

Pedagogical Ideas and Textbooks of Mirza Sadiq Fani

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ABSTRACT

Mirza Sadiq Fani (1840–?), who lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not only taught the Azerbaijani language in primary classes in Tabriz and Ganja for many years, but also authored valuable textbooks on this subject. His poems entitled “Aghil, Bakht va Dowlat” (“Wisdom, Fortune and State”) and “Hekayati-Amiri-Balkh va Eshqi-Pak” (“The Story of the Emir of Balkh and Pure Love”), preserved in the Institute of Manuscripts named after M. Fuzuli of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, together with selected samples of his poetry, his textbook “Daftari-dovvomi-adabiyya” published in 1893, as well as his manuscript textbooks related to the teaching of the Azerbaijani language, constitute important materials that make it possible to examine his pedagogical activity and educational views. Unfortunately, this topic has not yet been studied comprehensively and systematically. In the article, Mirza Sadiq Fani’s ideas and reflections as a pedagogue are carefully examined; his textbooks are analyzed and evaluated; certain facts related to them are clarified; and some erroneous views are refuted on the basis of well-founded arguments. The study concludes that the textbooks written by Mirza Sadiq Fani for primary classes in the Azerbaijani language possess distinctive positive qualities from both scientific-theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Keywords: Mirza Sadiq Fani; Mammad Taghi Sidqi; Azerbaijani language textbook; manuscript; pedagogical activity; Nakhchivan; Tabriz; “Khamsayi-Adabiyya”; nineteenth century education

1. INTRODUCTION

Mirza Sadiq Fani is one of the prominent Azerbaijani pedagogues who lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although he was born in Tabriz, he spent most of his life in Ganja. Teaching was his principal profession throughout both periods of his life, and his father educated him within a scientific-philosophical and moral-didactic framework. The influence of the knowledge he acquired in both directions is clearly observable in his activities during both the Tabriz and Ganja stages of his life.

A number of available facts indicate that although the “method of instruction” (usul-i ta’lim) in the schools where Mirza Sadiq worked was traditional, he most likely succeeded—particularly in individual instructional sessions—in teaching the subtleties of the native language to his students by employing new and original pedagogical methods, similar to those used by his Nakhchivan-born contemporary Mammad Taghi Sidqi. The manuscripts preserved in the Nakhchivan Branch of the Azerbaijan National

Academy of Sciences constitute primary source materials of exceptional value for the study of nineteenth-century pedagogy in the region (Khalilov, 2023).

This article examines the pedagogical ideas and textbooks of Mirza Sadiq Fani with the aim of contributing to a more comprehensive and systematic understanding of his educational thought and literary heritage. The study analyzes his published and unpublished textbooks, investigates the intellectual parallels between his methodology and that of Mammad Taghi Sidqi, and resolves an authorship dispute that has persisted in the scholarly literature since the 1950s. Arabic manuscript materials held at the Nakhchivan Branch of ANAS, as catalogued and analyzed by Valiyeva (2024), provide an important archival context for situating Fani's textbooks within the broader manuscript tradition of the region.

2. INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY WITH MAMMAD TAGHI SIDQI

Observations indicate that both Mammad Taghi Sidqi and Mirza Sadiq Fani attached great importance to the role and significance of recommendations and advice directed toward teachers, parents, and students in improving the quality of education. While Sidqi primarily addressed his recommendations to students, Mirza Sadiq directed his advice mainly to teachers and parents. Although the intended audiences of their recommendations differed, their content and essence were almost identical.

Sidqi writes:

“A teacher serves the moral refinement (tahzib al-akhlaq) and the intellectual development (manba' al-afkar) of a person. A teacher constantly strives for the strengthening of the student's spirit, the expansion of their intellect, and the proper cultivation of their morals and manners... Always endeavor and be attentive to remain beloved, respected, and honorable in the presence of your teachers and in the sight of the Almighty God, O lights of my eyes” (Sidqi, 2004, p. 99).

Mirza Sadiq writes:

“A teacher must, prior to teaching from the book, speak words in accordance with wisdom that inspire and assist the student, and encourage them to act accordingly: ‘Eat little, sleep little, speak little, write much, think much.’ All of these constitute the principal etiquette of acquiring perfection in education” (Fani, 1906, p. 19).

