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EGYPT'S LEGACY OF DEPENDENCY AND EDUCATIONAL UNDERDEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Egyptian education has undergone various transformations through the centuries, which have affected it deeply. Yet Egypt's history of prolonged dependency on foreign powers provides an interesting context that may help explain its resulting state of educational backwardness due to internally embedded causes. This article aims to study the relationship between Egypt's history of dependency and its educational backwardness with a particular focus on the legacy of Ottoman rule, which greatly impacted the development of Egyptian education, a consequence that Egypt has had to grapple with throughout its independence ever since. The study concluded that a crucial element of Egypt's subjugated experience lies in its timing with the dawning of Europe's intellectual renaissance and industrial development. This was a time when the Ottoman Empire depended on institutionalised religious education to guarantee its authority and internal political stability. Such regulatory policies were an obstacle for Egypt's educational development and made it incapable of achieving any intellectual progress. Furthermore, this experience led to a continued future of educational dependency on Europe, represented in borrowing as the only means toward attempting its own renaissance and development from that time onward.

Key Words: Egypt, Educational backwardness, educational borrowing, Ottoman rule.

1. INTRODUCTION

The educational system is a sub-system of a more extensive system, i.e., society's general social structure. An educational system's social aspect is always affected by and interacts with various changes occurring in the social sphere as if it were 'a continuously existing organism' that has not appeared out of nowhere but rather has emerged from other previous phases (Ali, 1987, 9). The Egyptian educational system has progressed thusly, undergoing various transformations that have deeply affected it over the centuries. Heggy (2003/2004, 149) illustrates:

Egypt's education is a closed system, detached from contemporary realities and isolated from the common cultural heritage of mankind, without which no educational system can hope to produce individuals capable of enriching their nations. But where and when did this tragedy start, and who is responsible?

Today's educational systems of Egypt or any other country 'can only be understood in terms of their past' (Williamson, 1987, 10). Heggy (2003/2004, 149-155) considered the circumstances of Egypt's educational tragedy starting from Mohamed Ali's rule onward. However, this research

suggests that dramatic situations predating this phase of Egypt's history are more primarily responsible and endeavours to investigate further the earlier historical causes and consequences.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EDUCATIONAL DEPENDENCY AND BACKWARDNESS

Egypt is always celebrated for its ancient civilisation and great historical legacies. Cochran credited Egypt for founding the first educational institution, 'the University of Ur or Heliopolis, known in the 40th century B.C. to have within its walls the wisest men on earth'. Indeed, the pyramids are one of the wonders that substantiate the exceptionality and pioneering spirit of Egyptian education. Nevertheless, Egypt's fertile land and the Nile's magnificent flow were mixed blessings, regrettably attracting the attention of Greek, Roman, Syrian, Ottoman and British intruders as well. 'Invaders ruled Egypt for two thousand of her five thousand five hundred years of recorded history...They established an educational system for the elite. Unfortunately, the foreign rulers' power was spent in maintaining their own political and military strength' (Cochran, 2008, 4).

The long-lasting occupation of Egypt created a status of 'direct subordination... a relationship in which the social structures and institutions of one society are rendered subordinate to those of another' (Williamson, 1987, 17). The prolonged dependency of Egyptian society presents an interesting context that may explain its state of backwardness in general and, more specifically, indicates the subtle relationship between this condition and its educational framework.

Such a relationship can be easily inferred among the conditions of dependent Islamic states, including Egypt, as a result of the dramatic contrast of intellectual climates between the Arabic-Islamic Golden Age and Dark Age. The former situation can be perceived through the historical fact of a flourishing of Islamic scientific rationality, when, 'for many centuries the world of Islam was in the forefront of human civilization and achievement' (Lewis, 2002, 3). This fact is often highlighted in the political realm. President Obama's 2009 speech in Cairo praised the contributions of Golden Age Muslim scholars '...that carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment' (Obama, 2010, 761), thanks to their efforts of translating and sustaining the wealth of Greek knowledge, through which significant advances were made in science, mathematics and philosophy (Williamson, 1987, 19).

