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DALTON PLAN

AS A GROUP METHOD OF TEACHING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

EL PLAN DALTON COMO MÉTODO GRUPAL DE ENSEÑANZA EN ESCUELAS PRIMARIAS

Aytekin Telman Mamadova
E-mail: aytakin.mammadova@sdu.edu.az
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1084-8884
Sumgait State University, Azerbaijan.

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ABSTRACT

The formation of the economic-political, scientific-cultural, and material potential of modern society depends to a large extent on education. School, which emerged in its time as a certain level of development attained relative independence and became, in turn, for subsequent periods the main driving force of progress having recorded and preserved what was created by humanity, turning it into a driving force for social development. Relating to this, the innovative processes happening in education in different historical periods have influenced greatly the course of development of the society, and since the emerging innovative approaches were directly related to the social order of society, they have conditioned the emergence of innovations in content, form and technology of education. Although a lot of research has been carried out on methodologies in education, there is still disagreements regarding the effectiveness and adaptability of these in different cultural contexts, and particularly within Azerbaijani primary education. Therefore, this study will explore the benefits, challenges and/or implications of the Dalton Plan, a recognized educational method, to foster student independence and creativity, and the possibility of an effective implementation in Azerbaijan. We argue that modernizing educational frameworks with innovative education practices requires much attention to be paid to cultural adaptation and teacher training if their potential is to be harnessed to maximum effect. We also draw attention to the need for continual research into innovative educational practices, integrated within the socio-cultural context of Azerbaijan to continue optimizing the learning process.

Keywords: Education, Innovation, Dalton Plan, Azerbaijan, Cultural adaptation.

RESUMEN

La formación del potencial económico-político, científico-cultural y material de la sociedad moderna depende en gran medida de la educación. La escuela, que surgió en su momento como un cierto nivel de desarrollo, alcanzó una independencia relativa y se convirtió, a su vez, en la principal fuerza impulsora del progreso durante los períodos posteriores, habiendo registrado y preservado lo creado por la humanidad, convirtiéndose en una fuerza impulsora del desarrollo social. En relación con esto, los procesos innovadores que ocurrieron en la educación en diferentes períodos históricos han influido en gran medida en el curso del desarrollo de la sociedad y, dado que los enfoques innovadores emergentes estaban directamente relacionados con el orden social de la sociedad, han condicionado el surgimiento de innovaciones en el contenido, la forma y la tecnología de la educación. Aunque se han realizado muchas investigaciones sobre metodologías en educación, todavía existen desacuerdos sobre la efectividad y adaptabilidad de estas en diferentes contextos culturales, y particularmente en la educación primaria azerbaiyana. Por lo tanto, este estudio explora los beneficios, desafíos y/o implicaciones del Plan Dalton, un método educativo reconocido, para fomentar la independencia y la creatividad de los estudiantes, y la posibilidad de una implementación efectiva en Azerbaiyán. Se sostiene que para modernizar los marcos educativos con prácticas educativas innovadoras es necesario prestar mucha atención a la adaptación cultural y a la formación de los docentes, si se quiere aprovechar al máximo su potencial. También se enfatiza en la atención sobre la necesidad de realizar investigaciones continuas sobre prácticas

educativas innovadoras, integradas en el contexto sociocultural de Azerbaiyán, para seguir optimizando el proceso de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Educación, Innovación, Plan Dalton, Azerbaiyán, Adaptación cultural.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, the predominance of temporary and transitory information over scientific knowledge indicates dangerous tendencies. Information is a tool that can be easily discarded after use. While knowledge is also a tool, it is one that transforms individuals into personalities, shaping their minds, morality, and spirituality. Knowledge is never discarded because it liberates people from ignorance and leads them to the world of science, culture, spirituality, and humanity (Chakravartty, 2023).

