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Al-Azhar's Approach to *Tajdīd*: A Case Study of *Fiqh* Textbooks

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Abstract

Pre-university Islamic Education in Egypt is provided through Al-Azhar Institutes where more than 2 million students are enrolled today. Since its establishment, Al-Azhar Institutes have gone through various changes with regards to the length of the study period and its educational curriculum. This study focuses on the most recent modifications in al-Azhar Institutes' *fiqh* curriculum introduced in 2013, after the outbreak of the Arab Spring. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Al-Azhar faced accusations of teaching classical books that include ideas that promote extremism and preach a sectarian divide. This was followed by the authoring of a "simplified" version of the *fiqh* textbooks instead of the classical *fiqh* textbooks. Hence, this study seeks to answer the following questions: What is the nature of these modifications in the *fiqh* curriculum? Was it for ideological or pedagogical reasons? Is it a state sponsored project or ʿulamā led effort? Using content analysis and comparative methods, the study analyzes and compares the "simplified" textbooks with the "original" textbooks to identify the patterns of changes and to outline the nature of the modifications and hence the reasons behind it. The analysis shows that one of the main purposes for the modification is to simplify the textbooks and to make them age appropriate for middle and secondary school students. The modification was conducted in accordance with the ʿulamā's conceptualization of the revival (*tajdīd*) that Islam needs, a revival that preserves the authenticity of the Islamic tradition (*turāth*).
Keywords: Al-Azhar, Fiqh, Curriculum, Tajdīd, Turāth.

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ملخص البحث

يُقدَّم التعليم الإسلامي في مرحلة ما قبل الجامعة في مصر من خلال معاهد الأزهر، حيث يدرس فيها اليوم أكثر من مليوني طالب. ومنذ تأسيسها، شهدت معاهد الأزهر تغييرات متعددة فيما يتعلق بمدة الدراسة ومناهجها التعليمية. يركِّز هذا البحث على أحدث التعديلات التي أُدخلت على منهج الفقه في معاهد الأزهر عام 2013، عقب اندلاع الربيع العربي. فبعد هذه الأحداث، واجه الأزهر اتهامات بتدريس كتب تراثية تتضمّن أفكارًا يُزعم أنها تُروّج للتطرف وتُكرّس الانقسام المذهبي، مما دفع إلى تأليف نسخة "مبسطة" من كتب الفقه بدلاً من كتب التراث. وعليه، يسعى هذا البحث إلى الإجابة عن الأسئلة التالية: ما طبيعة هذه التعديلات في منهج الفقه؟ هل جاءت لأسباب أيديولوجية أم تربوية؟ وهل هي مشروع ترعاه الدولة أم جهد تقوده هيئة العلماء؟ ومن خلال تحليل المحتوى والمنهج المقارن، يقوم البحث بدراسة النسخ "المبسطة" ومقارنتها بالكتب "الأصلية" للكشف عن أنماط التغيير، وتحديد طبيعة التعديلات وأسبابها. وتُظهِر النتائج أن أحد الأهداف الرئيسة لهذه التعديلات هو تبسيط الكتب وجعلها ملائمة للطلاب في المرحلتين الإعدادية والثانوية. وقد تمّ هذا التعديل وفقًا لتصوّر العلماء لمفهوم التجديد (التجديد) الذي يحتاجه الإسلام، وهو تجديد يحافظ على أصالة التراث الإسلامي (التراث).

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأزهر، الفقه، المناهج، التجديد، التراث.

Introduction

More than two million students in Egypt today receive their Islamic education through Al-Azhar Institutes. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Al-Azhar faced accusations that its teaching of classical jurisprudence promotes extremism and preaches sectarian division. In response, al-Azhar prepared "simplified" versions of the classical *fiqh* textbooks to be used at the middle, and high school levels. This study examines the most recent modifications to al-Azhar Institutes' curriculum introduced in 2013, namely, the simplification of the *fiqh* textbooks taught to middle school students.

This paper opens with an overview of its research focus, outlining the research questions and providing a concise literature review. It then transitions into the study's three main sections. Sections one gives a brief background on the structural and curricular reforms al-Azhar has undergone from the late 19th century to the beginning of the 21st century. In this section, the researcher points out the main characteristics of Ṭanṭāwī's *tajdīd*, introduced in 2007, and how the new curriculum of 2013 differs from it. Section two focuses on the content of the new simplified Shāfiʿī *fiqh* textbooks. The author compares the content of the simplified texts with the original texts to identify patterns of changes. In Section three, the author discusses the findings of the analysis, which suggest that the purpose of the changes was pedagogical and ideological.

Problem statement

Since its establishment in1936, Al-Azhar Institutes' Islamic curriculum has undergone various changes with regards to the topics covered and textbooks used.[1] These calls to modify and modernize al-Azhar curricula are not recent. Since the establishment of Al-Azhar Institutes in its modern structure in 1936, al-Azhar taught classical books. Then, with the development of al-Azhar education, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, al-Azhar started using a mixture of traditional texts and modern textbooks.[2] Yet, the need to develop modernized textbooks in simplified Arabic continued to be seen as an urgent need for the reformation of al-Azhar.

In fact, in the 19th and the 20th centuries, there were many calls, from the state and scholars such as Afghānī, ʿAbduh,[3] Tantāwī, Gomaa, and ʿImārah to modernize al-Azhar curricula and write new textbooks.[4] Responding to these calls, Al-Azhar, under the leadership of Tantāwī as its Rector in 2007, introduced his newly authored *fiqh* books into the curriculum for middle and high school students. With the appointment of al-Ṭayyib as the Rector in 2010, al-Azhar introduced yet a new *fiqh* curriculum in 2013, one that continues to be taught until today.

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[1] Dalal Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr, 2010).

[2] Nakissa Aria, *Aria Nakissa - The Anthropology of Islamic Law_ Education, Ethics, and Legal Interpretation at Egypt's Al-Azhar-Oxford University Press (2019)* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

[3] Muḥammad al- Aḥmad al-Ẓawāhirī, *Al-ʾIlm Wa-l ʿUlamāʾ Wa- Niẓām al- Taʿlīm* (Ṭanṭā: Al- Maṭbaʿa al- ʿUmūmiyya bi- Ṭanṭā, 1904).