This legendary status changed with the onset of intellectual darkening. Jabbar (2018, 6) indicated the effect of the evolving Islamic social environment in which the compatibility between ideals and practices was absent since Arabic and non-Arabic Muslims lacked the deep faith and obedience to Islamic laws, making them more susceptible to the temptation of allowing social evils to flourish, unlike the former generations. Ali (1987, 18) explained, 'social injustice and political tyranny found their way to the corridors of power, resulting in social stratification as rivers of wealth flowed over rulers and their confidantes... while the Muslim masses suffered from poverty and ignorance'.

There is, of course, no single explanation for the predominance of Arabic intellectual regression and no single ruler who caused it. Yet, this research argues that the most notable reasons for such regression were considerably linked to the way of perceiving and framing education in both epochs. Thus, the most significant factor in this gradual demise was the deviation and ossification of Islamic scholarship.

This intellectual stagnation seemed to have different salient causes. Firstly, Islamic philosophical sciences began to gain prominence due to rulers' interest in literary glory rather than in military glory (Musa, 2018, 20). However, the absence of sustainable institutions in support of knowledge was always an obstacle due to a traditional reliance on sponsorships, which depended on patrons and thus ended with their deaths (Masood, 2009, ch.9). Additionally, enthusiasm for knowledge was always linked to the ruling elite's attitudes, alternately permitting and prohibiting it (Musa, 2018, 20-22). Political exploitation also played a significant role in eliminating Islamic rational sciences. Sponsoring the rational philosophical movement and forcibly imposing it through an inquisition-like approach impinged on the freedom of belief, ultimately backfiring and resulting in the rise of the anti-philosophical movement throughout the population (Sobhi, 1985, 132-133).

The anti-rationalist movement organised 'guilds and colleges, where science was often not part of the syllabus' (Masood, 2009, ch.14). This, of course, occurred with the rulers' support; a decree was issued to set fire to all philosophy books and forbade any engagement with philosophical sciences, condemning philosophy scholars to beheading as heretics and atheists (Musa, 2018, 22-23).

The anti-philosophical school completely shattered any intellectual and philosophical reasoning among Sunni Muslims. Yet, it was also exploited to achieve the purposes and private whims of rulers by misusing the flexibility of some Islamic principles meant for denouncing rational judgments. Ali (1987, 18-19) explained, 'power-holders managed to twist the facts' with the aid of religious scholars and persuaded people 'that the ambition for a better life contradicts the submission to one's destiny and its distress is similar to an objection to Allah's will since the good believer does not oppose fate'.

By the mid-11th century and throughout the 12th century, education was exploited again within the political sphere but from a different angle, i.e., to serve the raging sectarian conflict between the ideological factions of the Sunni and Shi'a in the Islamic world. According to Al-Nasser Siddiqui (2018, 259-262) 'a dogmatic educational system was structured to support the cultural and intellectual war'. This politicised educational project resulted in 'neglecting independent reasoning at the expense of conveying rigid ideas and closing the door to rationalisation and hermeneutics'. It was employed to create 'armies of simple believers among the masses' as tools for adopting the agendas of politicians and judges, which 'ostensibly supported the religion as they claimed, but at the core were eminently political'. Nevertheless, all of these attempts failed to produce the kind of enlightened thinking that can accept the "other" within Islam or any culture opposing the humanistic interpretations of its religious texts. 'The explanations were views of an Islamic party that was partial only to the ruler'. Moreover, the system formulated teaching and education programs according to a methodology of targeting and recruiting loyal judges and scholars to further mobilise supporters.

A particularly telling example is the time of Fatimid rule over Egypt. Cairo witnessed a remarkable instance of educational development when the Fatimid forces instituted an educational policy that promulgated their sectarian and ideological orientation. The Fatimid used education for converting their Egyptian subjects from Sunni to Isma'ili-Shiite, whereby the 'scholars framed the believing masses'. The orientation was achieved successfully by building the al-Azhar mosque, then creating a unique form of instruction, (i.e., the 'tutoring circle') to teach Isma'ili-Shiite jurisprudence that soon was spread and followed by other mosques (Al-Nasser Siddiqui, 2018, 266; OECD, 2015, 32).

Yet, Sobhi (1985, 134) described the imposition of a specific type of education by the state as 'short-sighted' since it is only temporarily successful and is often counterproductive. Egyptian history is replete with such examples, as when King Akhenaton, powerful though he was, failed to successfully impose monotheism, which ended with his death but might have actually lasted if the promoter was a priest or simple preacher instead. Likewise, although the Fatimid Caliphs tried to impose Shi'ism on Egyptians, not a single Shi'a has remained since the end of the Ayyubids' rule. Similarly, the Islamic rational movement came to an end as the gates of intellectual rationalism were closed and replaced by the religious sciences. Since then the Arabic Islamic Golden Age began to run out of steam, heading towards the darkness of ignorance.

