

EDUCATIONAL REFORM

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The dynamic relationship between political, social and educational changes is central to determining whether educational reform occurred in the Muslim world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Changes in curricular and instructional policies and their implications for intellectual and cultural development are discussed in relation to four major issues.

The Muslim world initially rejected as irrelevant changes introduced from Europe in the early nineteenth century. Changes in technical, military, and vocational training dictated by local rulers and elites did not conform to the traditional educational practices that were the remnants of Islamic education.* Comparing these practices with recent changes runs the risk of overstating where and how educational reform has taken place.

Available literature indicates that old practices were not reformed and changes resulted in no significant attitudinal, or cultural development. Setting the European utilitarian and the Muslim altruistic modes against each other resulted in centralized state-controlled educational institutions and a complete departure from Islamic education.

The intellectual stagnation that characterized the Muslim world since the early fourteenth century remained despite mass and compulsory schooling in the postcolonial era. Recent reports indicate school and teacher shortages, low educational quality, lack of planning and of curricular and instructional compatibility, and disparity in access to

and completion of all types and levels of education between the sexes and between rich and poor and rural and urban populations.

1. Do Educational Changes Reflect Muslim Cultural Preservation?

The Muslim world's reaction to Western-introduced changes has lacked the intellectual dynamics that once marked its educational system. Although very different from modern education, formal and informal teaching and learning took place based on the accomplishments and needs of teachers and pupils. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1987) discusses the oral transmission that produced some highly knowledgeable Muslims even though they were illiterate. Such distinctive characteristics are not mentioned in Fazlur Rahman's (1982) discussion, even such remaining institutions as the kuttab (place of primary and Qur'anic education), halaqah, majlis (study circles in a mosque or private homes) and madrasah (center of secondary and higher learning). Western educational practices did not produce the same economic, intellectual, and social development they did in western Europe. Adnan Badran (1989) reports lacks of cohesion in educational planning, which is inhibited by socioeconomic, technical, or cultural factors. Educational objectives are ambiguous; although the philosophy claims to be rooted in the ideals of Islam, the pedagogical strategies contain both modern methodologies and political, nationalistic rhetoric. The inconclusive, fragmented, and contradictory literature, both in English and Arabic, indicates that educational transformation is an unstable process.

No full account of curricular reform is available despite the many reports on changes in the instructional process and numerical increase of schools, universities, and student enrollment. Reports by Albert Hourani (1981 and 1983), Jesse T. Jones (Education in East Africa, New York, 1970), UNESCO (1961), and others largely praise the progress of the "reformed and modernized" education system. Recent accounts, however, such as Nasr's, question such conclusions that confuse traditional Islamic reform with

fundamentalism and modernity with nationalism. Others, like Stephen P. Heyneman (1971), Ali Mazrui (The Africans: A Triple Heritage, Boston and Toronto, 1986), and A. L. Tibawi (1972) expose conflicting purposes and the incoherent systems resulting from imported colonial and missionary educational changes and emphasize problems of non-native development strategies and personnel.

One wonders why these changes were rejected by the nonruling, nonelite natives--who were suspicious of any new type of formal education--although foreign cultural practices were integrated during the eighth and ninth centuries. Local people and religious leaders considered the European educational changes irrelevant, alien, and part of the colonial exploitation and missionary attempts to Christianize the population. These views were not baseless, as the missionary education (see Bibliography) and foreign private and colonial government-supported school systems (British Parliamentary Records vol. 137 [1905]) attest.

Changes imposed by the Ottoman ruler Sultan Selim III (1789-1807)--considered in the traditional literature on modernization as the precursor to reform--were viewed in Stanford J. Shaw ("Some Aspects of the Aims and Achievements of the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Reformers" in W. R. Polk and R. L. Chambers, eds. Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century [Chicago and London, 1968], pp. 29-39) as traditional reforms; old elements remained even when they were superseded and became obsolete. The result was the rise of a heavy, complicated, and paralyzing hierarchy that stifled Ottoman educational development.

