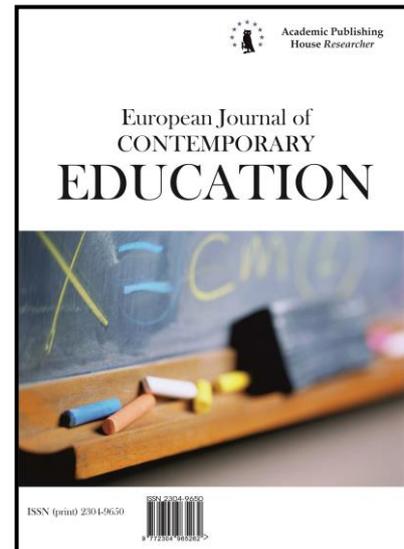




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### **The History of the Public Education System in Vilna Governorate (the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries). Part 3**

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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> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This part of the work analyzes the system's development in the period 1908–1917.

The authors drew upon a body of archival documentation from the Russian State Historical Archive (Saint Petersburg, Russia), a pool of statistical data published in Memorandum Books for Vilna Governorate in the period from 1880 to 1915, and an array of statistical data on the Vilna Educational District published in the scholarly journal *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya*. The authors made use of certain regulatory documents as well.

The authors' conclusion is that by the end of 1914 students in Vilna Governorate accounted for a mere 50 % of the total number of school-age children in the region. The governorate was still far from the introduction of compulsory primary education, as it had a motley ethnic makeup and large numbers of Catholics, Jews, and Dissenters. Of note is the fact that in the last pre-war year the region witnessed a sharp increase in the number of Catholics in attendance at its educational institutions. As early as 1915, in light of the "Great Retreat" of the Russian army, a portion of the educational institutions were evacuated to the empire's central regions, with the percentage of students, thus, starting to decline.

**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). At present, most of the area is part of Belarus, with the rest of it, including the capital, forming part of Lithuania. This part of the work examines the development of the public education system in Vilna Governorate in the period 1908–1917.

## 2. Materials and methods

The authors drew upon a body of archival documentation from the Russian State Historical Archive (Saint Petersburg, Russia), a pool of statistical data published in Memorandum Books for Vilna Governorate in the period from 1880 to 1915, 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](#)), and 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. Use was made of the historical-situational method to explore particular historical facts in the context of the era under study in conjunction with various “neighboring” events and facts.

## 3. Discussion

Generally, 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 produced 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 et al., 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, including 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](#)). Approaching the issue from this angle helps examine it by way of comparison across the various regions of the nation.

## 4. Results

The Vilna Educational District was among the first six educational districts created in the Russian Empire via Emperor Alexander I's edict of January 24, 1803 ([Imennoi ukaz, 27](#)). At the time of its establishment, the district incorporated educational institutions in eight governorates: Vilna, Vitebsk, Volyn, Grodno, Mogilev, Minsk, Kiev, and Podolia. The Main 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 quite a 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 thanks to 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 1861–1914.

**Table 1.** Numbers of Educational Institutions and Students in Vilna Governorate (1861–1914) (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; RGIA. F. 733. Op. 207. D. 39. L. 1; Vsepoddanneishii otchet, 1916: 122-123)

Year	Number of educational institutions	Number of students	Average number of students per educational institution
1861	145	5,728	39.5
1900	1,624	55,755	34.3
1908	1,529	71,374	46.6
1909	1,540*	72,242	46.9
1910	1,550	78,119	50.4
1911	1,589	85,620	53.9
1914	1,086	84,802	78.1

As evidenced in [Table 1](#), the period 1908–1911 witnessed a gradual increase in the region’s average number of students per school. In 1914, there was a sharp rise in that number. The thing is that in 1914 the region started to witness a decline in the number of educational institutions due to the mass closure of grammar schools and shifting of urban educational institutions to higher primary institutions.