Sidqi writes:

“A person nurtures their child until the age of fifteen or twenty and provides all necessary means... They labor and devote their life for their child until the end of their days. How great are the rights of your father and mother, and how necessary it is to obey and love them” (Sidqi, 2004, p. 106).

Mirza Sadiq writes:

“A father should ask his child in the evening: ‘How did the teacher and students treat you today? How much did you study, and who taught you your lesson?’” (Fani, 1906, p. 14).

There was also a notable similarity in the teaching methodologies of Mirza Sadiq and Sidqi. Both pedagogues considered it essential, prior to initiating the teaching process, to provide students with guidance on rules of conduct, the benefits of knowledge, moral norms, the importance of upbringing and instruction, and the value of educated and ethical individuals. They believed that presenting such guidance in short texts under various headings would be particularly effective. A few examples illustrate this approach.

In Sidqi's works: "A Well-Mannered and Educated Child," "A Child Who Loves His Parents and Teacher," "School Attendance," "Thinking and Reflection," "An Intelligent and Perceptive Child," "A Clean and Orderly Child" (Sidqi, 2004, pp. 66–97).

In Fani's works: "Etiquette of Going to School" (Adab al-maktab raftan), "Etiquette of Walking for Children" (Adab al-rah raftan-i atfal), "Wisdom in Washing Hands" (Hikmat dar dast-rui shostan), "The Benefit of Knowledge" ('Ilm-i samara), "Conditions of Teaching" (Shara'it al-ta'lim), "Etiquette of Teaching for the Teacher" (Adab al-ta'lim-i mu'allim) (Fani, 1906, pp. 7–17).

Another indication of the similarity of their methodologies is the special attention they paid, within the teaching process, to the rules of writing, spelling and pronunciation of individual words, difficult vocabulary, and the teaching of grammatical knowledge through methods such as dialogue, memorization, written exercises, and discussions, as well as—when appropriate—the use of poetry, fables, proverbs, and stories.

There is no available information regarding a personal acquaintance between M. T. Sidqi and M. S. Fani. Certain facts suggest that even indirectly they were not familiar with one another. For instance, the list of books in Sidqi's personal library does not include Mirza Sadiq's "Daftari-dovvomi-adabiyya" among works related to pedagogy and methodology. This is despite the fact that this textbook had been published in 1893, one year prior to M. H. Rushdiyya's "Vatan Dili." In our view, the similarities in the methodologies of these two educators—one working in Nakhchivan and the other in Ganja during approximately the same period—stem from their elevation to the level of master pedagogues.

3. TEXTBOOKS

There are two reliable sources through which comprehensive information can be obtained about the teaching activity of Mirza Sadiq Fani: his two textbooks on the teaching of the Azerbaijani language in primary classes, one published and the other unpublished. These textbooks constitute parts of a compilation entitled "Khamsayi-Adabiyya" ("The Quintet of Literature"), which Fani prepared for school students. F. Köçərli notes that this compilation consists of five parts: "1) Lazimdir (Necessities), 2) Adabiyya (Literature), 3) Tamsilat (Fables), 4) Iqbaliyya va Idbariyya (Fortune and Misfortune), 5) Akhlaqiyya (Ethics)" (Köçərli, 1926, p. 267).

3.1 *The Published Textbook (1893 and 1906 Editions)*

The textbook published in 1893 is entitled "Kitabchayi-Adabiyya," or "Daftari-dovvomi-adabiyya az Khamsayi-Adabiyya" (Fani, 1893, pp. 1–158). There is also another edition of this textbook, published in Baku in 1906 (Fani, 1906, pp. 1–136). The author expresses the primary purpose of writing this textbook as follows:

"This notebook of literature will teach the reading child the alphabet letters in the Persian script, the correct spelling and connected writing of words in the Arabic script, speaking fluently in the language of the homeland, the means of livelihood necessary for worldly affairs, refined speech, and the ease of acquiring writing skills" (Fani, 1893, p. 2).