[4] Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*.

Thus, this study focuses on the recent *tajdīd* in al-Azhar's curriculum in the period from 2013 until today. The author seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What was the nature of these modifications in the *fiqh* curriculum?
2. What were the topics discussed in the Islamic Heritage subject?
3. Were the modifications motivated by ideological or pedagogical reasons?
4. Were the modifications a state-sponsored project or ʿulamā led-effort?

Using comparative content analysis and focusing on the *fiqh* sections of the middle- and high-school textbooks, this study compares the "simplified" content with the original content to identify patterns of change and to propose reasons behind the changes.

The analysis suggests that one main purpose of the modifications was to make the *fiqh* textbooks age-appropriate for middle and high school students. The comparison shows the systemic removal of topics and passages that could be seen as threatening the national security of Egypt. Hence, the author argues that state stability, national unity, and security were main purposes for curricular modification. However, did this make the curricular changes a state-led project? Evidence suggests that, though the curricular changes eventually served the state and its stability, they were not directed by the state, but rather were conducted in accordance with the Azharī ʿulamā's conceptualization of a revival (*tajdīd*) of the Islamic tradition (*turāth*).

Literature Review

A preliminary literature review of shows that previous studies on al-Azhar are primarily focused on understanding its historical role and the development of learning system at al-Azhar Mosque and *riwāq*. Mary Elston in her dissertation titled *Reviving Turāth: Islamic Education in Modern Egypt* focuses on the construction of an ideal form of *turāth* through the texts, discourses and practices of the 'ulama and their learning community.[1] A few studies highlight the tension between the state and Al-Azhar and the call for the renewal of religious discourse. Ahmed Mustafa's study, *Al-Azhar's Renewal of Religious Discourse and Power*

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[1] Mary Beinecke Elston, "Reviving Turāth: Islamic Education in Modern Egypt" (Ph.D., United States -- Massachusetts, Harvard University, 2020), https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/2512790773/4B92BB3C8AC3473FPQ/4.

after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, provides an overview of the development of religious discourse in al-Azhar in the last 10 years. [1] He argues that al-Azhar's independence from the state increased after the Egyptian revolution. This independence enhanced al-Azhar's overall credibility in the view of the Egyptian public and transformed it into a critical player in the social and political contexts. [2]

Many other studies written in Arabic focus on the enrollment ratio. However, my survey of both Arabic and English scholarship suggests that minimal attention has been given to the curriculum itself and pressures toward its reformation. For example, one of the earliest in-depth writings that pays serious attention to the curriculum is a book written by the former Rector of al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohamed al-Ẓahrāwī (d.1953). In his book, *Al-'Ilm wa-l ʿulamāʾ wa- Niẓām al- Taʿlīm*, al-Ẓahrāwī provides a critical analysis of the curriculum taught at the time he wrote the book, 1905, at al-Azhar. [3] Though al-Ẓahrāwī's book is useful to provide a historical context of learning at Al-Azhar, it is outdated. What remains missing in our contemporary time is a critical analysis of the curriculum and its implications in the contemporary context. [4]

Another study conducted by Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Khaṭīb demonstrated that the restructuring of Al-Azhar's curriculum, particularly the reduction of advanced religious sciences, not only weakened the institution's appeal among traditionalist families but also raised concerns about its role as a bastion of Islamic scholarship in Egypt. [5] In Egypt, families choose to enroll their children in al-Azhar Institutes instead of public schools because of the rigorous religious education offered at al-Azhar. Through reducing the number of religious studies classes, al-Azhar lost one of its advantages that used to attract more families.

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[1] Ahmed Mustafa, "Al-Azhar's Renewal of Religious Discourse and Power After the 2011 Egyptian Revolution," accessed November 8, 2022, https://www.proquest.com/openview/eb6d9d5dc480ade3e8d17a6dfd1ff1da/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y.

[2] Mustafa, "Al-Azhar's Renewal of Religious Discourse and Power After the 2011 Egyptian Revolution."

[3] al-Ẓawāhirī, *Al-'Ilm Wa-l ʿUlamāʾ Wa- Niẓām al- Taʿlīm*.

[4] Atlantic Council, "Al-Azhar and Sisi's Regime: Structural Roots of Disagreement," *Atlantic Council*, April 2017, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/al-azhar-and-sisi-s-regime-structural-roots-of-disagreement/.

[5] ʾIbrāhīm Raslān, Moḥamed Naṣr, and Ḥasan Maḥmod, "Al-Ṭalab al-ʾIjtimāʾiī Ala al-Tʿalīm al-ʾAzharī Qabl al-Jamʾiī Ḥattā ʿĀm 2030" (Cairo: Mijalit kulliyat al-Tarbiyah, 2019).

The development of Al-Azhar's curriculum has always been closely tied to Egypt's political landscape. After the January 25th (2011) revolution, Al-Ṭayyib often demonstrated strong opposition to the state's policies and its approach to religious renewal, an approach that he believed contradicted the Islamic heritage.[1] This was followed by a conflict between al-Azhar and the Egyptian state, led at that time by al-Ṭayyib on one hand and state's officials and pro-state national media channels on the other hand. The conflict was manifested in the state's critique of the religious discourse and Islamic education offered.[2]

This conflict between al-Azhar and the state enticed many activists, thinkers, and journalists to investigate and criticize the curriculum taught in Al-Azhar Institutes. They argued that the curriculum contains texts that promote violence and extremism, cause division among the Egyptian people, dehumanize the followers of other faiths, and impede the development of Egypt. Several activists and journalists wrote articles in local newspapers and appeared on Egyptian TV channels claiming that Al-Azhar's approach is not moderate (*wasaṭī*). For example, Aḥmed Māhir is an Egyptian judge known for criticizing *turāth*. In a televised interview on ETC channel, Māhir criticized al-Azhar's Shāfiʿī *fiqh* textbooks for forbidding Muslim to greet non-Muslims in their religious holidays. He also blamed al-Azhar for promoting the sectarian division.[3]

Thus, this research focuses on changes in the *fiqh* curriculum since the appointment of Ahmed al-Ṭayyib in 2010 as the Rector of Al-Azhar – that is, in the last 10 years. The study argues that the newly introduced modifications to its curriculum have allowed al-Azhar to retain its role in providing Islamic education to Muslim children in Egypt and to thousands of students who attend al-Azhar from across the world. Additionally, the study contributes to the literature on modern Egypt by bringing the research attention to the significance of the pre-university Islamic education in Egypt. It also shows the role al-Azhar can play in maintaining the stability of the state and strengthening its national unity during critical times.