In 1914, Vilna Governorate had the following state of affairs in terms of the number of schools run by the Department of Religious Affairs: two-grade – 7, one-grade – 231, and rural grammar schools – 177. The 415 educational institutions had a combined enrollment of 17,291 (9,446 boys and 7,845 girls). Thus, there were 41.6 students per church school. That being said, there were an average of 26 students per grammar school, 109 students – per two-grade school, and 52 students – per one-grade school ([Vsepoddanneishii otchet, 1916: 122-123](#)).

At January 1, 1915, the total number of students in attendance at the region’s educational institutions run by the Ministry of Public Education was 67,511 ([RGIA. F. 733. Op. 207. D. 39. L. 1](#)).

It is worth noting that at 1915 the total number of children of school-going age in the governorate was 183,658 ([RGIA. F. 733. Op. 207. D. 39. L. 1](#)), with 84,802 of these attending the region’s church and ministerial schools at the time. However, the two bodies of authority were not the only ones that had schools run under their auspices in the region. For instance, the Ministry of Trade and Industry ran an eight-grade commercial school and a trade school. The Office of the Institutions of Empress Maria ran a female Mariinsky gymnasium. The Ministry of Railways ran a technical railway school and a school of the Vilna Railway Club. Along with the church schools, the Department of Religious Affairs ran the Lithuanian Ecclesiastical Seminary, a male ecclesiastical school, a female ecclesiastical school, a female three-grade diocesan school, and a diocesan Roman-Catholic seminary. The region also had in operation one facility run by the Department of Military Affairs – the Vilna Military School ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1915: V-IX](#)). Thus, it may be assumed that by the end of 1914 the total number of students in Vilna Governorate accounted for around 50% of all children of school-going age in the region. As early as 1915, in light of the “Great Retreat” of the Russian army, a portion of the educational institutions were evacuated to the empire’s central regions, with the percentage of students, thus, starting to decline.

The key reason behind the low figures was the region’s motley ethnic makeup. Specifically, by January 1, 1912 the population was 1,709,000, with 467,000 of these being Orthodox Christians, 25,500 – Old Believers, 1,081,000 – Catholics, 131,500 – Jews, and 3,300 – Moslems, with members of the rest of the faiths accounting for a minor percentage of the population ([Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1913: 2](#)).

\* Approximate figure, as precise data are not available.

**Table 2.** Departmental Affiliation of Educational Institutions in Vilna Governorate (1884–1914) (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*	1
1900	845 <sup>†</sup>	778	1
1908	827	701	1
1909	837	703	1
1910	842	708	1
1911	1,051	538	1
1914	648	420	1

As evidenced in Table 2, nearly half of the region’s schools were parochial schools and grammar schools.

Of particular interest is also the development of special Jewish education in Vilna Governorate. By departmental affiliation, the region’s Jewish schools ran under the aegis of its Directorate for Public Schools. Table 3 displays the distribution of Christian and Jewish schools in Vilna Governorate.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Christian and Jewish Schools in Vilna Governorate (1891–1911) (Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1901: 40; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1913: 36)

Type of educational institution	Number across years					
	1891	1900	1908	1909	1910	1911
Public schools	187	221	474	315	416	553
Cheders	90	496	255	241	228	302

**Table 4.** Distribution of Students in Vilna Governorate by Estate (1884–1911) (Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1885: 18; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1889: 63; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1892: 124-125; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1898: 264; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1913: 27-33)

Estate, children of	Year				
	1884	1888	1892	1898	1911
Nobles and functionaries	2,337	2,621	2,862	3,156	2,723
Persons of ecclesiastical status	562	470	594	567	513
Members of the urban estates	5,422	7,162	7,668	7,947	2,413
Members of the rural estates	9,128	12,122	11,074	14,397	2,561
Persons of military status	29	27	127	82	-
Foreigners and raznochintsy	119	67	84	76	32
Total	17,597 <sup>*</sup>	22,469	22,409	26,225	8,242 <sup>§</sup>

As evidenced in Table 4, during the period spanning the 1880s and early 1890s nearly 50 % of all students in attendance at the region’s schools run under the aegis of the Directorate for Public Schools were accounted for by members of the rural estates. Around 35 % of the student body was