3. EGYPT UNDER THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Despite the fact that Egypt experienced a state of dependency for 2000 years, Ghazi (2000, 5) has argued that the tragic turning point that critically caused Egypt's renaissance crisis traces to the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Williamson (1987, 17) identified the significance of this timing as an historical moment when certain 'constraints and opportunities', which influenced and defined the conditions for progress in Europe and the Middle East, were determined.

Yet, what were these 'constraints and opportunities'? What was the link between the two regions' development? Specifically, what was their impact on the development of education in Egypt, and how did it unfold?

To discuss these questions, the historical ties of interdependence between the Middle East and Europe will be considered with a view to the position of Middle Eastern societies that resulted within the newly forming capitalistic world, which Williamson (1987, 4) saw as playing '... a particular role as peripheral and dependent societies in the changing structures of that world'.

In order to approach an answer to the specific question of how Egypt's educational development was impacted by Ottoman rule, it is helpful to first discuss the broader question of developmental links between East and West, given that the Ottoman Empire is inevitably the important common denominator of influence between these two regions during its time.

The Arab world and its neighbouring European countries have a shared past of falling under the Ottoman Empire's grip (Duranoglu & Okutucu, 13-14).

The Ottoman Empire was always inextricably connected to the West, either through peaceful means or otherwise. The empire benefited from controlling the East by achieving internal political cohesion in the East's broad territories, which in turn brought substantial commercial gains to its relationship with the West (Duranoglu & Okutucu, 14-15). Accordingly, this nexus was considered 'one factor in a vortex of changes which transformed the medieval economy of Europe' (Williamson, 1987, 8).

As a Middle Eastern country, Egypt's experience can be seen as a telling example within the Ottoman epoch. Egypt's state of dependency under Ottoman rule lasted for nearly three centuries, from the toppling of Mamluk rule in 1517 to the French invasion in 1798. However, Egypt was, formally, an Ottoman territory until World War I (Ryzhenkova, 2016, 55). Alexandri & Hassan (2014, 64) argue that Ottoman Egypt's complete dependency lasted for the first two centuries of control, while the subsequent period was nominal, due to British colonisation of Egypt.

Egypt was a traditional Muslim society, effectively secluded from the Westernised world (Abdel Karim, 1938, 30), other than its position as a thoroughfare of trade with Europe (Yaghi, 1997, 71). Nevertheless, the Ottoman conquest itself was an influential turning point for both sides.

Winter (1992/2003, 17) explained that for the empire, Egypt was definitely an asset on all levels, i.e., 'politically, strategically and economically', since Egypt was the window from which Ottoman influence was cast over nearby geo-strategically important areas. However, the empire's interests always took precedence over Egypt's interests (Abunahel, 2003, 203). For Egypt, therefore, Ottoman rule was an unfavourable phase in its history, in which a state of backwardness and isolation generally prevailed, accompanied by an atmosphere of resentment and uneasiness that was more acute than under the ruling predecessor, the Mamluks (Ghazi, 2000, 5; Ali, 1987, 21).

4. EDUCATIONAL BACKWARDNESS IN DEPENDENT OTTOMAN EGYPT

Egypt's state of dependency under the Ottoman Empire resulted in a set of constraints. Yet, identifying the impact of these constraints on Egypt's educational development would require addressing the educational atmosphere of Ottoman Egypt versus that of Europe. Throughout the 15th and 16th centuries the scientific renaissance spread throughout Europe, evolving at unprecedented speed, leading to scientific and geographical explorations that founded modern civilisation in the West (Alexandri & Hassan, 2014, 27). European development was growing increasingly towards pioneering scientific and military affairs and controlling the entire global economy (Williamson, 1987, 19). Whereas inside the Ottoman Empire the opposite was true; 'the Renaissance, the Reformation, even the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, passed unnoticed in the Muslim world' (Lewis, 1993, 183). Ottoman Egypt was suffering political dependency's constraint, which permeated throughout the whole society with its series of tragedies and lack of opportunities for development, as we will elucidate below.