Sultan Muhammad II's (1808-1839) Tanzimat (army regiments) reform ideology is another example of Ottoman reaction to the military advancement of the French as early as 1789. The impact of this regimented, centralized system on modern bureaucracy in

the Muslim world is apparent even now, particularly in the civil service systems: personnel affairs, education, and justice.

Educational objectives shifted from emphasizing discipline for both children and adults (Dale Eickelman, 1985) to a means to formalize the relationship of citizens to the state to meet its economic and political interests. Local governors' policies, led by their eagerness to acquire European technologies to strengthen and modernize their military, weakened the kuttabs and madrasahs, especially when their waqf (endowment) was distributed among the ruling class and missionary societies to establish private schools. J. Heyworth-Dunne (An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt. New impression [London, 1968]) suggests that the Egyptian Mamluk Muhammad Ali's (1806-1841) imposed system is the key to understanding why Egypt's present system is so defective and ill-adapted to the country. Although he established a military school (1816), technical and engineering schools and colleges, and a medical school (1827), they were for men only and staffed by European Christians. He also sent large students' missions--all men, mainly of ruling and elite families--to study in Europe in 1826. In such institutions, natives were forced to study Turkish, Italian, French, and English. Even when translations were made to aid in the instruction, comprehension problems were not overcome because native students came to these schools unprepared. The shortcomings of this instructional system resulted, in part, from its neglect of female education, particularly at the secondary level, and its training of teachers for the elementary and the preparatory schools. But, most of all, it was not coordinated with the traditional practices and appeared to operate as a rival or even substitute. New subject matters were divorced from the Qur'anic and other sciences of antiquity such as astronomy, geography, and medicine. Above all, Tibawi asserts, the system had little or

no direct intellectual purpose; it existed primarily to train the natives to serve colonial and local government interests.

2. What Has Been the Function of Education Before and After Changes?

Despite its lack of vitality after the fifteenth century, Lillian Sanderson points out in "Education and Administrative Control in Colonial Sudan and Northern Nigeria" (African Affairs 74 [October 1975]: 427-41) that Islamic education achieved the goals it set: passing on the customs of the adult community, teaching children the knowledge and skills of the culture that they needed to function effectively, and instilling in them beliefs in relation to the universe about the relationship between the seen and the unseen.

What remained of the Islamic education system became peripheral, reserved for the underprivileged, such as girls and poor rural and urban masses. Primary Islamic education, for example, came to a standstill when its main language, Arabic, was replaced by Turkish as the medium of instruction in most government schools and by colonial languages in private schools. Changes, as Gregory Starrett states in "Appropriating the Kuttab: The Functionalization of Mass Religious Instruction in Egypt, 1882-1952" (forthcoming), "transformed people's ideas about religion" and its importance to community development by removing the teaching of Islam as the base of character formation and making it a new subject "Religion," without primary status in the curriculum.

Changes introduced in the nineteenth century did not meet Islamic cultural needs. The government schools were based on colonial policy to control Muslim rulers, administrative management, and agricultural productivity. As described by Leila Ahmad in Women and Gender in Islam. (New Haven and London, 1992), when enrollments

grew, girls were denied places in classrooms and tuition was instituted in secondary schools, making girls' education of low priority.

The English colonial system penetrated the Indian subcontinent, the majority of the Middle East, and many African nations, even though it claimed not to have interfered in internal affairs (Mazrui). The French colonial system in North and West Africa and in Syria and Lebanon, as W. Bryant Mumford (Africans Learn to Be French [New York, 1970]) suggests, assimilated the existing system to the point of annihilating it. It contributed further to diverting the rural system from traditional Islamic education to superstitious social customs, dogmatic and nationalistic creeds, and passive sufi orders. And instead of strengthening institutions of higher learning, such as the oldest (over 1,100 years) Al-Qurawayun in Fez in Morocco, the colonial government dismantled many old centers.

Similar movements took place in other regions, with varying degrees of interaction with European expatriates and different levels of emphasis on 'traditional' vs. 'modern' elements in education depending on the colonizers' policy and the extent of their penetration of native cultures.

