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DONALD MALCOLM REID  
Updated by SYED RIZWAN ZAMIR

### EDUCATIONAL METHODS

Methods are a critical element in realizing the goals of education, as they link teachers, students, and content. Like all aspects of education, methods are deeply influenced by cultural environments. Thus the teaching of Islam follows religious injunctions as well as local social and cultural traditions. At the same time it has to be seen in conjunction with the state of general education in Muslim societies, of which it remains an inseparable part, without losing its specific character derived from the transfer of religious knowledge, practice, and faith. There has been no clear separation between religious and secular education; both types have, at various times, been transmitted by both traditional and modernizing approaches.

**Inheritance from the Past.** The transfer of Islamic knowledge has long been modeled after the early mosque community of the founding generation of Islam. It was marked by a profoundly oral tradition based on a strong attachment by students to a chosen teacher. Since the Qur'an, the Prophetic revelation, was seen as the Word of God and the prime source of knowledge (*'ilm*), its

memorization and transmission were considered essential, or even sufficient. Religious instruction was carried out in the mosque, in religious schools of a primary level (*kuttāb*) outside the mosque, and in the *madrasah*. As an institution, the *madrasah* gained its prime importance through the teaching of law (*fiqh*). Besides the Qur'an it relied on the standard books in *ḥadīth* studies. Qur'an recitation was pervasive, being a daily requirement of the students. Islamic schools also taught non-Islamic sciences such as logic, mathematics, or astronomy. Many subjects were taught by means of poems or in rhyme, facilitating their memorization. Reliance on memory was highly valued, as were repetition and taking notes from dictation. The memorized material was quoted verbatim during disputations. Islamic theology and jurisprudence were marked by a strong tradition of interpretation and therefore generated lively debates.

Whereas the oral tradition contributed to the importance of rote learning, the legalistic influence was reflected in the study of highly specialized commentaries on the sources. Teaching focused on the understanding of specific scholarly texts. The discussion of texts was personal and based on the interpretation of the teacher, who would then probe the understanding of the students. Results were certified by evaluating the competence of the student to understand and transmit all or part of a text or a subject, for which he would then be awarded a license to teach (*ijāzah*). But the acquisition of knowledge (*'ilm*) was always seen as a spiritual act as well. The recitation of the Qur'an and the study of other religious subjects were regarded as acts of utmost piety.

At the more advanced levels education was highly personalized, because the system was based on the view that knowledge was acquired through contact with learned individuals. A student would select a master and develop a close personal and intellectual relationship with him. The choice of a teacher was usually the single most important decision that a student could make, for one's career was commonly determined by the mentor's reputation. The teacher was responsible for the moral as well as the intellectual development of the student. A psychological distance often remained between them, however. The religious teacher as *shaykh* acquired a special role and status in Muslim orders (*ṭarīqa*), leading to unquestioned obedience and veneration. But the student's status



**Educational Methods.** Iran, c. 1540. Among the activities depicted in this Šafavid-dynasty folio are students copying texts and a master beating his student. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.221

was also elevated as he became a disciple (*khalifa*) who would carry on the message and mission of the teacher in a formally anointed and highly committed manner.

Over time, education became more institutionalized, especially at the higher levels, where various kinds of colleges were established; in the beginning, they retained the personal, informal character of earlier institutions. Egypt's famous al-Azhar, for example, possessed no regular schedule, entrance requirements, formal standards, required courses, examinations, or sharp distinction between faculty and students—a teacher in one course could be a student in another. After radical reforms it gradually turned into a “bureaucratic university.” (Kadi and Billeh, p. 343.)

Some early Arab scholars who studied educational processes advocated the use of different methods and arrangements, especially at the higher levels, but their treatises had only limited impact. The prevailing methods effectively socialized large populations into Islamic beliefs, values, and practices, and Qur'ānic schools using these methods continued to thrive.

**Impact of Modernity.** It was perhaps not before the eighteenth century with the emergence of public schooling, often under Western and colonial influences, that Islamic schools began to focus on Islamic sciences exclusively. The bifurcation of secular and religious education strengthened the association of Islamic schooling with rote learning and memorization. The encounter of the established Islamic schools with new civil schools produced different responses in two main directions: modernist Islamic educators set out to revise their curriculum and make it responsive to the new era by evoking the principle of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), sometimes fusing it with secular subjects, whereas their conservative colleagues took to reviving traditional teaching in the spirit of adherence to precedent (*taqlid*).