- **Draining Constraints**

Egypt's educational dimension was severely impacted during Ottoman rule due to disadvantageous practices. First and foremost, the Empire did not consider the spreading of formal education, let alone enacting any policies for such, as a primary responsibility towards its subjects (Ghanayem, 1999, 42-43). Furthermore, Egypt witnessed evident cultural lag due to three notable factors. First, the empire showed little to no interest in engaging in any joint activity with their non-Ottoman subjects (Abunahel, 2003, 203). Second, the most valuable books, among other things, were transferred to Istanbul right after the conquest. Third, the most influential scholars, judges, and brilliant men in all fields were exiled from Egypt to Istanbul due to the practice of deportation (Alexandri & Hassan, 2014, 20). Consequently, there was a spread of intellectual impoverishment (Ali, 1987, 21), since 'material prosperity and with it intellectual development seemed to have been transferred to Constantinople' (Heyworth-Dunne, 1939/2019, 16), for the sake of creating the Turkish intellectual legacy (Abo Ghazalah, 2019, 329).

- **Socioeconomic Constraints**

On the other hand, very stressful socioeconomic pressures restrained educational development in Egypt during this time, when essentially 'Egyptians became slaves in their own land' under their Ottoman masters. They were reduced to life in shabby clothes, dwellings, and subsistence diets, exhausted from paying taxes, legal or otherwise. If he refused to pay due to poverty, an Egyptian was typically beaten and tortured until he relented, or was simply killed outright (Alexandri & Hassan, 2014, 69). Given such economic hardships, how could education even be considered an option, and if so, for whom?

Furthermore, Ottoman land ownership laws negatively affected Egypt's socio-educational development. The Empire's rulers originated a governmental land tenure system aiming to generate revenue for the state (Williamson, 1987, 19), which resulted in 'the absence of civil society, i.e. urban bourgeois society' (Williamson, 1987, 10). In pre-Ottoman Egyptian society, there were indications of social transformation evolving towards a dissolution of the Eastern feudal society, favouring a new capitalist society instead, where the relative weight of the civil class was beginning to outpace that of the military (Ghazi, 2000, 5-15). However, the Empire's regulations halted the momentum of this developing civil class by demanding greater civic participation in all aspects of society, affecting, for example, benefactors, especially those related to education, which in turn negatively affected the building of new schools and the support of existing ones. Heyworth-Dunne (1939/2019, 15-16) described the main consequences of such poor economic conditions on Egyptian education in which the schools and libraries affiliated with mosques progressively disappeared due to funding shortfalls in the poorly administered properties, resulting in insufficient attention and neglect. Hence, the instructors and learners departed due to either the school's deterioration or to a deprivation of material assistance.

- **Political Constraints**

Religion was a fundamental political constraint that continued for centuries to ensure the masses' submission to Ottoman rule in all Muslim countries (Heyworth-Dunne, 1939/2019, 17; Ali, 1987, 22). The Muslim religion had a paramount influence on Egyptians and permeated all aspects of their lives (Hyde, 1978/2013, 1). Islam itself was the source through which religious scholars/ulama had drawn power to subjugate the people. The great significance of religious scholars in their communities derived from playing 'a variety of key religio-legal and pedagogical functions' (Mirza, 2014, 30), serving as 'exponents, interpreters, and teachers of religion' (Winter, 1992/2003, 4). In explaining their 'glorified image', Marsot (1972, 149-150) argued that they 'were the purveyors of Islam, the guardians of its traditions, the depository of ancestral wisdom, and the moral tutors of the population. The ulama attained a position of moral and social superiority on the basis of their profession as doctors of the law and of their preoccupation with the words of God which regulated the gamut of relationships between individuals and between them and their Maker'.

Yet, ulama authority was exploited for political ends to the expediency of rulers, justifying the continual closeness of the ulama to their societies' seats of political power (Mirza, 2014, 30). However, this apparent domination of the ulama also brought material gains to the ulama themselves. Marsot indicated that 'high ulama'¹, who were a minority, most often derived their financial benefits and substantial personal wealth (other than from patrimonial sources) from the advantage of contacts maintained with the ruling elite (Marsot, 1972, 150-151).