The society we live in during the 21st century is changing rapidly. The global informatization of society and the development of telecommunication technologies have created completely new conditions in the field of education. This transformation is primarily due to education's mass character and its new quality of continuity (Alkhnbashi et al., 2024). Most modern researchers believe that the digitalization of education is an integral sign of society's technological development and that the gradual improvement of electronic education technologies will reach a level sufficient to provide digital education technologies in many areas (Ahmadov et al., 2021). The continuity and sustainability of education imply its accessibility to everyone, its adaptation to the interests and needs of learners, and its focus on personal development. However, there are many difficulties in creating a developmental educational environment in both higher and secondary schools. Some of these are global challenges that do not depend on the school or the teacher. Learners are more interested in gathering information than acquiring scientific knowledge (Khahro & Javed, 2022). Currently, both teachers and students have more sources of information: computers, radio, television, and world travel. Modern educational resources (textbooks, etc.) themselves are also rich in information. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that information does not always transform into knowledge (Aliyev, 2002). It should be noted that current legislation, development strategies, and action plans in the field of education are drawn up and approved taking into account all social criteria. In the conditions of the post-industrial stage of society's development, global social production is carried out based on the innovative development of national economies (Ahmadov et al., 2021).

The study of educational history expands the boundaries of pedagogical thinking. The reintroduction of progressive aspects from the 20th century's historical and pedagogical heritage into scientific circulation plays an important role in forming modern educational culture. This heritage serves as a source for both the renewal of pedagogical knowledge with qualitatively new content and its sustainability (Valencia et al., 2023). Studying educational history is of great importance and helps solve two closely related problems. First, researchers studying the historical and pedagogical heritage determine the reasons and conditions for the emergence of pedagogical ideas, evaluate them in the context of space and time, study their application conditions, analyze results, and determine development dynamics and trends. Second, they assimilate the theories that form and develop under the influence of these pedagogical ideas. Historical-pedagogical heritage helps scholars study contemporary educational theory and practice, generalize advanced practices in this field, and evaluate, understand, and address innovative reforms in education from the perspective of modern pedagogical thinking and worldview (Covato et al., 2021).

In the 1920s, serious searches began in the field of organizing training in elementary schools. Changes were made to the regulated traditional class-lesson system. School self-government, class-group (Dalton-plan) and laboratory systems emerged, which allowed students to independently plan their work, develop creative activity, bear a sense of responsibility, and perceive the teacher as a mentor-instructor (in today's terms, a facilitator). In elementary schools, great attention was paid to the Dalton-plan, and significant experience was accumulated in this area. The creator of this special form of organizing training sessions, the "Dalton plan" (named after the city of Dalton, Massachusetts, USA), was the famous American educator Ellen Parkhurst. This system was first introduced by her in 1918 in US schools. The main essence of the Dalton plan was the conscious attitude of children toward the proposed tasks, a clear understanding of the goal and result, and the independent fulfillment of the accepted tasks by students (del Pozo & Braster, 2018; van der Ploeg, 2014). E. Parkhurst, while opposing the class-lesson system based on strict rules, justified her opinion by saying that collective exercises forced highly talented students to work at the speed of weak and average students, limiting the students' independent work. In the Dalton plan, since each student had an individual task, they worked according to their talents and abilities, submitting program tasks earlier or later than their peers. The speed of work depended on the student's talent, desire to work, and motivation (Röhner, 2025).

Under the Dalton plan, children were divided into classes and groups, though the collective form of study was abandoned. The lesson schedule was eliminated, and weekly, biweekly, or monthly individual assignments were prepared in classrooms and laboratories for each subject. These assignments comprehensively described what knowledge and skills were required of students, what books they should read, and what experiments and exercises they should conduct to acquire this knowledge and these skills.

In the Dalton plan, the composition of the groups remained mostly stable during the initial period when assignments were distributed and students were familiarized with the curriculum and plans. Subsequently, students freely chose their assignments and laboratories. Students had specific assignments and work plans for each subject. These assignments were carried out in designated laboratories, and reports were submitted upon completion. Such laboratories were equipped with all necessary teaching aids, tools, devices, books, methodological recommendations, and questionnaires. During independent work, each student was responsible for their own work. They clarified everything themselves, studied, understood, generalized, and reinforced through repetition, adapting their activities to the ultimate goal of the task they were performing. Each student completed tasks in one or more subjects, consulted the teacher when necessary, and when they considered themselves ready, received a "pass" (acceptable) mark, which was recorded on their record card. In this way, training was organized individually based on the students' independent work (Sorokin & Sakharova, 2016).