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[1] *Tajdīd Al-Fikr Al-Islamī: Jadal Bayna Shaykh Al-Azhar Wa Raʾīs Jamiʿat Al-Qahirah*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EOW9XYzwf4.

[2] Mustafa, "Al-Azhar's Renewal of Religious Discourse and Power After the 2011 Egyptian Revolution."

[3] *Ahmed Maher: ʾIḥtiwā ManahijAl-Azahr Ala Taḥrīḍ Ḍid Al-Aqbāṭ*, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOGP1qTsstU.

1. Educational and Structural reforms at al-Azhar

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed significant reforms at al-Azhar system and curricula that shaped the field of Islamic education in Egypt for the rest of the twentieth century. In the past century, al-Azhar was able to overcome three interconnected challenges that represented obstacles to keeping up with the changes of modern times and their necessities. These obstacles were the lack of a standardized curriculum, lack of certification, and the inconsistent length of the study period.

1.1 Study Period

 The lack of specific study period in al-Azhar Mosque represented a huge challenge and resulted in a very low number of graduates. Until the late 19th century, al-Azhar followed the traditional method of learning which is the distinctive feature of Islamic learning since medieval times. James Heyworth-Dunne highlighted that student spent an estimated eight to ten years to complete a set of general books.[1] Bayard Bayard adds that more serious students who were aspiring to reach the highest levels of scholarship spent their entire lives studying at al- Azhar. Shaykh al-Azhar Muḥammad al- Aḥmadī al- Ẓawāhirī (d.1907) shared the same concern when he highlighted that aspiring students spend at least 20 years at al-Azhar to reach the level of scholarship.[2] As a result of these long periods of study, the learning process in al-Azhar was inefficient and, to a certain extent, disorganized.

To overcome this problem, the Law of 24 March 1885 mandated that students must be registered, and attendance be recorded. This meant that a person who was not registered in *riwāq* could not be counted as a student of al-Azhar. [3] This change made the learning process more organized and controlled the number of students to ensure the efficiency of teaching. Moreover, additional requirements such as the age of the students and their reading abilities were introduced to ensure that students had the aptitude to benefit from the classes taught.

For example, in order for a student to be eligible to study at al-Azhar, he had to have been at least 15 years old, have memorized half of the Qur'an, and been able to read and write. Blind student had to know the

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[1] Bayard Dodge, *Al-Azhar: A Millennium of Muslim Learning* (Washington, D.C: Middle East Institute, 1961).

[2] al-Ẓawāhirī, *Al-ʾIlm Wa-l ʿUlamāʾ Wa- Niẓām al- Taʿlīm*.

[3] Dodge, *Al-Azhar*.

entire Qurʾān by heart.[1] These reforms were extended to the rest of the teaching mosques that were independent from al-Azhar, most prominently the Aḥmadī Mosque in Tantā – the very same mosque at which Abduh studied and about whose teaching methods he complained. When Al-Azhar Administration Council was established in 1895, schools at mosques of Tanta, Disūq and Dimyāṭ were placed under the control of Al-Azhar and the same rules were applied.

By 1911, the length of study was specified for each educational stage, with four years allocated to each of the following three stages: *ibtidāʾī* (equivalent to middle school nowadays, i.e., 6th-8th grades), *thānawī* (equivalent to high school nowadays, i.e., 9th-12th grades) and higher education (equivalent to university nowadays). [2] The Law of 1961 modified the study period and divided it into three stages: elementary, middle and high school. In 1961, the study period was six years for elementary, three years for middle and five years for high school. The age of students in each stage was equivalent to nowadays. Then, in 1967, Law 49 was passed to reduce the high school study period from five years to four years, which remained unchanged until 1998,[3] when the study period in the high school was reduced to three years.[4] By the end of the 20th century, Al-Azhar study periods have been restructured to align with the modern educational system in public schools and to meet K-12 educational standards.

1.2 Standardized Curriculum

The second problem that al-Azhar needed to overcome was the absence of a fixed curriculum. Each teacher used to choose what books to teach and there were no study plans. To combat this inefficiency a mandatory fixed curriculum was assigned. [5] According to Aria Nakissa, this step was crucial to other reforms because "once a basic curriculum was in place, further efforts could be undertaken to boost educational efficiency by (1) increasing the speed at which students completed the curriculum, (2)

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[1] Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 135.

[2] Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 141.

[3] Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*, 90.

[4] Ṣabrī Moḥamed Ḥamad, "Al-Tʿalīm al-ʾAzharī Qabl al-Jamʾiī Fi Miṣr," *Mijalat Markaz Al-Buḥoth al-Jughrāfiyah*, no. 2 (2003): 80.