Additionally, ulama exercised a double political authority owing to religious exploitation. Elite ulama were usually the last refuge of tyrannised Egyptian subjects, who hoped for them to act as intermediaries and liaise on their behalf. Yet, ulama were also used to authorise and legitimise the political control of rulers (Winter, 1992/2003, 106; Mirza, 2014, 31-32). Indeed, 'the ulama were torn between their own self-interest and their moral responsibility... reluctant and timid' (Winter, 1992/2003, 108). Consequently, a social feature of 'a Sunni tradition of submission

Ulama had a family kinship with Mamluk rulers; becoming a theologian was the only prestigious opportunity open ¹ to Mamluk sons, by which they were assigned as supervisors over their fathers' religious foundations.

to authority no matter how tyrannical' was catalyzed (Marsot, 1972, 150). Despite all attempts by non-religious leaders to exercise some amount of rule in the tyrannical Ottoman Empire, they failed since the only open way to political and social authority was through the gate of Islamic knowledge (Cochran, 2008, 26).

5. THE AUTHORISED EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR THE EGYPTIAN MASSES

The kind of education that the empire provided and reinforced in its dependent communities was meant to control the masses. Considering that many ulama themselves were originally derived from the masses yet were able to wield religious power over simple people through channels of politicised Islam (based on their own human interpretations of holy texts), where laws controlled every action and were obeyed faithfully, the dominating nature of this educational atmosphere can be seen.

For centuries, Egyptians witnessed the prominent influence of education, which 'could change languages, national identification, loyalty and religious beliefs'. The Mamluks' status was a case in point for Egyptians to perceive education's power since Mamluks began in slavery yet were able to attain positions of high-class and eventually freedom by the end of their lives (Cochran, 2008, 32). A good example of the Egyptians' tendency to pursue education was the interest of wealthy families in collecting books and facilitating their lending to learners, in addition to hosting seminars, such as the famous merchant Ahmad Al-Sharayi, whose house was the scholar's destination (Alexandri & Hassan, 2014, 70).

Yet, Egypt's education was mainly informal. The entire educational system was dominated by 'the ulama and Coptic clergy', who provided teaching through mosques and churches in the form of 'theological seminaries' (Nooijer & Edelenbosch, 2004, 25).

The educational process was quite unsophisticated at mosque schools (*kuttab*), where traditionally the aim was simply to teach students 'how to recite', since poor Egyptians did not require much for their children's education, e.g., learning basic reading and writing skills for Arabic, memorising and reciting Qur'anic verses by heart and performing prayer movements correctly. However, the more essential concepts of interpreting a text's meaning, understanding its grammatical structure, or grasping the basic principles of arithmetic were not taught to the students. The educational materials were minimal and, to a great extent, linked to the foundation's financial condition, to the point where, quite probably, many schools did not even own a copy of their necessary textbook, i.e., Qur'an, due to its high-priced status as a 'manuscript'. The *kuttab* education was only feasible for students whose parents could afford some type of remuneration, which, in fact, usually consisted of any meager financial compensation they could manage or some sort of in-kind payments (Heyworth-Dunne, 1939/2019, 2-7).

Nevertheless, *kuttab* pedagogy initially adopted an individualised educational approach, which provides a flexible education that meets the students' abilities. However, it was deformed over the years by being put to use only for achieving rote memorisation skills rather than for those of reasoned argumentation. In addition, most *kuttab* students were more likely to relapse into illiteracy (and the manual labor that often accompanies it, such as cotton picking) due to a lack of usage in daily life (Abdel Karim, 1938, 14). Yet, as Cochran (2008, 28-29) noticed, 'All faiths relied upon oral recitation and memorization as the measure of learning'; for Christians and Jews it was a sign of knowledge, just as it was for Muslims.

Michael (1964, 1) indicated that the successful completion of kuttab studies was like an accredited eligibility criterion, enabling successful enrollment at Al-Azhar, for those 'exceptional kuttab students' who aspired to advance in their education and become 'the most highly educated Egyptians', i.e., ulama (Cochran, 1986/2013, 3).

Furthermore, Copt children usually continued their education after finishing church studies, focusing on artisanal skills and arithmetic, enabling them to work as writers, accountants or in similar professions (Al-Asbahi, 2017, 12).

- **The Features of the Educational System**

The ossifying attitude against rational sciences continued to permeate all levels of education. The main focus of senior ulamas was limited to studying linguistic and legalistic minutiae; they neither kept abreast with the scientific renaissance in Europe nor did they endeavour to preserve knowledge of the practical sciences from the previous era of the Arab renaissance (Alexandri & Hassan, 2014, 70).

