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Socialist competition and its role in Soviet mathematics education

The Kolmogorov mathematics school curriculum reform, which was implemented in the USSR in the 1960s and 1970s, was criticized by Soviet educators. The conceptual and theoretical character of the curriculum created anxiety about mathematics among many students. Another factor that contributed to students' discomfort with mathematics was the political doctrine known as "socialist competition." Citizens and enterprises were encouraged to compete with each other to achieve greater productivity and success. Success in mathematics was a key part of academic achievement in the Soviet education system. Students who struggled were judged to be poor performers in the spirit of socialist competition, a situation that created additional anxiety about mathematics.

Kolmogorov and his colleagues attempted to make mathematics more palatable by publishing various kinds of extracurricular literature. A more positive attitude to mathematics would result from hearing about the many practical applications of mathematical concepts. However, it could be argued that this literature contributed to students' academic anxiety even further, because the topics discussed were often challenging and unfamiliar, and were not discussed in detail in the school curriculum itself.