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An Analytical Review of the Policies and Processes of Rural School Development in Kerman Province During the Second Pahlavi Era

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ABSTRACT

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The development of rural schools from the early years of the Second Pahlavi era, spurred by laws such as the Compulsory and Free Education Act, attracted the attention of several intellectuals. This created a foundation for expanding the educational system in rural areas during the Second Pahlavi period, affecting the gradual growth of rural schooling in Kerman Province as well. Using a historical approach and drawing on archival documents and the press, this study examines the trajectory of rural school development in Kerman Province during the Second Pahlavi era, along with its challenges. Findings reveal that despite some progress, rural education in the province faced numerous obstacles. Until the late 1960s, severe financial constraints prevented the government from providing adequate infrastructure for remote villages, and funds were mostly allocated to urban areas. Consequently, many rural schools emerged not from coordinated governmental planning but through persistent requests from villagers, coupled with their contributions of land and construction. Chronic shortages of personnel and lack of funds remained persistent barriers. Other impediments included the province's vast geographical expanse, scattered low-population villages, harsh climatic conditions, and limited rural resources—factors that dissuaded many teachers from accepting or retaining positions there. As a result, by the late 1970s, a significant portion of villages in southern Kerman Province still lacked primary schools.

Keywords: Rural Schools, Education, Kerman Province, Second Pahlavi Era, Literacy Corps.

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Introduction

Education has long been regarded as one of the principal indicators of social development and was a major concern of the Constitutional Movement in Iran. The ratification of the Comprehensive Education Law in 1911, which emphasized free and compulsory schooling, marked a significant step in shaping Iran's educational system. However, financial constraints and weak infrastructure prevented full implementation. A revision of this law in 1943 was also unsuccessful, largely due to shortages of teachers and resistance from some landowners. Many landlords, who depended on child labor, opposed the establishment of rural schools, slowing the spread of education in villages.

The White Revolution accelerated the expansion of elementary schooling, particularly through the Literacy Corps, educational reforms, and the adoption of free education. These initiatives boosted quantitative growth, though quality remained neglected.

In Kerman Province, as elsewhere, educational expansion faced unique difficulties. The first public and private schools were established in the city of Kerman, while rural schools were initially built only in larger villages, leaving many remote areas without access. The province's vast geography, scattered settlements, and shortages of financial and human resources posed major challenges. Although villagers and local officials made considerable efforts to build schools, the shortage of qualified teachers persisted. In some cases, individuals with only elementary education were dispatched to rural areas as teachers. Thus, while schooling in Kerman expanded, it remained burdened by serious shortcomings.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What impact did the Compulsory Education Law and Truman's Point Four Program have on the development of rural schools in Kerman Province during the 1940s and 1950s?
2. What were the main factors influencing the expansion or lack of expansion of rural schools in the province?
3. What consequences did budgetary shortages and the lack of teachers have on the spread of elementary education in rural areas?
4. What role did villagers themselves play in the development of rural schools in Kerman Province?

Materials & Method

This research employs a **historical approach**, relying on archival documents and contemporary newspapers to examine the trajectory of rural school development in Kerman during the Second Pahlavi era, along with the obstacles encountered throughout this process.

Discussion

The aftermath of World War II and subsequent economic crises slowed educational development in Iran. In 1943, Minister of Education Isa Sadiq enacted the Compulsory and Free Education Law, but a lack of funds and infrastructure prevented nationwide implementation. Around the same period, Truman's Point Four Program emphasized rural health and education as part of its anti-communist agenda. Yet in practice, the program disproportionately benefited urban centers, leaving rural areas with limited gains.

In Kerman Province, as in much of Iran, schools were established mainly through the efforts of local residents and philanthropists. Laws obligated landlords and villagers to contribute land or financial resources, but economic hardship and cultural resistance limited compliance. Many families continued to prefer traditional *maktab-khaneh* (religious schools), while budgetary and staffing shortages frequently forced rural schools to close.

The Literacy Corps program of the 1960s marked a turning point, as conscripted soldiers were deployed to villages as teachers. This expanded the number of rural schools, but several challenges remained: lack of trained teachers, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, and curricula disconnected from rural realities. In Kerman, many schools were physically built by villagers themselves, but securing permanent teachers proved far more difficult.

By the late 1970s, despite increases in educational budgets, many remote villages in Kerman still lacked schools or permanent teachers. Structural problems—such as urban-focused resource allocation, staff shortages, and neglect of local needs—meant that while rural education expanded quantitatively, its quality remained critically low.

Results and Conclusion

The historical trajectory of rural education in Kerman Province during the Second Pahlavi era demonstrates that, despite the ratification of laws such as compulsory education, Truman's Point Four Program, and the Literacy Corps, achieving universal and sustainable schooling in villages faced profound obstacles. Villagers' contributions often outweighed the state's role: many schools were built through local initiative and landowner participation, while government agencies struggled to supply infrastructure and staff.

Educational laws of the 1940s and 1950s largely favored urban centers, leaving many southern districts such as Jiroft and Kahnooj without elementary schools

even by the 1970s. Cooperative schemes—such as allocating agricultural revenues or company bonds for school-building—proved insufficient.

Teacher shortages were among the most pressing issues: schools were sometimes left vacant for years awaiting staff. Literacy Corps assignments were uneven, favoring semi-urban areas near Kerman City, while remote villages received little support. Many conscripts lacked professional training and often abandoned posts due to harsh conditions.

Curricula also failed to reflect local needs, being modeled on urban education and largely irrelevant to rural agricultural livelihoods. This disconnect fostered disinterest among students and parents alike.

In sum, the development of rural education in Kerman during the Second Pahlavi era was shaped less by coherent government planning than by persistent social demand and local resistance to deprivation. The case of Kerman illustrates that national educational policies—if inattentive to climate, economy, and local culture—cannot achieve equitable or sustainable development. Lessons from this history remain crucial for redesigning current educational strategies in disadvantaged regions.

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