From this, it becomes evident that Mirza Sadiq's textbook was written to teach students the rules of correct speaking, writing, and reading, as well as to explain—in accordance with their age—the "means necessary for worldly affairs." At the beginning of the book, the author presents useful pedagogical recommendations addressed to teachers and parents, after which he focuses on teaching the alphabet and subsequently provides certain grammatical information, such as the infinitive, pronouns, and verb tenses. In presenting this material, he pays particular attention to comparative analysis with the Persian language. The poems, stories, narratives, fables, proverbs, and sayings used in the textbook play a

significant role in facilitating students' comprehension of the material. The inclusion of general information on theology, arithmetic, calligraphy, the Persian and Arabic languages, as well as commonly used everyday vocabulary, is intended to ensure the comprehensive development of students.

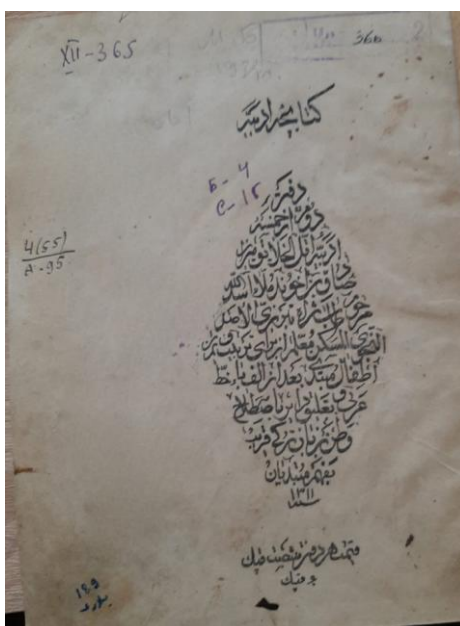


Figure 1. Title page of M. S. Fani's textbook "Kitabchayi-Adabiyya" (Daftari-dovvomi-adabiyya az Khamsayi-Adabiyya), published in Tabriz in 1893.

According to Professor A. Abdullayev, "This work of the author was one of the most comprehensive textbooks used in traditional neighborhood schools (mollakhanas) of its time" (Abdullayev, 1966, p. 231).

3.2 The Manuscript Textbook

Mirza Sadiq Fani's other textbook, which exists in manuscript form, remains unpublished. This 148-page textbook consists of two parts. It is not possible to determine its exact date of composition as a single year, since different dates are recorded at the end of various texts included within it: 1300 (1882), 1301 (1883), 1302 (1884), 1308 (1890), 1311 (1893), 1314 (1896), 1318 (1900), 1320 (1902), 1321 (1903), and 1329 (1893).

In the first part of the textbook, the author initially provides an extensive discussion of educational and moral issues, then proceeds to grammatical matters, paying particular attention to the main parts of speech. In order to substantiate his views, Mirza Sadiq throughout the textbook "provides examples in Turkish and Persian and includes quotations from Persian-language poetry where appropriate" (Hacıqədirlı, 2012, p. 463). The author also makes extensive use of dialogue, conversations, and folklore materials.

In the second part of the work, the author teaches students the rules of letter writing and provides sample texts of letters for the most essential recipients, such as: "From Mother to Son," "From Elder Brother to Younger Brother," "From Master to Servant," "From Husband to Wife," "From Uncle to Nephew," and "From Father to Son." In this work, Mirza Sadiq presents "examples of 50 types of practical documents... in both Azerbaijani and Persian, which was undoubtedly an important and beneficial development for that time" (Abdullayev, 1966, p. 233). These documents include commercial papers, congratulatory letters, condolences, guarantees, bills of exchange, wills, and protocols. These facts

demonstrate that M. S. Fani made a distinctive contribution to the formation and development of practical writing genres in the Azerbaijani language.

4. AUTHORSHIP ATTRIBUTION AND REFUTATION OF ERRONEOUS CLAIMS

Unfortunately, Professor A. Abdullayev, who was the first to introduce the aforementioned manuscript textbook into scholarly circulation, was unable to correctly attribute the work to Mirza Sadiq Asadulla oghlu in his monograph published in 1958. According to his view, “this person (Mirza Sadiq Fani—F.K., K.V.) is the Mirza Sadiq mentioned in the first volume of Muhammad Agha Mujtahid-zadeh’s ‘Riyaz al-‘Ashiqin’, who at one time worked as a teacher in Shusha” (Abdullayev, 1958, p. 103). It is regrettable that this erroneous claim was repeated in the revised edition of the same monograph eight years later (Abdullayev, 1966, p. 235).