According to the terms of the Dalton plan, students could graduate at different times - some early, others late. During independent research, students developed intellectual endurance, work habits, patience, and the ability to identify necessary elements and distinguish between important and secondary matters. The main characteristic of the Dalton plan was its focus on cultivating a sense of responsibility in students. The nature of the work and the learning conditions created fostered a sense of responsibility and accountability while developing initial research habits. Students saw themselves at the center of the learning process. They understood that their learning achievements depended on their personal activity and independent fulfillment of assigned tasks. The students, not the teachers, were responsible for the knowledge, skills, and habits they would acquire. This approach not only stimulated children to work better but also accustomed them to hard work, taught them self-control, and created conscious discipline. In this training organization, students learned independently rather than being taught directly. This concept of the "Dalton plan" corresponds to the learning process taking place in Azerbaijani education today. Students reveal their inner potential through personal research and studies. Training tasks are assigned according to students' wishes, desires, internal needs, interests, demands, knowledge levels, opportunities, and abilities. However, after the 1930s, when researchers criticized the "Dalton plan" form of organizing training, they overlooked these positive qualities. Neither Russian nor Azerbaijani researchers (M. Mehdizadeh, M. Muradkhanov, H. Ahmadov, I. Valikhanli, A. Hashimov, A. Kerimov, N. Kazimov, Y. Talibov, etc.) sufficiently appreciated students' attempts to learn independently and seek answers to questions as researchers.

Considering the above elements, the main objective of this research is to analyze the relevance of the Dalton Plan as a group teaching method in primary schools, emphasizing its role in the educational formation of students but also its impact on the development of competencies such as independence and creative thinking. In order to achieve this goal, several research methods were used including analysis of pedagogical documents, literature reviews on educational approaches and the observation and contextualization of the historical development of education in Azerbaijan, especially in relation to the implementation and adaptation of the method in the local education system.

DEVELOPMENT

Important elements about Dalton Plan

The criticism that "such training is in line with the competition and individualism prevailing in bourgeois society and serves to prepare leaders of bourgeois management and industry" (Mammadova, 2019), which emerged in Russian pedagogical literature regarding the Dalton plan in the early 1930s, occupied a leading position in textbooks and teaching aids published in Azerbaijan until the 1990s, in research conducted on training methods and forms of organization, and in scientific and methodological articles.

In the Dalton plan, tasks (topics) for primary school students were usually determined on a weekly basis. The purpose and methodology of each task had to be completely clear to the students. The determination of tasks on a monthly or weekly basis did not limit students' right to choose. Students were independent and free to choose tasks, regardless of their level of difficulty. When preparing a program for groups (classes) on a subject, teachers differentiated the instructional content. Tasks were determined according to maximum, average, and minimum levels. Students could choose tasks at any level. In the

process of work, students realized their natural abilities and inclinations. They adjusted their desires and efforts to their capabilities by determining how much effort to put into subjects that interested them or not, and how much time they spent.

One of the advantages of this approach was that struggling students did not become objects of condemnation. No one monitored them or reproached them with "you are lagging behind." Students worked on their chosen programs at their own pace. This approach to the learning process not only improved the quality of the tasks assigned by teachers but also instilled confidence in students. This organization of training was especially interesting and attractive for working with struggling students.

The Dalton plan, which was widespread in America and England, became prevalent in Russia in the early 1920s. Shortly after, this form of training was similarly implemented in Azerbaijani schools. All work on the Dalton plan was divided into three stages:

1. Precise and clear formulation of the task;
2. Independent processing of the given material by students, joint work with the teacher in identifying and eliminating difficulties;
3. Verification of work results and self-examination.

