As a result, one Polish and one German vocational school were established in 1925 (see Table 1). Before 1917, there were Jewish craft schools. Figure 1 [5] depicts the dynamics of the number of vocational schools in the 1920s.

According to archival materials, in 1920, most Jewish vocational schools were located in the Kyiv province and this trend continued until 1923. As a result, we can see that the most beneficial dynamics occurred in 1921, when the number of vocational schools more than doubled on average across all provinces. However, no changes were made in the provinces of Podil and Volyn after 1921, and two vocational schools in Kyiv province were closed. In fact, this diagram demonstrates some efforts towards the revival of Jewish vocational schools in 1921, but subsequently shows a slowdown in this direction on the territory of Right Bank Ukraine.

Unfortunately, there is almost no data on vocational schools in the Right Bank provinces after 1923, thus we will use data relating to the entire country. This will enable us to spot general trends that existed in the investigated region. Table 1 shows the trends of vocational schools in relation to the entire country of Ukraine [6].

**Table 1. Dynamics of vocational schools for national minorities in Ukraine**

Source: [6]

Years / Schools	Jewish	German	Polish
1923/24p.	30	-	-
1924/25p.	10	-	-
1925/26p.	13	1	1
1926/27p.	15	1	1

These data show that there was a threefold decline in Jewish vocational schools in the 1924-1925 academic year compared to the previous year. As for the rather low rates of Germans and Poles, this is due to the fact that agricultural schools are not included in the table. In 1926 there were 4 schools for Germans and 2 for Poles. Agricultural schools, along with secondary education, imparted knowledge of agricultural organization, technology, and agronomy to young people.

Analyzing archival documents, we find many suggestions, requests from local authorities to the center to expand the network of Polish and German agricultural schools. For example, the Polish agro-vocational school was required in the Proskuriv region (present Khmelnytsky region) [7]. During the 1920s German colonists in the Volyn district constantly raised the issue of opening an agricultural school for them [8].

At the end of the 1920s, Polish vocational schools existed in Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Berdychiv and other districts. However, their organization necessitated the establishment of boarding schools for them. Due to a lack of boarding schools, Polish children from remote areas were unable to attend these schools [9].

Vocational schools were distributed by specialization. There were institutions of industrial and technical education, as well as medical, socioeconomic, artistic, factory, and agricultural education.

Many of Jews in cities worked in industries and got their education at factory schools (FS), which first appeared in Ukraine in 1921. Factory schools accepted young people as early as the age of 15. They were educational establishments that offered a variety of theoretical and practical subjects in which students might develop industrial specializations. As a result of the korenization policy, it was unclear if such schools could serve the Jewish community in their original tongue. There were already ten factory schools in Ukraine teaching in Hebrew in the 1925-1926 academic year. In the following year, Kyiv alone had two leather schools, one for mechanics and the other for sewing. In Kamjanets, there was a Jewish vocational school with mechanical and woodworking departments, where about 40 pupils were taught by seven instructor teachers.

However, the state encountered a problem when graduates of factory schools did not go to work and instead completed their education in institutes, technical schools, and other educational establishments. The resolution of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of September 15, 1933, reflected this in particular. At the same time, the inefficiency of schools in training students in the specializations like “riveters, drills, leaf law”, etc., was underlined, as was the inclusion in the curriculum of numerous useless topics that divert students’ attention away from professional subjects. [13] The national Jewish schools of Right-Bank Ukraine had similar irrelevancies.

In order to improve the provision of professional staff of the plants, the CEC and CPC decided:

1. “... Everyone who graduates from the factory school ... is obliged to work in the industry for at least three years in their specialty.
2. Reduce the study term in factory schools... from two years to six months...
4. To oblige all People’s Commissariats to revise the curricula of factory schools, so that 80% of all educational time is devoted to direct instruction of students in the specialty at the machine...
6. Students admitted to factory schools must be at least 15-16 years old ...
9. To establish that the factory school is an integral part of the plant (factory) and is directly subordinated to the plant (factory) director ... ” [14].

If there were not enough Jewish children in a general factory school, special Jewish groups were formed. For example, in 1927, a Jewish branch was established at the Vinnytsia Electromechanical School, and 50 (according to other sources, 47) students were enlisted for the first year [15].

On the same premise, similar departments were established in other cities. According to archival records from 1927, there was a Jewish department at a vocational school in Berdychiv with 35 pupils, and a department at a vocational school in Proskurov with 15 students. Approximately 24,6 percent of Jews, 1,8 percent of Poles, and 0,5 percent of Germans attended general vocational schools during the 1925-1926 academic year.

Much emphasis was placed on the proletarianization of diverse nationalities, the majority of which were peasants by nature. In particular, the People’s Commissariat of Education underlined in its immediate priorities for 1928 the need for maximal participation of youngsters of national minorities in factory schools [18]. However, factory-style schools for Germans and Poles have yet to be built [19].

In addition to the factory schools, there were professional art schools for Jews. For example, according to 1927 data, there was a music school in Kyiv with 44 students and an art school with 53 students [20].

The state had to invest more than usual in the creation of vocational schools for national minorities. Factory-type schools, for example, provided particular workshops because not everyone had the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills directly in factories and plants. The mutual aid societies, which were organized as a result of the desperate condition of the population in Ukraine following the Civil War and a series of Jewish pogroms, and so on, was one source of funding for vocational schools. On October 20, 1925, an NKVD interdepartmental commission prepared and adopted a mutual aid society's charter. According to it, the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee and the CPC adopted legislation on mutual aid societies in cities and villages on November 22, 1926. There were 92 societies in 31 districts of Ukraine on January 1, 1927, with 81% Jews, 9% Ukrainians, 6% Russians, and 3% other nationalities. A portion of the funds were used to maintain eleven workshops and craft schools that educated 550 students [22].

Philanthropic groups such as the Joint, the Jewish Community Committee, also supported Jewish vocational schools. The public committee, for example, financed a Jewish vocational school in Kyiv at Kruglouniversytetska Street 6a, as well as carpentry, sewing, printing, and leather schools. This organization funded similar Jewish professional institutions on the Right Bank in the cities of Uman, Berdychiv, and Radomyshl [23].

The issue of a severe scarcity of trained pedagogical staff for Jewish vocational schools, which were the largest in comparison to other national minorities, was regularly mentioned during meetings of the People's Commissariat of Education. Based on this, the board of the Kyiv Institute of Public Education resolved on October 14, 1929, to create two subdivisions (literary and socio-historical) of the Faculty of Vocational Education in place of the Jewish Department of Social Education. In addition, it was planned to identify those students of 1-3 years of study who wanted to transfer to the newly established departments from the Faculty of Social Education [24].

In the 1920s, the shortage of teachers for technical schools and other national minorities was a pressing concern. As a result, special courses for graduates of craft schools were to be established to solve this issue. They returned to schools as instructors after completing a year of training [25].

Vocational schools, in addition to providing industrial specialties to diverse ethnic groups, have also become places for advanced training of workers in numerous specialties

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Workers were given special education at Jewish vocational institutions. They were active in the regions of Volyn, Berdychiv, Vinnytsia, and Kyiv [26].

### **Conclusions**

The Soviet government prioritized vocational education as part of its korenization agenda. Vocational schools with Hebrew, Polish, German, and other languages of teaching, in particular, trained specialists in a variety of specialties. In order to increase their social support, the administrative bodies contributed to the establishment of a network of factory schools. However, this process was fraught with challenges, including a lack of material assistance from the authorities. Vocational schools aided in the formation of a new Soviet type of individual.

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