3. To What May We Compare the Two Schemes of Education?

Comparing teaching in kuttab and madrasah to the colonizers' technical, military, and vocational training or the missionaries' book knowledge is not an accurate indicator of educational reform. What is obvious, however, is that educational practices have changed from informal family-based, formal teacher-centered, and nonformal community-decentralized tarbiyah (character and intellectual development) to either formal missionary-controlled and/or state-centralized schooling.

The function of teaching was primarily Qur'anic talqin (acquisition and dissemination of meaning and spirit), instilling community values while combating illiteracy. Other types of kuttab were to teach some knowledge of akhbar (history), hisab (simple arithmetic and reckoning), and elementary Arabic nahu (grammar), reading, and writing. The function of the madrasah was to complement the objectives of both kuttabs, as well as the halaqah's advanced ^عulum al-Qur'an (Qur'anic sciences), ^عulum al-hadith (sciences of the Prophetic tradition), and their ancillary sciences of Arabic nahu and adab (literature). Thus, science of the ancients in which hikma (wisdom), kalam (philosophy/theology), mantiq (logic), ^عilm al-nujum (astronomy), music, and ^عilm al-tub (medicine), as Ayyub Ali (1983) states, were part of the curriculum even early in the nineteenth century. Government and missionary schools, meanwhile, as Malek Bennabi (1969) asserts, aimed at implanting European secular and Christian values of agrarian, office, and class bureaucracy.

Although printed textbooks and notebooks may have replaced the murrabi's (teacher/guide) scripted notes and the lah (tablet), respectively, mainly in urban schools, book and lecture instruction and memorization of factual information continue to prevail. But they lack the essence of the transmitted oral tradition.

A pupil who used to study under one teacher with whom she or he had a mutual relationship and moved from one subject to the next after showing mastery through oral discussion or tutoring his or her juniors is now instructed on a mass scale, segregated by sex, and taught different subjects in a school day. The idea of special girls' schools was introduced by the Catholic missionaries. In these schools girls were taught embroidery, home economics, domestic skills, and nursing in addition to reading the Bible. Boys were taught office skills, agricultural, military, and vocational trades, and some fiqh (jurisprudence) to serve government needs. Pupils in these schools,

according to M. H. Khan (History of Muslim Education Vol II: 1751-1854 A. D. [Karachi, 1973]), are examined in material that is irrelevant to their culture so they can be promoted to the next level taught by a new teacher. The concept of tarbiyah has been reduced to passing on some skills and information to qualify for a job.

The two interfacing schemes represent a departure from the Islamic perspective that was instrumental in the evolution of the Islamic civilization. Rahman notes that intellectual stagnation occurred during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when manuals and commentaries dominated, and suggests that the educational process had virtually ceased to function by the late 1500s when the Andalusian Islamic community was dismantled. Eickelman, however, sees the Islamic education mnemonic devices as a continuation of the socialization process even during and after the colonial period when systems of mass and compulsory schooling were legislated.

The Islamic system was abandoned when the state and colonial governments made decisions for the natives and Muslims lost their scholarly and intellectual initiatives. With the exception of scattered individual scholars and artisans during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries that Nasr points out, Islamic educational practices became dormant. Attempts to expound the positive attitude of Islam toward science by those Rahman calls "pre-modernist reformers"--Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and Sayyid Amir [ؑ]Ali (d. 1928) of India, Namik Kemal (1840-1888) of Turkey, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) and Muhammad [ؑ]Abduh (1845-1905) of Egypt--resulted instead in complete separation of "Islamic" and "non-Islamic" knowledge. The strategies of nationalist elites such as Ma [ؑ]aruuf al-Rasafi (1875-1945) of Iraq, attest to differences in attitude, especially toward the implications of modern science for the traditional worldview and faith. These different attitudes and strategies created further confusion as to how to reintroduce science and technology in the culture. Aspirations of some elites and rulers

were, as Bennabi states, not those of the community or the masses, but those of the colonials, missionaries, and romantic orientalists.