Various forms of the Dalton plan (individual work, pair work, group work) were used in Azerbaijani schools. Later, the project method was introduced, which emphasized students' creative activity within groups. Teachers in Azerbaijani schools began to study and apply the Dalton plan in 1923-1924. During these years, contradictory interpretations emerged regarding the Dalton plan (some researchers considered it a form of organizing training, while others viewed it as a training method). Although the Dalton plan was initially difficult to implement in the education system as a new technology, it quickly became the primary form of organizing training in primary schools. A free schedule was established, classrooms were designated as laboratories, tasks were compiled and displayed on laboratory walls, and students were allowed to perform these tasks freely. However, this freedom led to disciplinary issues. Students who had previously attended school under traditional training methods interpreted this freedom differently. Tardiness, irregular attendance, and entering and leaving classrooms without permission became common problems. Students also developed varying attitudes toward completing assignments, often preferring tasks with lower difficulty levels to obtain grades. This not only resulted in disciplinary problems but also reduced students' interest in learning activities.

Since the Unified Labor Schools were newly organized, there were limited educational resources to meet society's needs. Most educational resources (devices, tables, maps, plans, pictures, drawings, models, etc.) were prepared by the students themselves (in special second-level schools). This played an important role in developing students' initial practical skills. However, the Dalton plan was not an ideal form of organizing training. Primary schools faced several challenges in implementation: insufficient educational resources, placement of most newly opened schools in adapted buildings with limited facilities, and inadequate teacher competency in elementary schools.

The excessive individualization of training tasks, solitary student work, neglect of training's emotional aspects, and imbalanced teacher-student relationships created problems with students' training load in the learning process. While the excessive individualization of training emphasized the "advantage of the book" in learning material, it minimized teacher interaction and discouraged collective creativity. Students working on individual plans had limited communication with classmates, ultimately reducing work efficiency. Homework remained confined to textbook materials, with students preparing assignments only in class. The main methodological flaw of the Dalton plan was the reduction of the teacher's guiding role in the training process, as students were given independent work assignments without being taught how to work independently.

Despite its negative aspects, the Dalton plan fostered elements of creative activity in each teacher's methodological system. A new form of independent work emerged, taking into account student interests in task formulation, topic study, group leadership, and collective work organization. The experience with these forms led to modifications of the Dalton plan in Azerbaijani schools and improvements in curricula and programs. The technological changes in the pedagogical process were primarily connected to the State Council of Science's decision. Between 1928-1931, specific changes were made to the Dalton plan's structure, and it continued under the name "laboratory-brigade method." In pedagogical literature, it was variously interpreted as either the "laboratory-research method" or "laboratory-brigade method."

In the improved version of the Dalton plan, classes were maintained, but students were divided into brigades of 5-6 people. Educational tasks were assigned to entire classes rather than individual students. Topics were distributed among teams in parts. The development of each task consisted of three stages:

4. An introductory conference where teachers provided guidance on approaching the topic.

5. A 15-20 day period during which each team, under their foreman's guidance, studied their portion of the topic, primarily using books and occasionally conducting laboratory and cabinet work (teachers could address topic-related questions during this time).
6. A final conference.

During the final conference, the foreman and a brigade member would present information about their assigned topic portion, and the teacher would evaluate the brigade's work and summarize the topic based on their responses. Although this method significantly enhanced students' research skills, it had methodological shortcomings. Many students relied on their brigade companions rather than working independently, as the active brigade member's answer was applied to the entire group. Another flaw was the uneven distribution of topic knowledge among class members. While each brigade thoroughly studied their assigned portion, they gained only superficial knowledge of other parts. This organizational approach was soon criticized. While complex and project methods were used in 1926-1929, the "complex-project" method became prevalent in 1929-1931.

In the late 1920s, significant interest developed in the project method within pedagogical circles and school practice. This method represented an improved form of the Dalton plan adapted to Soviet school principles. Prominent Russian and Azerbaijani educators believed the project method could ensure student independence and creative thinking development while playing a crucial role in knowledge acquisition and practical skills development. Organizing education through projects would help establish direct connections between problem-solving and practical application, involving students in socially useful work and socialist construction. The project method was gradually implemented in Azerbaijani schools, initially tested in selected model schools before rapidly expanding to encompass almost all primary schools.