Islamic schools were also influenced by Western patterns of teaching, as can be seen in the Institute of Higher Islamic Studies, the Dāru'l-'Ulūm of Deoband in north India. When established in 1866 it was consciously modeled after Delhi College, a British-led institution. Clerics were striving to work for the revival of the faith and of religious knowledge through the application of techniques of the colonial powers. Theologians argued for the need of Islam to interpret the world through its

own precepts more comprehensively if it was to withstand the pressure felt from the Western Christian world. A gradual modernization of Islamic teaching ensued in which a sector of religious institutions emerged that turned religious training into mass education. In many parts of the Muslim world, institutions multiplied at a high rate. These Islamic schools or *madrasahs* followed fixed schedules, held exams, and provided residence accommodation. Paradoxically, many of them, such as the schools of the Deoband tradition, are seen today as traditional and antiquated; in their time, however, they were on the cutting edge of change and modernity, at least within the sector of religious teaching.

In view of the growing variety of educational institutions it is difficult to generalize about methods of Islamic teaching. Some of the methods that Western experts often see as critical in Islamic teaching, such as rote learning, authoritative teaching, and absence of debate and dissent, can rather be seen as a stage through which most forms of teaching passed, be it Western or Oriental, religious or secular. Therefore, the establishment of modern civil schools in the Muslim world in the nineteenth century produced less change in teaching methods than is often assumed. Also, the Western powers had no political interest in establishing schools that would prepare students from the colonies and dependent territories to think independently. They developed curricula that were similar to those at home and expected students to master a body of knowledge that would prepare them to be loyal, obedient administrators. The cultivation of intelligence, sensitivity, and awareness was often rigidly suppressed, as could be seen in Egypt under Lord Cromer. Ministries of education permitted no deviation from strict rules and regulations.

Even in states that retained their independence, Western influences did not transform traditional patterns in the civil sector. At first large numbers of Europeans were hired to teach in reformist schools, but this was an inefficient arrangement because their lectures had to be translated into the local language. To meet the need for native teachers, the Ottomans founded the Darūlmuallim in 1848. Its graduates, and those of the other teacher-training colleges that subsequently opened throughout the region, replaced the Europeans, but teaching methods mostly retained their traditional character.

**Contemporary Methods.** After independence from colonial domination, Islamic schools evolved through several stages. In the 1950s and 1960s they were subjected to nationalist education policies. Beginning in the 1970s, a resurgence of Islamic schools occurred, generating a revival of religious education. At the same time, institutions and methods diversified.

Attempts to reform Islamic teaching had started in colonial times when administrations sought to encourage the teaching of secular subjects in Islamic schools. Similar efforts at “mainstreaming” Islamic schools have intensified recently, as Islamic schools have been reviewed critically and are often portrayed as an obstacle to development and modernization. Since the 2001 attacks at the New York World Trade Center and the war against Afghanistan, *madrasahs* have also been considered a political threat, as they allegedly produce Islamic radicalism and militancy. Sociological analysis has not borne out such contentions, as the number of Islamic schools linked to militant activities remains very low in countries such as Pakistan. It is estimated that *madrasahs* in those countries have not captured more than 3 to 5 percent of the educational market.

Islamic educators have often emphasized that their goal of education is to produce students who are good Muslims. Students in Islamic schools continue to be bound by the strong moral and emotional constraints of the teacher’s authority. They are discouraged from questioning the authority of teachers, but also the authority of texts and authors being taught. Nevertheless, the tradition of theological dispute and of the defense of the faith against what are seen as deviant or heretical beliefs will lead to animated discussions and even disputes in Islamic schools. Some teachers emphasized their right to administer corporal punishment whenever necessary, legitimizing it with reference to the Qur’an and the *hadith*. Today civil institutions and the media have started highlighting cases of abuse in *madrasahs*, calling for more stringent oversight on behalf of the public and the state.

In those parts of the Muslim world where *madrasahs* have become mass phenomena, notably in South and Southeast Asia, their student body is no longer insulated from social and political influences. Students often become politicized holding debates and publishing

student wall papers, albeit under the guidance and control of teachers. Students discuss not only theological but also political issues seen as having repercussions for Islam.

Ideological influences in Islamic schools have been traced to sectarian teachings seeking to mobilize students to stand up for the “true” Islam in the interpretation of particular groups or sects. Such sectarianism breeds intolerance toward dissenting fellow Muslims and non-Muslims and can ultimately feed into political extremism. The root cause for such polarization, however, seems to be the political manipulation of these schools by some Islamic politicians and militants. It has also been noted that, conversely, some radical and ideological groups seek to open their own schools committed to the group’s ideology.

Since the 1990s, the sector of Islamic teaching has been opening up and diversifying in a remarkable way. Economic reforms emphasizing market modernization are pushing Islamic schools to position themselves in the educational market to compete with private schools that are emerging in large numbers for the new middle and even lower classes. Increasingly Islamic schools opt for teaching the regular primary and secondary curriculum, sometimes also at the advanced level. *Madrasahs* in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia have become truly modern secondary schools, run by the state, but also by Islamic groups such as the Indonesian Muhammadiyah. Teaching has expanded also through the new trend of Islamic girls’ schools—both traditional and modern—that are opening in large numbers in parts of the Muslim world.