[5] Aria, *Aria Nakissa - The Anthropology of Islamic Law_ Education, Ethics, and Legal Interpretation at Egypt's Al-Azhar-Oxford University Press (2019)*.

decreasing the per-capita cost of completing the curriculum, and (3) maximizing the number of students completing the curriculum". [1]

Thus, in 1896, al-Azhar took the first step towards establishing a fixed curriculum. First, courses were divided into two categories: *ulūm al-māqāṣid* (substantive disciplines) which included legal theory (*Uṣūl al- Fiqh*), law (*Fiqh*), theology (*Tawḥīd*), Hadith reports, Qurʾanic exegesis (*Tafsīr*); and *ulūm al-wasāʾil* (instrumental disciplines) which included syntax (*Naḥw*), morphology (*Sarf*), and logic (*Manṭiq*), as well as the three sciences of rhetoric (*Maʿānī, Bayān, Badīʿ*).[2] The first of these categories comprised the substantive aims of religious study, while the second comprised study of supporting methods. There was also a move to ensure that these subjects were taught using relatively standard texts.[3] When the law of May 13,1911 divided the study period into three stages, a set of courses was designated for each stage.[4] Going forward, al-Azhar had a set of texts and courses taught at each grade level, which is the case until today.[5]

1.3. Standardized certification

The third challenge that went hand in hand with the above two was the lack of standardized certification and therefore recognized degrees. Al-Azhar graduates could not take state jobs because they lacked certification. Until the end of the 19th century only *ijāzas* were granted by the sheikh. Nakissa remarks that "After spending countless years at al-Azhar, a student had no official degree to show for his efforts. Rather, his chief accomplishments largely consisted in the personal relationships he had cultivated with various *shaykhs*. It was on these relationships that he based his authority and from which any *ijāzas* he had collected derived their value."[6] The lack of official degrees and certifications prevented al-Azhar from controlling the teaching that takes place under its name.

To overcome this challenge, the law of 1896 instituted a new examination to be given after eight years of study and after the completion

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[1] Aria, *Aria Nakissa - The Anthropology of Islamic Law_ Education, Ethics, and Legal Interpretation at Egypt's Al-Azhar-Oxford University Press (2019)*, 135.

[2] Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 135.

[3] Aria, *Aria Nakissa - The Anthropology of Islamic Law_ Education, Ethics, and Legal Interpretation at Egypt's Al-Azhar-Oxford University Press (2019)*.

[4] Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 141.

[5] Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*.

[6] Aria, *Aria Nakissa - The Anthropology of Islamic Law_ Education, Ethics, and Legal Interpretation at Egypt's Al-Azhar-Oxford University Press (2019)*, 223.

of eight courses.[1] Students start this phase after they have graduated from *kuttab* school. Thus, the eight-year study period is equivalent to middle and high school nowadays. If the student passed the examination, he would be awarded a degree equivalent to a high school diploma (*al-shahādah al-ahliyyah).* This certificate qualified the graduate to be imam or khatib (preacher) in a mosque. After 12 years of study – that is, after an additional four years of study, students could take the test of Al-*shahādah Al-ʿĀlamiyah* (higher diploma) administered by a committee of *shaykhs.* This degree represented the highest level of education.[2] This would be equivalent to a Ph.D. degree in today's educational system. This *shahāda ʿālamiyya* degree was later made a requirement for teaching at al-Azhar. An individual without a degree would be barred from teaching in the mosque.[3]

The latest changes of 1961 marked the introduction of secular subjects to al-Azhar's educational system, for the purpose of making al-Azhar's high school diploma equivalent to public school's high school diploma. Since then, the certificate of al-Azhar has become equal to those of public schools, which means students can transfer between al-Azhar and public schools and transfer between colleges and universities.

Undoubtedly, the reforms in the study period, curriculum and certification were much-needed and played a central role in transforming al-Azhar into a system of education parallel to the national public school. Yet, what remained missing was the modification of the content of the textbooks and the authoring of modernized textbooks for religious subjects and selecting the books and the content that will be taught.

1.4. Need for Newly Authored Books

Authoring a creative and modernized Islamic studies curriculum relevant to the contemporary context has been a pressing need in modern Egypt, highlighted by many scholars. For example, the highly influential modernizing figure Jamāl al-Din al-Afghānī warned that "the *ummah* will never be revived as long as the books taught at Al-Azhar are still in use."[4] Muḥammad ʿAbduh also emphasized that "the reformation of al-Azhar and its education requires authoring new books accompanied by bylaws

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[1] Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 136.

[2] Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 136.

[3] Aria, *Aria Nakissa - The Anthropology of Islamic Law_ Education, Ethics, and Legal Interpretation at Egypt's Al-Azhar-Oxford University Press (2019).*

[4] Manṣor Ali Rajab, *Al-Azhar Bayna al-Māḍī Wal-Ḥādir* (Maṭbaʿat al-makṭaf, 1946), 52.

(*lawāʾiḥ*) to organize its use." [1] In 1895, using his ties with Khedive Abbas, ʿAbduh proposed a plan to reform al-Azhar that included the reformation of the curricula and the incorporation of modern sciences. As a result, in 1887, the Khedive designated part of al-Azhar's budget to encourage the 'ulamā' to write new textbooks for the religious studies curriculum. [2]

Mansour, in his book *Al-Azhar Bayna al-Māḍī wal-Ḥādir (Al-Azhar between the past the present)* (1946), asks: Al-Azhar had fulfilled its mission in the past in a way that was suitable to the time, but is al-Azhar fulfilling its mission in the modern context? He stressed that "the religious studies textbooks contain a lot of confusion (*awshāb*) that is not part of the religion, and it is our duty to purify religion from it." [3] He concludes his book with a set of recommendations, one of them being the "necessity to revise the books taught at al-Azhar." [4] Mostafā al-Marāghī also pointed out the urgency of authoring new books. He asserts, "The religious studies books contain precious contents but what needs to be changed is the presentation of the content and the teaching methods." [5] Though the calls for authoring new textbooks started in the early 20th century, Al-Azhar continued to teach *turāth* books in their original form until the 21st century when Ṭanṭāwī introduced his series of newly authored textbooks, which were then assigned to al-Azhar middle and high school students. However, none of these efforts paid any attention to tazkiyah and taṣawwuf curriculum. It was completely absent from this project.