The project method originated in the second half of the 19th century in agricultural schools in the United States. Later, it was transferred to general education schools. It was based on the theoretical concept of pragmatic pedagogy, which emphasizes learning through work. The project method is rooted in the activities and theoretical contributions of J. Dewey and his followers, such as W. Kilpatrick, K. Patrin, and Y. Collings.

The main ideas of the project method are as follows:

7. Childhood should not be merely a period of preparation for future life; it should be a valuable and meaningful part of the child's life.
8. Education should be based not on knowledge that children might need in the future, but on knowledge that is relevant to their current needs and real-life problems.

Education should not only consist of imparting existing knowledge to the child; rather, it should primarily help the student solve life problems, teach them how to live in the world, communicate with others, collaborate, and independently acquire necessary knowledge.

Children's activities, including education, were grounded in their personal experiences, interests, and needs. The primary goal of education was for children to explore the world around them with the guidance of teachers. The learning process occurred through the joint efforts of children and adults, including teachers and parents. Everything children did, even completing educational tasks, had to align with their desires. They were expected to engage in this work with intrinsic motivation, planning, executing, analyzing, and evaluating tasks themselves—whether individually, in groups, with a teacher, or with others—and understanding the purpose behind their actions. W. Kilpatrick described the program of schools using the project method as follows: "The program consists of several closely related experiences: the information obtained from one experience serves to develop and enrich other experiences".

Such experiences were gained based on the child's interests, internal motivation, and the reality surrounding them. Therefore, neither the state nor the teacher could prepare a school program in advance. These programs could only be developed in response to the surrounding reality during the learning process, with the active participation of students and the support of teachers. As a result of this approach, students encountered various learning situations and challenges, uncovered their potential, acquired essential life skills, and achieved their learning goals.

Thus, students acquired synthesized knowledge and life skills based on their own experiences and independently explored life issues. In the learning process, content was interconnected with form and other procedural aspects of education. Form was considered an integral part of content, methods, and teaching technologies. Pedagogical research demonstrates that children's educational and cognitive activities are closely tied to play, communication, and personal labor. Consequently, it was deemed essential to consider these elements when organizing the learning process and to draw on students' personal experiences. In pedagogical literature, this method was interpreted in various ways. Some viewed it as the method of purposeful tasks, others as a complex approach, an interest-centered method, or simply the method of projects.

Although there was no unified scientific opinion accepted by didactics regarding the project method in either the Russian or Azerbaijani pedagogical press in the 1920s, the project method was considered the primary method of schooling. The project method was characterized by its emphasis on connecting the school with the public environment, relying on children's personal initiative, providing them with ample opportunities for activity, fostering their ability to work in a planned manner, and requiring them to report on each activity. The widespread adoption of the project method was largely due to the People's Commissariat of Education promoting it as the only Bolshevik method capable of organizing the desires and activities of the masses. Consequently, all teachers were called upon to implement this method (Jabrayilov, 2019). The theoretical ideas proposed by Moscow scientists regarding the project method were echoed in various ways in the Azerbaijani pedagogical press. Azerbaijani researchers emphasized the importance of the project method in organizing primary school work, particularly in developing socially useful labor, practical skills, and connecting education with life and society. They described it as the "acquisition of knowledge through the structure of action and socialism" (Isaxanli, 2011). However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that action and knowledge were not presented as unified but as separate elements. This should be regarded as the main flaw in the definition provided for the project method. In reality, the essence of the project method was to acquire education through practice and the labor process. This approach is significantly different, and the following four features of the project method are more evident:

9. Incorporating active community service into the school's work plan;
10. Mastering teaching material through research;
11. Encouraging children's collective work and personal activity in setting topics and creating work plans—collective work does not hinder individual efforts;
12. Pre-planning the results. The internal structure of each method distinguishes it from others.