It is no wonder, then, that educational projects deemed orthodox enjoyed greater longevity and sustainability in an environment of Islamic education where theology and anti-rationalism dominated, together with calls for rejecting philosophy under the pretext of protecting religion. Thus, any endeavours to consolidate Greek philosophy with Islamic curriculum were strictly prohibited (Ali, 1987, 20).

The authorised education was not institutionalised, making it entirely the 'monopoly' of religious leaders until the early nineteenth century. The Ottoman Empire's education was wholly run by the ulama and financed through philanthropic donations of religious foundations, which were also operated by the ulama. Undoubtedly, it was their responsibility to decide the educational contents and teaching methods and to instruct the students (Mirza, 2014, 30-31), despite the fact that the ulama's own educational background 'except for religious studies, was indeed limited' (Winter, 1992/2003, 112).

A particularly telling example of how little the ulamas' interest stretched beyond the traditional theological scope into other sciences was a meeting that took place in [October 1747]² between an Ottoman deputy governor, who was interested in mathematics, and Cairo's most prestigious ulama, Shaykh al-Azhar Al-Shubrawi. The Ottoman governor was frustrated upon discovering that Egypt's senior ulama was incapable of discussing mathematical sciences with him. However, Al-Shubrawi offered the following justification:

We are not the greatest ulama in Egypt. We are only those who have taken upon themselves to serve the masses' needs and represent their demands to the officials and the rulers. Most people of al-Azhar do not involve themselves with the mathematical sciences, except for arithmetic and related measures required for the law of descent and distribution of inheritances..., these kind of studies of exact sciences require instruments and technical skills, but most of the Azharites are poor; a collection of simple people from the villages and the provinces, among whom the ability for such sciences was very few (Abdel Karim, 1938, 8).

² This date was transformed from the Islamic Hijiri 1160.

Consequently, the Empire's regulated religious education allowed for the influence of rulers to reach into the educational sphere, even if this was not seen as an explicitly imperial agenda. The practical result of this approach was that current learners and future citizens were brought into conformity with certain acknowledged religious ethics and morals, which were established by the ulama to subdue the Egyptians under their Ottoman rulers. Within such a framework education was not as independent as it seemed since the ulama's role was used in the service of facilitating the empire's political stability.

6. CONCLUSION

This research concludes that Egypt's protracted political dependency illustrates how education's social aspect was politically controlled to restrict Egypt's educational development for centuries, which has negatively affected the prevailing type of education.

No difference can be identified in the perception and framing of education between Egypt's Ottoman epoch and its earlier stages. Education was always politically exploited by the establishment of religious education policies and the organising of educational projects in light of the prevailing political and ideological thought, which eschewed pursuit of the rational sciences and subordinated the Egyptian masses under both the ulama and the ruling class.

The Ottoman conquest's greatest impact on Egypt lies in the time of its occurrence and in its subsequent regulated policies. Crucially, it happened during the emergence of a new world order that was moving towards modern industry and development in Europe throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, a time in which Egypt's political dependency on the Ottoman Empire resulted in a severe intellectual and educational backwardness and seclusion from the course of civilisation then unfolding in the nations outside of the empire's borders.

Worldwide, perceptions of education were greatly diverging, producing a sharp contrast from the 16th century onwards. While the West was adopting education, embracing knowledge, and moving away from theologically dominated thought, the Ottoman East was profoundly abandoning such a direction to deepen its commitment to religious thinking instead. This guaranteed Ottoman authority by way of the ulamas and contributed to political stability. The empire's policies did not adopt an institutional approach towards education. Instead it regulated the practice of religious education in an effort to control the thinking of the simple masses and thus preserve an endless cycle of reproducing the same mentalities throughout successive generations.

Ottoman governmental policies over dependent Egypt were the obstacle to its educational development. They imposed constraints and limited opportunities, which depleted Egypt and made it incapable of achieving any cultural and intellectual progress. Ironically, such suffocating policies caused a significant scientific and intellectual gap that crippled the empire itself and portended its future of political, economic and educational dependency on Europe. From such a legacy Egypt was burdened with an inherited pattern dependency that naturally translated to its relationships with the West, represented in borrowing as the only means of instigating its own development and a renaissance in all fields in general and education in particular ever since.

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