1.5 Ṭanṭāwī Reforms

For example, Ṭanṭāwī focused on *tajdīd* in *fiqh* subjects. The first attempt to modernize the curriculum by authoring new textbooks happened at the beginning of the 21st during the period of the former rector of al-Azhar Moḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī (1928-2010). After his appointment in 1996, he ordered the revision and the reformation of the textbooks of the al-Azhar Institutes. The revision focused on simplification (*tabsīṭ*) and abbreviation (*ikhtiṣār*) of the texts and curricula. [6] The reformation

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[1] Rajab, *Al-Azhar Bayna al-Māḍī Wal-Ḥādir*, 54.
[2] Elston, "Reviving TurāTh."
[3] Rajab, *Al-Azhar Bayna al-Māḍī Wal-Ḥādir*, 80.
[4] Rajab, *Al-Azhar Bayna al-Māḍī Wal-Ḥādir*, 87.
[5] Muḥammad Abd al- Mun'im Khafājī, *Al- Azhar Fī Alf ʿĀmm*, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Beirut: ʿĀlam al- Kutub., 1987).
[6] Elston, "Reviving TurāTh," 277.

introduced by Ṭanṭāwī prioritized the simplification (*tabsīṭ*) and abbreviation (*ikhtiṣār*) over preserving the original Arabic form of the *turāth* texts.[1] Ṭanṭāwī discontinued the teaching of the *fiqh* of the four *madhāhib* at the middle and high levels and replaced them with his newly authored book called *al-Fiqh Al-Muyassar* (simplified jurisprudence) for middle school and *al-Fiqh Al-Waṣīṭ* (moderate jurisprudence) for the high school level.[2,3]

Though Ṭanṭāwī introduced changes to all the religious subjects, the modifications of the *fiqh* curricula were the most noticeable and controversial. Many of al-Azhar's scholars opposed cancellation of teaching the four *madhāhib* from middle and high school Institutes and considered this to be a threat to the *turāth* and the identity of the Muslim *ummah*.

1.6 Al-Ṭayyib's Reforms

With the death of Ṭanṭāwī and the appointment of Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib as the Rector, al-Azhar returned to teaching the four *madhāhib: Shāfiʿi, Ḥanafī, Malkī* and *Ḥanbalī*. Each of the four schools teaches its own classical books. This reflects that al-Ṭayyib prioritized the preservation of *turāth.* As a result of this return to the four *madhāhib*, al-Ṭayyib and al-Azhar faced a lot of criticism. After the Arab Spring and the rise of extremist groups, al-Azhar was accused of spreading religious extremism. The critics and state media claimed that al-Azhar's curriculum contains too much of the *turāth* texts, including sections from *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence that deal with slavery, the *jizyah* tax, and *jihad*.[4] External pressure led to al-Ṭayyib's decision to again reform the *fiqh* curricula at the middle and high school Institutes. In 2015, Al-Azhar announced it had revised curricula for all pre-university levels of education.[5,6]

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[1] Elston, "Reviving TurāTh."

[2] Elston, "Reviving TurāTh."

[3] Ismael El-Kholy, "Al-Azhar Controversy Leads to Curriculum Updates," Al-Monitor, accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2015/06/egypt-azhar-university-curriculum-updates-extremist-sisi.html.

[4] Elston, "Reviving TurāTh"; El-Kholy, "Al-Azhar Controversy Leads to Curriculum Updates - Al-Monitor."

[5] El-Kholy, "Al-Azhar Controversy Leads to Curriculum Updates - Al-Monitor."

[6] "Al-Azhar Rewrites Curricula - Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East," accessed May 10, 2022, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2015/06/egypt-azhar-curriculim-revise-religious-discourse-extremism.html.

The curriculum in its revised form continues to cover all the classical religious and Arabic subjects such as *ḥadīth*, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), jurisprudence (*fiqh)*, logic (*manṭiq*), rhetoric (*balāgha*), grammar (*naḥw*), syntax (*ṣarf)*, and prosody ('*aruḍ*), but the textbooks through which these subjects are currently taught were revised in 2015. This study focuses on the *fiqh* textbooks. This study focuses the *fiqh* subject because it is the subject that has received most attention in all *tajdīd* efforts due to due to criticism directed at it by secularists for including ideas that were seen as a threat to Egypt's national unity. Also, *fiqh* texts are amongst the most difficult to understand due to their technically difficult terminology. The remaining part of this paper is dedicated to the *fiqh* subject. Through this analysis, the study highlightsthe main changes in the Shāfiʿī *fiqh* textbooks to show how has al-Azhar responded to the accusation it faced after the Arab Spring.

2. Modification in the *Fiqh* Curricula

In this section, the author examines the modification in al-Azhar Institutes' *fiqh* curriculum. The author begins with a brief history of the *fiqh* books taught to middle and high school students. Then, he discusses the author's introduction of simplified texts where they outline the principles and the approach of modification. After that, the study identifies four types of changes that characterize the new textbooks, namely: 1) reformatting the text and topics; 2) editing out topics from the curricula; 3) rephrasing the complex sentences and rulings; 4) the addition and the removal of passages and sections under topics.

2.1. History of the *Fiqh* Curriculum at Al-Azhar

Fiqh is one of the main subjects that has always been taught in al-Azhar since its establishment. During the Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1260), *fiqh* was one of the main subjects alongside *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*. Similarly, during Ottoman and modern Egypt, the four *madhāhib* were taught in al-Azhar.[1] The reformation in the second half of the 19th century brought many changes, such as the integration of secular subjects or modern sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-Ḥadīthah*), elimination of some religious subjects, and removal of certain books and commentaries, yet the teaching of *fiqh* remained central. Although the teaching of *fiqh* as a subject continues to

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[1] Moḥamed al-Bahiyī, *Al-Azhar: Tarikhoh Wa-Taṭawruh* (Cairo: Dar wa-Maṭābʾi al-Shʿab, 1964), 287.

be a core component at al-Azhar, the content of what is taught has undergone significant flux in recent decades. In this section, the researcher traces the changes in the *Shāfiʿī fiqh* subject in the last 12 years, since the appointment of Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib as the Rector of al-Azhar in 2010.