The project (prose) method was implemented in three stages:

13. Preparation for the project;
14. Organization of the process;
15. Summarization of the work done.

Therefore, the success of any educational or labor project depends on the student's internal potential, motivation, interest, and inclination toward the work. O. Dekroly proposed the term "interest-centered method" as an alternative to the project method. Based on this approach, material was selected according to the interests and needs of children, and the learning process was organized into three stages: observation, association, and expression (explaining or demonstrating). During the observation stage, the students' goal was to investigate the causes of events and develop conscious understanding. At the association stage, the primary goal was to cultivate the ability to generalize in students. The final stage, expression, allowed students to present their results either concretely (through handwork, drawing, making, or knitting) or abstractly (through reading, writing, or speaking). The last stage in O. Dekroly's classification (expression) can be equated to the stage of reviewing educational material. He argued that students, especially those with disabilities, require sufficient time to consolidate and systematize knowledge.

Some researchers interpreted this technology (the project method) as a socially useful activity carried out in a specific sequence, following a predetermined plan after thorough theoretical preparation. Others approached it as a research method. Such an organization of educational activities enabled children to perform at their highest potential.

On the implementation of Dalton Plan in Azerbaijan

In the 1920s, the requirements for the application of the project method in Azerbaijani pedagogical science were defined as follows:

16. When choosing the topic of the project, the child's wishes and desires should be taken into account, and teachers should appropriately stimulate their interests;
17. The project material should be suitable for children to work with and should also be based on the child's past experiences;
18. In addition to the practical purpose of the project, it must contribute to some form of socially beneficial work;
19. Projects should ensure natural development in an interconnected manner, rather than in isolation;
20. The project should allow for collective planning of work.

In the Azerbaijani pedagogical press, the project method was examined in the context of the theoretical ideas of American and Soviet educators, and its main features were identified as follows:

- **First feature:** The project method has a specific goal, and a clear, attractive objective is of great importance in the lives of children.

- **Second feature:** The inclusion of topics related to the project method in the work plan from a practical perspective. According to Russian and Azerbaijani researchers, the primary goal is to achieve a practical result from the children's work. In contrast, American scientists emphasized the importance of not linking theoretical preparation directly to the labor process during the project method. Examples include writing a story (essay), investigating the causes of war, or studying the works of writers for specific purposes.
- **Third feature:** When applying the project method, students' activities should be socially beneficial. At this stage, a strong enthusiasm for communal and useful work should be fostered among children.
- **Fourth feature:** The project method involves a comprehensive approach to work. A multifaceted examination of each fact and event, studying it from various angles, is the best way to uncover the truth.
- **Fifth feature:** The project method is applied through collective, rather than individual, organization of work. The team participates in some way in all stages of the project.
- **Sixth feature:** The lack of continuity in students' work when applying the project method.
- **Seventh feature:** The implementation of the project method relies on the personal activities and initiatives of students. Children choose the project topic, plan the work, execute it, analyze, critique, improve, and finally present their results to the student body and public organizations.

Although there are differing opinions regarding the stages of the project method, Azerbaijani researchers consider the following stages to be the most acceptable:

21. Motivation, that is, creating a sense of purpose;
22. Selection of the preparation process;
23. Taking into account the real situation;
24. Execution of the process;
25. Evaluation and presentation of the results.

Research indicates that the project method is based on the principle of the labor method (or the method of purposeful tasks) used in Soviet schools in the early 1920s. Purposeful and complex tasks designed for students incorporated the content of subject programs prepared under specific conditions (Hamidov, 2008).

Thus, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as in other areas, the process of centralization accelerated in the field of education. A tendency to control the content and methods of school education emerged, and the content of primary education was revised to align with the requirements of class struggle and socialist construction.

The 1920s were a highly productive period in the history of primary education in Azerbaijan. During this time, the foundation was laid for establishing new types of schools, mass enrollment of school-age children, and the preparation and approval of regulations to regulate the development of the school system. The content of education was adapted to meet societal needs, textbooks were written in accordance with new programs, and general, compulsory, and free education was declared. Additionally, disadvantaged students were provided with clothing and educational materials.