The practical implications of these differences in attitude and alienated aspirations may be seen in the varied and conflicting responses to modernization and in the present disparity between the ideal and the reality of the Muslim world, particularly in education. Sir Sayyid's call in 1860 for the reinterpretation of the Qur'an in light of modern experience, for example, failed because his views were not based on the Islamic perspective. He was not able to implement them in the Aligarh Muslim University of India, which he created to integrate religious beliefs with a modern scientific outlook. Islamic education was reduced to religious education and was left to teachers who had little training or support. Other reform ideas, put forth by those who had studied in Europe, had a similar negative results. Though these ideas were supported by elites and rulers, they were opposed by orthodox community leaders who feared they would contaminate the beliefs of the people and were ignored by the masses as irrelevant and providing no practical solutions to the ailing educational practices.

4. How Do Community Development and Educational Progress Interact and How Central Are Women to Educational Reform?

The rival Muslim and European schemes reigned until the second quarter of the twentieth century, when turmoil became the common denominator in the social, political, and educational systems until military and political independence from colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s. Elites (who were largely educated either in missionary schools and colleges, or in East and West European and American institutions), Bennabi adds, contributed further to this turmoil by adopting Western ideas of change as the only

means for reform without considering actual needs and the socio-psychological factors of the community.

Postcolonial changes, which almost uniformly used 'modern' educational instructional schemes, also resulted in confusing outcomes. With minor variations in their level of success in achieving the objectives of the ruling class (introducing modern technology as a symbol of progress) the overall picture after almost fifteen years, as A. A. H. El-Koussy (Survey of Educational Progress in the Arab States, 1960-1965 [Beirut, 1966]) describes it, is still an aimless system with no evaluation system or overall direction. His description of the Arab world applies to other Muslim countries as well. Education authorities were working with enthusiasm, but they lacked planning and balance in educational development.

With some exceptions, such as the return to regional (native) languages --European languages became secondary to Arabic, Persian, or Urdu as media of instruction in public schools--the lack of overall success in achieving this goal in all regions attests to the general uncertainty of the objective. This is evident in African countries, especially North Africa as Abdelhamid Mansouri discusses ("Algeria Between Tradition and Modernity: The Question of language" [The State University of New York at Albany, Ph.D. diss., 1991]), and in Asian countries, particularly Pakistan that could not make a full transition as Taj Ali Koraisy points out in How to Reform Educational System in Pakistan and Other Muslim Countries (Gujranwala, 1972). As nationalistic sentiments were emphasized, the idea of restoring Arabic as the language of the Qur'an became idealized. Meanwhile, using a regional language for instruction created problems of translating European textbooks instead of writing new, native textbooks.

Rapid growth in the quantity of schools did not keep up with population growth or with the demand for education. High levels of illiteracy persist (UNESCO, 1990) and,

notwithstanding arguments concerning definition of literacy and the value of oral transmission, females' level and type of education are still inferior to that of males (Nagat El-Sanabary, 1992). Educational quality is inadvertently sacrificed in pursuit of universal schooling and mandatory elementary education because of the lack of both human and other resources and of coherent regional planning and technical competency (Badran). Intellectual production, Bennabi (1959) laments, is hindered because Muslims value European products and wish to acquire them, without researching the ideas behind these products.

Educational transformation varied among Muslim countries, depending on the development model adopted, because of the post-1969 Muslim world's economic and political polarization and the role played by oil-rich countries and their international benefactors. For example, the Malaysian government accommodated secularism in its educational program between 1971 and 1980, M. Kamal Bin Hassan (1981) reports, expanding facilities and opportunities for education in science, mathematics, and technology-oriented disciplines along with attempts to equip youths of all races and sexes with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in developing the economy. The relation between tradition and change in the Malaysian context did not arise from the question of cultural change, in which women's place is used as the central discourse in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan. Instead, Muslim religious groups used new discourse to defend the encroachment of Western ideas. By emphasizing the morality question, epitomized in attire and sex segregation, particularly in higher education institutions, they have indirectly restricted females' intellectual role in the development process. Malaysian educational reform did not change the intellectual, attitudinal, and cultural development of the Muslim masses either. As similar movements are spreading

in other Muslim communities from Indonesia to North America, one wonders whether there ever was an educational reform!

* See the author's article "Religious Education."

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