Many *Shāfiʿī fiqh* textbooks have been utilized at al-Azhar throughout its history. Moḥamed Al-Bahyi in his book *Al-Azhar: Tarīkhuh wa-Taṭawwuruh* (Al-Azhar: Its history and Development) lists the *Shāfiʿī fiqh* books taught at al-Azhar in 1892, 1899 and 1908. These include *Matn Abū Shujāʿ (MAS)*[1] and its two commentaries (*sharḥ),* Ibn Qāsim's (d.1512) *Fatḥ al-qarīb al-mujīb fī sharḥ alfāẓ al-Taqrīb (*abbreviated *Fatḥ al-Qarīb, or FQ)* and al-Khaṭīb's (d.1570) commentary *al-Iqnāʿ fī Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī* abbreviated henceforth as *al-Iqnāʿ*[2] Shaykh Moḥammad al-Aḥmadī al-Ẓawāhirī in his book *Al-'Ilm wa-l ʿUlamāʾ wa- Niẓām al- Taʿlīm* (Scholars and knowledge and the Educational System) states that *Fatḥ al-qarīb (FQ)* and *al-Iqnā* were taught at al-Azhar in 1904.[3] Manṣor Ali Rajab also pointed out that the two books were taught in al-Azhar in 1946.[4] This shows that *Matn Abū Shujā (MAS)* and its two commentaries, *Fatḥ al-Qarīb (FQ)* (taught to middle school) and *al-Iqnā* (taught to high school), have continuously been central to the teaching of the *Shāfiʿī fiqh* at al-Azhar Institutes.

For the first half of the twentieth century, Ibn Qāsim's *Fatḥ al-Qarīb (FQ)* [5] *and* al-Khaṭīb's *al-Iqnāʿ* [6] were taught without any changes. Then, in 1981, Ibn Qāsim's *Fatḥ al-Qarīb* was simplified. The new simplified version was titled *Taqrīb Fatḥ al-Qarīb* (TFQ).[7] The book was printed in three volumes, one volume for each of the three middle school years, i.e. grades 7, 8, and 9, for ages 12, 13, and 14. On the other hand, *Al-Iqnāʿ* remained unchanged and continued to be

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[1] Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn Abū Shujāʿ al-Iṣfahānī, *Matn al-ghāyah wa-al-taqrīb: qism al-ʿibādāt*, al-Ṭabʿah 1. (Dimashq: Mājid al-Ḥamawī, 1979).

[2] al-Bahiyī, *Al-Azhar: Tarikhoh Wa-Taṭawruh*, 287–302.

[3] al-Ẓawāhirī, *Al-'Ilm Wa-l ʿUlamāʾ Wa- Niẓām al- Taʿlīm*.

[4] Rajab, *Al-Azhar Bayna al-Māḍī Wal-Ḥadir*.

[5] Al-Sayyed Nadal Al-muʾmini, *Al-Sharif Hussain Bin Ali and Calipahte* (Jordan: Al-Maktabah Al-Wataniyah, 1996).

[6] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Shirbīnī, *al-Iqnāʿ fī ḥall alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ and ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd, al-Ṭabʿah 3, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Bayrūt, Lubnān: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 2004).

[7] Al-Ḥusaynī Yusfu Al-Sheikh, Moḥamed Al-Burulus, and Mustafā Al-ʿīsawī, *Taqrīb Fatḥ Al-Qarīb Fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī: Al-Juzʾ al-Awwal*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Cairo: Maṭābiʿ al-Hayah al-Maṣriyah al-ʿĀamah, 1984).

taught to the high school students, ages 14 to 18 through 2016. Both *TFQ* and *Al-Iqnāʿ* were taught at the middle and high school levels until Ṭanṭāwī introduced his two books, *al-Fiqh al-Muyassar (FM)* and *al-Fiqh al-wasīṭ (FW)* in year 2007.

In 2012, Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib announced the return to the teaching of the four *madhāhib* using the curriculum that was taught before Ṭanṭāwī's book. *Taqrīb Fatḥ al-Qarīb (TFQ)* and *Al-Iqnāʿ* in their original forms became part of the curriculum again until al-Ṭayyib's new revised curriculum was introduced. As shown in figure 1, by 2013, *Taqrīb Fatḥ al-Qarīb (TFQ)* was revised in a new book and titled *Taysīr al-Taqrīb fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī (abbreviated Taysīr al-Taqrīb, or TT).* [1] Al-Khaṭīb al-Shirbīnī's *Al-Iqnāʿ* was taught until 2016 when the first edition of its modified version *Taysīr al-Iqnāʿ fī Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī* (abbreviated *Taysīr al-Iqnāʿ,* or TI)" [2] was published and introduced to the high school level. [3] Then in 2019 the title for the high school book, *Taysīr al-Iqnāʿ,* was changed to *al-Mukhtār min al-Iqnāʿ fī Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī* (abbreviated *al-Mukhtār min al-Iqnāʿ,* or MmI). [4] Both *Taysīr al-Taqrīb* and *al-Mukhtār min al-Iqnāʿ* are printed in three volumes with a volume assigned to each grade of the three middle and high school grades.

In this analysis, the author contrasts the two original *shāfiʿī* textbooks, *Taqrīb Fatḥ al-Qarīb (TFQ)* and *Al-Iqnāʿ,* which were taught before the most recent modification in the curriculum, with their modified versions *Taysīr Al-Taqrīb (TT) and al-Mukhtār min al-Iqnāʿ (*MmI) which are taught today. My analysis is based on 2021 editions of the latter. two titles.

The following chart gives a summary of the development of the Shāfiʿī fiqh textbooks.

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[1] Lajnit Taṭwīr wa iʿdād al-Manāhij bi al-Azhar, *Taysīr Al-Taqrīb Fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī: Li al-Ṣaff al-Awwal al-Iʿdādī*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Cairo: Azhar Press, 2021).

[2] Lajnit Taṭwīr wa iʿdād al-Manāhij bi al-Azhar, *Taysīr Al-Iqnāʿ Fī Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ Fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī: Li al-Ṣaff al-Thānī al-Thānawī*, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Cairo: Azhar Press, 2015).

[3] In the second edition of *Taysīr Al-Iqnāʿ (TI)*, the title of the book was changed to *Al-Mukhtār min al-Iqnāʿ fī Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī* (abbreviated *al-Mukhtār min al-Iqnāʿ,* or MmI).