The authorship of the textbook belonging to Mirza Sadiq Asadulla oghlu Fani is so clearly evidenced within the work itself that there is no need to seek external corroboration. On page 34 of the manuscript, the following is written:

“I, Mirza Sadiq Fani, who have devoted many years of my life to teaching and have written several notebooks in order to enable children to learn writing and reading more quickly and easily, have, in this notebook of writing, set down the rules of composing texts in Turkish and Persian in simple Azerbaijani and Caucasian language” (Fani, 1893 [ms.], p. 34).

From this statement, several definitive conclusions can be drawn. First, the author of the manuscript is unambiguously Mirza Sadiq Fani—the same individual whose published works all appeared under this signature. Second, the author devoted many years to teaching, which corresponds precisely to Mirza Sadiq Fani’s biography; by contrast, the Shusha-based Mirza Sadiq was primarily a physician. Third, the principal aim was to facilitate children’s acquisition of reading and writing skills, which again corresponds to Mirza Sadiq Fani’s stated objectives in “Daftari-dovvomi-adabiyya.” Fourth, the manuscript’s author presents his ideas in a question-and-answer format—the same methodological approach as the published textbook. Fifth, the author states that he recorded the rules of the Azerbaijani language in several notebooks, corresponding to the “Khamsayi-Adabiyya” compilation of five works (Köçərli, 1926, p. 268). Sixth, the near-identity between the manuscript and “Daftari-dovvomi-adabiyya” in terms of purpose, language, style, instructional process, and pedagogical methodology strongly confirms that both works belong to the same author.

The manuscript in question was presented to readers under the title “Munshaat” in the Catalogue of Manuscripts published in Baku in 1963 (Sultanov, 1963, p. 441). In our opinion, this designation is inappropriate, as the manuscript is a textbook rather than a collection of authentic correspondence. Works typically classified as “Munshaat” consist of authentic letters, whereas this work contains model letters devised for pedagogical purposes.

The well-founded evidence presented above clearly demonstrates that the textbook under discussion was not authored by the Shusha-based Mirza Sadiq, but rather by Mirza Sadiq Asadulla oghlu Fani, who was originally from Tabriz and worked as a teacher in Ganja for many years.

5. CONCLUSION

Mirza Sadiq Fani stands among the creative intellectuals and competent pedagogues whose names are inscribed in the history of Azerbaijani literature and enlightenment at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. His enlightenment-oriented ideas and pedagogical activity exerted

a significant influence on the cultural development of society. His teaching career in Tabriz and Ganja reflects both his innovative approaches to education and his profound dedication to his students.

His published and unpublished textbooks on the teaching of the Azerbaijani language constitute valuable sources that demonstrate his contributions to the field. The textbooks written by Mirza Sadiq Fani possess distinctive positive qualities from both scientific-theoretical and methodological perspectives. The enlightenment-oriented as well as religious-philosophical ideas expressed in his textbooks represented a call for society to advance toward a better future.

The studies conducted to date do not fully and systematically cover his pedagogical ideas or the analysis of his textbooks. There remains a need for further research in order to comprehensively re-examine this subject from the standpoint of the ideology of Azerbaijanism. The archival resources of the Nakhchivan Branch of ANAS, including the manuscript collections documented by Khalilov (2023) and the Arabic-language materials studied by Valiyeva (2024), provide a rich foundation for such future inquiry. Mirza Sadiq Fani's teaching activity and pedagogical-literary heritage make it possible to define his distinctive place in the history of pedagogical thought and enlightenment in Azerbaijan.

DECLARATIONS

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Authors' Contributions: Farman Khalilov: conceptualization, archival research, manuscript analysis, writing – original draft, reviewing, and final editing. Kubra Valiyeva: archival data collection, source verification, and writing. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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