The main direction of the social pedagogical situation in the 1920s was the orientation of the pedagogical process toward the formation of the child's personality, the comprehensive study of society and the environment, the use of new technologies and active learning methods to understand reality, and the connection of school life with high civic ideals and labor activities.

The completion of universal compulsory primary education in the republic was one of the greatest achievements of the Cultural Revolution. This accomplishment addressed one of the most complex and challenging tasks of the Cultural Revolution in the country. The eradication of illiteracy and the establishment of a broad network of compulsory primary education played a crucial role in the socio-political life of the poor, wage earners, workers, and peasants. It also facilitated the socialist reconstruction of industry and agriculture. The successful implementation of universal compulsory primary education not only created the conditions for achieving the next goal—compulsory seven-year education—but also served as a significant motivating factor. The elimination of illiteracy, in addition to raising the intellectual and cultural level of the nation, became a fundamental principle for the development of the economy, industry, and agriculture. Based on universal compulsory primary education, a powerful surge in public education began in the republic. This achievement was regarded as a revolutionary event in the construction of new schools and became a subject of political and pedagogical discussions.

Thus, the existing legislation, development strategy, and action plan in the field of education were formulated and approved, taking into account all social criteria. In the context of the post-industrial stage of societal development, global social production is carried out based on the innovative development of the national economy.

Although the experiments conducted in the field of education during the 1920s aimed to raise the cultural level

of society, eliminate illiteracy, establish new approaches in education, and introduce innovations (such as the application of «complexes,» the use of active learning methods, and the implementation of the project method), they often fell short of improving the quality of education due to frequent changes. New teaching methods, borrowed from European and American schools and applied to Azerbaijani schools without proper adaptation, created significant challenges in the construction of the education system. These new technologies often rejected tradition, leading to serious issues. For example, the class-lesson system, with its strict regulations, complete structure, and rich traditions, was replaced by the laboratory-brigade method.

The main characteristic feature of education content in Azerbaijan during 1920-1931 was its heavily psychologized pedagogical process. Schools aimed at fully developing children's abilities and natural potential during their childhood. Despite the lack of necessary educational infrastructure, there were favorable conditions for the creative and free development of children's humanistic nature and personality. Furthermore, despite significant politicization and ideologization of educational activities, the concept of primary education content encompassed conceptual approaches such as democracy, openness, collegiality, creative use of foreign experience, regular improvement of educational strategy and tactics in accordance with social order requirements, and support for innovative teachers' initiatives. The formation of student personality was the main task of primary schools and the core of pedagogical research.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, several factors led to a decline in the level of general education: the school's departure from traditionalism, the predominance of practice over theory, overloaded curricula, the introduction of «complex» and «complex-project» programs, the abandonment of traditional lessons and textbooks as main training organization forms, improper integration of topics, chapters, and essays in teaching, and subjectivity in assessing student achievements.

Since the forms and methods adopted from foreign school experiences and applied without adaptation to local conditions did not prove effective in helping the growing generation master scientific basics and acquire systematic knowledge, improvements were needed. However, instead of enhancing educational organization, both foreign school experiences and new educational theories were banned. This was primarily due to the political situation worldwide and within the country. Consequently, some normative acts adopted in the 1920s regarding school humanization and student personality formation were canceled, and the democratic environment in school life deteriorated.

The decisions and instructions adopted in Azerbaijan regarding primary schools in the 1920s and 1930s are significant both as political and pedagogical documents. They provided serious analysis of school life, summarized completed work, and determined future prospects. Regardless of their nature, the implementation of mass educational measures in Azerbaijan from the 1920s onward, the elimination of illiteracy courses, and the involvement of citizens in compulsory education were among the most significant achievements of that period. This activity, which initially had an ideological purpose, changed its character in the 1960s and assumed a more national character (Ahmadov, 2014).