[4] Lajnit Taṭwīr wa iʿdād al-Manāhij bi al-Azhar, *Al-Mukhtār Min al-Iqnāʿ Fī Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ Fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī: Li al-Ṣaff al-Awwal al-Thānawī*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Cairo: Azhar Press, 2021).

Figure 1: a summary of the development of the *Shāfiʿī fiqh* textbooks.

MAS (Matn Abu Shuja)
➥ FQ (*Fatḥ al-Qarīb* by Ibn Qasim) - for middle school
      ➥TFQ (*Taqrīb Fatḥ al-Qarīb*, 1981, by al-Husaynī) – for middle school, in 3v
            ➥ replaced by FM (*al-Fiqh al-Muyassar*) by Tantawi in year 2007
     ➥ TFQ (*Taqrīb Fatḥ al-Qarīb*) reinstated by al-Ṭayyib in 2012
           ➥ replaced by *Taysīr Al-Taqrīb (TT)* under al-Ṭayyib in 2013, in 3v
➥ Al-Iqnāʿ (by al-Khatīb) – for high school
      ➥ replaced by FW (*al-Fiqh al-Wasīṭ*) by Tantawi in year 2007
    ➥ *al-Iqnāʿ* reinstated by al-Ṭayyib in 2012.
        ➥ replaced by TI (*Taysīr Al-Iqnāʿ (TI)* under al-Tayyib in 2016, in 3v
        ➥ retitled MmI (*al-Mukhtār min al-Iqnāʿ*) in 2019 under al-Tayyib

2.2. Principles of Curricular Modifications

Taysīr al-Taqrīb (TT) and *al-Mukhtār min al-Iqnāʿ (*MmI) were written by the Committee of Designing and Developing Curricula in al-Azhar (*Lajnat iʾdād wa taṭwīr al-manahij bi al-Azhar al-Sharīf*). In the introduction of each series, the committee outlines the simplification approach *(manhaj al-taysīr)* that was followed to modify the previous textbooks. For *Taysīr al-Taqrīb* (TT), the committee listed five key guiding principles for the modification process:

1- To modify (*tanqīḥ*) the textbook to be suitable for the middle level students.
2- To explain (*tawḍīḥ*) classical *fiqh* terminology in modern terms (*maʿānī muʿāṣirah*) such as the explanation of old measurements in modern measurement units.
3- To rephrase (*iʿādat ṣiyāghat*) technical terminology that the students cannot comprehend its meaning in a simpler format easier to understand.
4- To organize (*tartīb*) the topics of the book in a more suitable way and to put *fiqh* rulings under the appropriate sections and topics. This should help in conveying knowledge to the students comprehensively.
5- To proofread (*tadqīq*) the book and to reference *ḥadīths*.

These five principles define the approach of modification and simplification for the middle school *fiqh* curriculum.

As for high school curriculum, the first edition of *Taysīr al-Iqnāʿ* (TI) was published in 2015 and added to the curriculum in the school year 2015/2016. This edition of the book was called *Taysīr al-Iqnāʿ fi Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ*.[1] The edition published in the school year 2020/2021, taught until today, is called *al-Mukhtār min al-Iqnāʿ fi Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʾ* (abbreviated MmI, or *al-Mukhtar min al-Iqnaʿ*).[2] The difference between the two editions is the replacement of the word *Taysīr* (simplification) with *"al-mukhtār"* (the selected), to indicate that the approach will not be just simplification but will also include the omission of topics. In the introduction of *al-Taysīr* edition (2016), the committee outlines *"manhaj al-taysīr"* (the simplification approach) in nine principles. The following are three key principles:

1- To maintain (*al-muḥāfadhah*) the *matn* (base-text) and *sharḥ* (commentary) of original textbook.
2- To only include (*iqtiṣār*) the topics that will be studied from each book.
3- To remove (*ḥadhf*) some of the rules that were relevant to the people of the past and no longer relevant to the contemporary time provided that these rules can be removed without changing the content of the book or the legal theory of the *madhhab*.

In *al-Mukhtār* edition (2021) the committee listed the same principles with a few changes. There is a total of ten principles instead of nine. The main differences are the addition of two more principles:

1- To add learning goals and objectives at the beginning of the selected topics
2- To incorporate practice questions at the end of every section to reinforce understanding and retention.

In addition to adding the above two principles in *al-Mukhtar* edition *(2021)*, the main difference between the high school two editions (edition 2016 and 2019) is changing the title of the book from "*al-Taysīr*" (simplification) to "*al-Mukhtār*" (the selected). This is because the modification of "*al-Iqnāʿ*" was not just a simplification of the original textbook while keeping all the topics, sections, and subsections. Instead, many topics and sections were removed from the original text and that is why it could no longer be called "*Taysīr*".

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[1] Lajnit Taṭwīr wa iʿdād al-Manāhij bi al-Azhar, *Taysīr Al-Iqnāʿ Fī Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ Fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī: Li al-Ṣaff al-Thānī al-Thānawī.*
[2] Lajnit Taṭwīr wa iʿdād al-Manāhij bi al-Azhar, *Al-Mukhtār Min al-Iqnāʿ Fī Ḥall Alfāẓ Abī Shujāʿ Fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī: Li al-Ṣaff al-Awwal al-Thānawī.*

Overall, outlining these principles at the beginning of each book gave the committee the freedom to make the changes they wanted to make in the original textbooks. It allowed them to remove the parts that were controversial and for which al-Azhar is accused of promoting extremism. These principles suggest that the main purpose of the modification is to reduce the learning load for al-Azhar students who, on top of studying religious subjects, are also required to study the modern subjects that their counterparts in public schools are studying.

The usage of words like "*tawḍīḥ*" (explaining), "*tanqīḥ*" (refining), "*ḥadhf*" (removing) and "*tartīb*" (organizing) foretells the types of modification contained in the new curriculum which include omitting parts of the text, simplifying, clarifying.