Besides the *madrasah* it was mainly Muslim private schools that provided the platform for reforming Islamic teaching. They offer a religious curriculum, sometimes modeled on the *madrasah*, sometimes adapting modern secular teaching methods integrating various concepts. In addition, they teach secular subjects at the primary and secondary levels, what today is often called the “national curriculum.” These schools started operating in the nineteenth century, but have spread more widely with the privatization of public education in the 1990s in many parts of the Muslim world. They are distinctive places of learning in that they place a much higher burden on the students, as they have to master two demanding

curricula of religious and secular subjects. Their proponents allege that the Islamic emphasis on memorization could be an advantage, as the training in the Islamic sciences methodically prepares students for the heavier teaching load. Their opponents complain about the formation of a uniform ideological outlook weak in critical evaluation. Good examples are the group of IQRA Rozatul Atfal schools in Pakistan or the Muslim schools in South Africa.

**Practical Problems.** The problems that beset the Islamic schools and Muslim private schools are often the same as those in the public schools in the Muslim world. Reforms have been hampered by ideological and material constraints. Nationalist, socialist, and lately Islamist ideological concepts have interfered with revising curricula and teaching methods. Scarcity of resources limits the possibility of applying more student-centered methods. The available textbooks are often unadapted translations of Western texts or works produced by authors with little practical experience. Audiovisual materials and other teaching aids are rarely available. Library resources too are limited, and access is strictly controlled by librarians.

These conditions mostly apply to all subject areas, even those such as science, foreign languages, and vocational training that receive special attention because of their significance for the achievement of national developmental goals. Science continues to be taught in a formalistic manner. Schools at all levels lack adequate laboratory facilities, and what is available is often not utilized properly. Instead of allowing students to engage in practical work, to solve problems for themselves, the teacher demonstrates his ability by carrying out experiments while the students watch. Even though simple homemade devices can be very effective in science courses, few teachers possess the knowledge or motivation to develop and utilize them.

Foreign-language instruction is another critical area. In most countries every student is required to study at least one foreign language. Although many students are bilingual or multilingual, given the cultural heterogeneity of most parts of the Muslim world, few students acquire full proficiency. Many of the instructors possess only a limited knowledge of the language they are teaching. In some regions of the Muslim world (West

and South Asia), Islamic schools find it difficult to condone the teaching of Western languages, which are still seen as potential instruments of Western adaptation and Christian influence.

Vocational schools do not prepare students adequately for industrial occupations because of inadequate facilities and curricula and the difficulty of finding and retaining staff with industrial knowledge. The teaching is theoretical rather than practical, and students spend little if any time working with machinery and tools and acquiring hands-on experience.

Rudimentary vocational training courses have existed in some Islamic schools (*madrasahs*), although limited to traditional trades associated with schooling such as bookbinding. In the wake of *madrasah* reforms, computer courses have become an almost compulsory addition to their curricula. New independent training institutes are branching off from *madrasahs*, offering additional skills in foreign languages and computer knowledge.

This trend also applies to public schools. National programs of computerization, sometimes in combination with local or Western NGOs, are being implemented in many Muslim countries, although at an uneven and generally slow speed. Particularly in Asia, NGOs have been formed to offer affordable quality education in the form of low-priced private schools.

**Higher Education.** Islamic teaching diversified further through the emergence of the International Islamic Universities at the behest of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) beginning in the late 1980s. In addition, national modern Islamic universities are being created in countries such as Indonesia and South Africa with a similar profile. The Malaysian scholar Syed Muhammad Naqib al-Attas (b. 1931) championed a project for the "Islamization of knowledge," primarily in the social sciences, which became a standard reference point for these institutions. Quality teaching is being pursued here as they teach modern graduate and postgraduate courses in technical and social sciences, business, and law. Islamic teaching continues through specialized departments with separate degrees for Arabic and Islamic studies. Teaching methods here present a lively fusion of traditional, authority-oriented patterns and modern performance- and problem-oriented approaches.

In some regions, such as South Asia, *madrasahs* also offer graduate and postgraduate religious courses, bestowing the degree of *'ālim* (religious scholar) after at least eight years of study. In addition, some offer a postgraduate specialization course (*takmil*) in Islamic jurisprudence (*muffi*), the study of Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*), or Islamic theology (*kalām*). These courses are recognized as the equivalent of bachelor's degrees in Arabic and Islamic studies in Pakistan, and to some extent in India and Bangladesh.