In the 1930s-1950s, the content of primary education underwent numerous changes and acquired different characteristics as a result of state-adopted goals, social needs, social and scientific achievements, pedagogical opportunities, and personal needs. While practice dominated school education in the late 1920s, the practical direction gradually weakened in the 1930s, and theory gained dominance in school education by the 1940s. From the mid-1950s, this trend began to shift as schools were reorganized based on polytechnic education, and curricula were revised accordingly to meet polytechnic education requirements.

In the 1960s, primary education organization was largely based on memory, with its main task being to instill reading, writing, and arithmetic skills in young schoolchildren. The content of primary education and its teaching technology neither stimulated students' intellectual activity nor developed their thinking. The three-year primary education system, widely implemented in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was based on thinking. The main features of this new system included creating problem situations in the educational process, increasing children's intellectual activity, involving them in thinking and research, ensuring their independent activity, and teaching them learning methods. Consequently, the principles of scientific approach, providing students with knowledge at the highest level of difficulty, and rapid knowledge acquisition were established as the foundation of the new education system.

The changes in primary education content during the 1970s and 1980s can be summarized as follows:

- While scientific and technical innovations ensured rapid student development, their capabilities, cognitive activity, memory strength, and independent logical thinking were not assessed in primary grades;

- The programs developed for three years of primary education created the basis for restructuring the education system and improving its methodology;
- The main direction of primary education restructuring was considered to be increasing educational process effectiveness to ensure students' overall development;
- The following principles were considered important for effective organization of three-year training:
- Setting training at a high level of difficulty appropriate to students' abilities.
- Increasing theoretical knowledge volume and ensuring its leading role.
- Rapid learning of program material.
- Students' understanding of the learning process.

The transition to higher education for primary school teachers was associated with serious changes in primary education content within secondary schools. The existing primary education content had fallen behind contemporary requirements. In higher pedagogical schools, future primary school teachers needed to acquire scientific, pedagogical, and methodological training along with necessary skills within 4 years. These future teachers had to master theoretical and practical issues of primary education thoroughly, acquire systematic and generalized knowledge, develop skills to independently solve problems that might arise in organizing the pedagogical process in secondary schools, and be able to creatively use scientific achievements while continuing their professional development. Pedagogical technical schools could not adequately train such teaching staff. Therefore, serious changes in primary education content necessitated the restructuring of primary school teacher training at the higher education level.

Thus, primary education theory in Azerbaijan developed against the backdrop of contemporary socio-political, scientific, and cultural events. In accordance with social order, the purpose, content, organizational forms, methods, and assessment technology of education evolved, improved, and acquired new essence while balancing traditions and innovative approaches. Rich and diverse experience (including both successful and unsuccessful aspects) has been accumulated in the theoretical and practical development of primary education. Through creative utilization of this valuable resource, it becomes possible to elevate primary education development to a higher level.

CONCLUSIONS

The Dalton Plan, although allowing for autonomous and individualized learning depends on the quality of the teacher training and their commitment to it, and also on the adaptation of the method to the local cultural environment. Without adequate support, full benefits from this approach are likely not to be achieved. One of the most promising aspects of the Dalton Plan is the possibility of creating an environment in which students can really explore their potential and learn independently. However, it is important to emphasize that such independence should be carefully weighed against opportunities for group interaction and direct teacher support so that learners will not feel isolated in their education. We believe that notwithstanding the criticisms, the Dalton Plan has been able to accomplish certain positive results in developing creativity and a spirit of inquiry among students.

The implementation of the Dalton Plan in Azerbaijani Primary Schools exhibits additional challenges such as the scarcity of suitable learning materials, misbehavior, and students' avoiding more challenging assignments. Thus, in order to the method function well, the teacher must provide strong guidance and supervision; otherwise, this approach may be impossible to be adopted in school. In a wider perspective, experiences from an implementation of the Dalton Plan should contribute to subsequent improvements of curricula and methodology. However, to continue exploring and adapting innovative educational strategies compatible with the exclusive needs and character of Azerbaijani students, ensuring that the quality of education keeps pace with the demands of a rapidly changing world.

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