\* Exclusive of parochial schools

† Inclusive of 563 special Jewish institutions

‡ Exclusive of students in attendance at the region’s parochial schools

§ Data not available on students in attendance at the region’s lower, primary, and parochial educational institutions

accounted for by members of the urban estates and less than 15 % – by children of nobles and functionaries. At the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the region witnessed a redistribution of residents in attendance at its schools. Specifically, the number of children of nobles dropped sharply – from 19.5 % in 1898 to 13.9 % in 1899 and to 4.1 % in 1900. There was a decline in the number of members of the urban estates as well (1898 – 26.5 %, 1899 – 25.6 %, and 1900 – 11.9 %). At the same time, there was a sharp rise in the number of members of the rural estates (1898 – 54 %, 1899 – 60.5 %, and 1900 – 84%) (Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1901: 37). Unfortunately, the data for the year 1911 are incomplete, which makes it difficult to put together a data sample on the estates.

**Table 5.** Distribution of Students in Vilna Governorate by Faith (1884–1911) (Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1885: 18; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1889: 63; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1892: 125; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1898: 264; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1901: 38; Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1913: 27-33)

Faith	Year					
	1884	1888	1892	1898	1900	1911
Orthodox Christians	6,464	7,875	8,130	9,619	23,054	21,577
Dissenters	108	128	146	245	463	39
Catholics	6,590	8,187	7,777	9,995	15,341	26,114
Protestants and Lutherans	259	263	305	359	467	1,397
Jews	4,118	5,953	5,959	15,866	16,351	2,334
Karaites	7	9	23	29	434	43
Moslems	51	54	69	112	36	186
Total	17,597	22,469	22,409	26,225	55,755	48,690

As evidenced in Table 5, during the period spanning the 1880s and 1890s the numbers of Catholics and Orthodox Christians in attendance at schools run by the Directorate for Public Schools were about the same (around 35 %), with these two groups followed by Jewish students (around 25 %). The data for the year 1900 in Table 5 are inclusive of students in attendance at the region's parochial schools and grammar schools. Based on this, the percentage of Orthodox students in the region reached 40 %. In 1911, the number of Catholics in attendance at the region's educational institutions rose sharply.

So what were the outcomes achieved by the region's public education system by 1911? As commonly known, no census was conducted at the time – so the only source covering the matter for that period might be a pool of annual military conscription data on the number of literate recruits\*. Data of this kind are available on Vilna Governorate as well (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Literacy Level across the Districts within Vilna Governorate (1902–1911) (based on materials from the Vilna Governorate Office for Military Conscription) (Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1913)

Conscription year	Vilna	Districts							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
1908	87.1	57.1	72.5	63.2	55.7	57.9	53.9	41.0	60.3
1909	90.7	43.7	77.7	67.2	55.9	60.1	55.2	40.2	58.2
1910	80.8	42.5	78.3	56.8	49.9	52.0	54.3	36.1	54.6
1911	78.5	48.3	82.6	63.7	61.5	67.2	58.1	48.1	63.3

\* In 2011, researcher A.A. Cherkasov likewise made use of these military conscription materials (which he did extensively as part of his research into the public education system in the Russian Empire) (Cherkasov, 2011).

As evidenced in [Table 6](#), the percentage of the literate not only varies tangibly across the region's districts and within a given year but appears to vary sharply within each district as well. The erratic percentage of the literate suggests an unstable public education system in the region, which must have been caused by the following two key factors:

- 1) the region's schools not being distributed evenly throughout 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 lack formal validity, as most were gathered by way of surveys of newly enrolled learners.

## 5. Conclusion

By the end of 1914, students in Vilna Governorate accounted for a mere 50 % of the total number of school-age children in the region. The governorate was still far from the introduction of compulsory primary education, as it had a motley ethnic makeup and large numbers of Catholics, Jews, and Dissenters. Of note is the fact that in the last pre-war year the region witnessed a sharp increase in the number of Catholics in attendance at its educational institutions. As early as 1915, in light of the "Great Retreat" of the Russian army, a portion of the educational institutions were evacuated to the empire's central regions, with the percentage of students, thus, starting to decline.

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