In the civil sector, higher education has been battling with structural problems similar to those in secondary education. Although higher education has been favored by all Muslim states, in this area too the rapid expansion of enrollments has greatly outpaced the available human and physical resources. The result has been that in many colleges, facilities are stretched, faculty members need more qualifications, and student-teacher ratios are too high. Education has become a mass-production process with little interaction between student and teacher. Universities in several countries utilize some temporary faculty from Western states, but this solution creates a divided faculty, many of whom have no lasting commitment to the institution or its students.

**Prospects for the Future.** Islamic education in its various formats, ranging from Qur'anic schools at a pre-school age to traditional *madrasahs*, to modernizing and fully modernized *madrasahs*, to national and international Islamic universities, is still expanding throughout the Muslim world. It represents a growing sector in Muslim minority communities in the West, but also in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It interacts and is often directly linked with public schooling. Increasingly it competes with private schools, both secular and confessional. Many modernizing Islamic schools turn into fee-based private schools, but community resources are also pooled to help Muslim students attend classes there. This trend reflects a strongly held belief in Muslim activist circles, reinforced by international political currents, that on a global scale Muslims are disadvantaged and need more opportunities for both religious education and modern knowledge. With the enormous cultural and social variety of Muslim societies there is no uniformity in direction, contents, or methods. Schools try to adapt through better networking on a national and global scale.

The best schools of these networks can hold their own in the expanding educational market. Yet many of them are beset with structural problems similar to those of the public institutions.

Throughout the Muslim world one can find exceptions to the critical condition of public education. There are teachers who are committed to their students and attempt to make schooling an exciting and stimulating experience. Yet they are found primarily in the elite schools of urban centers, and even there they struggle against great handicaps. The more remote the area, the worse the facilities and the more conservative the teaching styles.

Some Muslim scholars argue that existing teaching methods are not consonant with a real Qur'anic approach to education, and pedagogues point out that these patterns do not promote the intellectual and moral development of young people or prepare them to function in modern societies. Nonetheless, the criterion of good teaching in the civil sector remains the number of students who successfully pass the national examinations, the primary purpose of which is to identify those (usually of elite background) who are qualified for further schooling; the majority receive only an elementary education, and the number of functional illiterates remains high.

Governments now accept the need to upgrade teaching staffs, modernize curricula, and improve facilities. Many are turning to modern technologies to improve educational practices. Turkey, for example, has created an "Open University" in which classes are conducted via television. Large numbers of teachers are receiving instruction in subject matter and pedagogical techniques, and it is hoped that thousands of students will be positively affected. Computers are also being emphasized in many countries. Such technologies can play a useful role, but only if a new orientation toward education is accepted within a society. In other words, quality must replace quantity as the major criterion for educational policymakers; political elites must recognize that development requires creative, independent, resourceful citizens capable of critical reasoning and moral judgment, and they must be willing to allocate the necessary resources to create the educational systems that produce such citizens.

[See also Fiqh; 'Ilm; Madrasah; Modernism; Science; Technology and Applied Sciences; and Universities.]

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DIETRICH REETZ

Original article by JOSEPH S. SZYLIOVICZ

#### EDUCATIONAL REFORM

The challenge for educational reform in the Muslim world is steep. By the turn of the twentieth century, Islam has become a globalizing force and demands for reinstituting religio-moral education have produced tensions between Muslims and the dominant capitalist

Western globalization forces. In the five hundred years since the Spanish inquisition, which dismantled the last intellectual and cultural stronghold of Islam in Europe, Western forces had failed in their goal of "modernizing" the Muslim world, mainly because of their double-standard policies. Focusing on modern skills and vocations as the only means to reform made existing Western-imposed educational reform paradigms almost obsolete. In Barazangi's opinion, Muslim educators need to understand issues of pluralism, secularism, and the individual belief system. The problem lies mainly in confusing these issues as well as in applying the ethnic-religious divides when addressing the public-private domains within the Islamic belief system (Barazangi, 2004). Barazangi warns against the "addition of contents, concept, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its basic structure, purpose, and characteristics," stating that it is twice as important in the context of the current political climate. That is, she explains, "the universal beliefs of Islam that [are] rooted in the Qur'an are often confused with the . . . individual cultural and ethnic interpretations of these beliefs, especially because these interpretations are predominantly exercised by males."

Understanding the dynamic relationship between the universal belief system and the individual views of Islam was central to the determination of the nature of educational reform in Muslim societies and minority communities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it has become more central in the twenty-first century. This centrality, represented in the five major challenges that are addressed in the five sections of this article (preservation versus revival of Islamic culture, changing functions of education, . . .) is essential for discussing changes in curricular and instructional policies and their implications for attitudinal change.

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, particularly so when outside systems have been imposed. Zia's (2006) claim that, contrary to modernity,