One of the most common forms of this type of *tajdīd* in curriculum is the omission of sections and topic. The Curriculum Committee states in the introduction of the new *fiqh* textbook edition that their methodology includes refining (*tanqīḥ*) of the original textbooks and selecting limited number of topics (*iqtisār*). This means the removal of certain topics and sub-topics in their entirety. Analysis of the *Taysīr*'s three volumes taught to middle school students reveals that in fact, a small number of topics that were included in *Taqrīb Fatḥ al-Qarīb* have been removed. In this section, the author illustrates with examples the types of topics that were removed. My analysis shows that controversial and irrelevant topics were removed. By controversial, the author refers to the topics for which al-Azhar is accused of promoting extremism. By irrelevant, the researcher refer to the topics that are irrelevant to middle school aged students.

For example, volume one of middle school *Taysīr* covers acts of worship such as prayer, *Zakat* and fasting and *Hajj* (pilgrimage). The *Fiqh* of prayer is one of the main chapters in the study of *fiqh.* In the prayer chapter, there are many sections such as the obligatory prayer and its conditions, times, and pillars; rulings of performing prayer in congregation; Friday prayer; and supererogatory (*sunnah*) prayer. Supererogatory prayer is the prayer that is recommended to perform but not obligatory. In other words, the person can choose to perform it or not, and whoever performs it is rewarded and whoever misses it is not penalized.

From the sunnah prayer section, the following prayers were removed: eclipse prayer (*salat al-kusūf*), fear prayer (*salat al-khawf*), rain prayer (*salat al-istisqā*ʾ). These topics were included in the middle school *Taqrīb*

Fatḥ al-Qarīb,[1] but removed from the high school *al-Mukhtār*. Why were these topics removed from middle school textbooksIt is true that these prayers are *Sunnah*, and they are among the least frequently performed because they are offered in specific circumstances. For instance, the eclipse prayer is performed only during a solar or lunar eclipse, which occurs rarely. The rain prayer is offered during times of drought, as a supplication to God for rain. Similarly, the fear prayer is performed in situations of imminent danger or threat. Despite their infrequent nature, these prayers hold significant spiritual value and remain integral acts of worship in the life of every Muslim. Therefore, their exclusion from the new curriculum is unjustified

3. Discussion

The types of modification observed reveal that the motives and the driving force for *tajdīd* were pedagogical and ideological reasons. Pedagogical modification is represented in simplifying the text and selecting age-appropriate topics for each stage, middle and high school. ideological modification is reflected in editing texts that might be misinterpreted or seen as a threat to the national unity. In this section, the study elucidates upon the pedagogical dimension of the modifications which include two aspects: accessibility and age appropriateness.

3.1. Accessibility

With a quick look at the Curriculum Development Committee's approach to reforming the curriculum stated at the introduction of each book, it becomes evident that the new curriculum was intended be to more accessible to the students than the original one. This accessibility has been achieved by simplification and clarification. In the Introduction, the committee states that approach to modification is called simplification approach (*manhaj al-taysīr*). The emphasis on simplification (*Taysīr*) is manifested in the titles of the middle and high school *fiqh* books, which are *Taysīr al-Taqrīb* and *Taysīr al-Iqnāʿ*. Moreover, the committee states that the main objectives of the revisions are simplicity (*al-suhūlah*) and ease (*al-yusr*). All this aims at reading accessibility and facilitating comprehension. Why is accessibility a priority? There are a number of reasons.

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[1] Al-Sheikh, Al-Burulus, and Al-ʿĪsawī, *Taqrīb Fatḥ Al-Qarīb Fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī: Al-Juzʾ al-Awwal*, 1:97–101.

The first reason is to give all students a point of connection to Islamic tradition (*turāth*) regardless of their background knowledge. Al-Ṭayyīb, Gomaa and ʿImārah all perceived *turāth* as necessary to the progress of the *Ummah* and held that any revival must begin with *turāth*. But they found that students found the study of *turāth* books difficult due to the insufficient preparation, itself as result of reducing both the study period and the hours of study in each phase or level of study. Insufficient preparation and the consequent difficulty in studying original classical texts caused students to abandon the study of *turāth* entirely and look for something simpler and easier to understand, which meant transferring from Al-Azhar or not considering Al-Azhar at all. Al-Azhar found in the simplification of *fiqh* books a solution to the dilemma of teaching *turāth* books to middle and high school students who are not familiar with the language in which that *turāth* was written. This step not only enabled students to better comprehend the topics studied in *fiqh*, but it also gave access to the public, who are not necessarily specialized in any religious studies, a point of connection to *turāth*. Giving access to public readers is a common goal shared by many scholars. Al-Marāghī is one of the scholars who emphasized that one of the missions of Al-Azhar is to simplify religious knowledge to make it more accessible to the public. [1]

To illustrate, al-Azhar chose to teach a simplified version of *turāth* books instead of authoring new books in order to preserve *turāth* from being lost. But teaching the *turāth* books in simplified Arabic might risk the loss of the Arabic language of the *turāth* as well.[2] That is why al-Azhar revived the *riwāq* system and put emphasis on teaching books of *turāth* without any modification at the *riwāq*. Both Ali Gomaa and Al-Ṭayyib played a significant role in reviving the *riwāq* system. Today, *riwāq Al-Azhar* is found not only in al-Azhar Mosque, but in additional mosques across Egypt.[3] Thus, the *riwāq* learning system plays the role of both preserving *turāth* and preserving its original language, its discursive medium while the simplified texts aim at giving students easier accessibility at the beginner level. Together, the *riwāq* and al-Azhar Institutes curriculum provide a balanced approach that combines both modernity (*muʿāṣarah*) and originality (*aṣālah*).

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[1] Muḥammad Abd al- Mun'im Khafājī, *Al- Azhar Fī Alf ʿAām*, vol. 4 (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub., 1987).

[2] Gomaa, *Al-Ṭarīq Ilā Al-Turāth*.

[3] "Arwiqat Al-Azhar Dakhil al-Bayt al-Marsi," accessed April 19, 2023, https://gate.ahram.org.eg/daily/NewsPrint/819400.aspx.

Al-Ṭayyib's approach to revival and modernizing the curriculum is different from Ṭanṭāwī's method. During his appointment as the Rector of al-Azhar, Ṭanṭāwī tackled the dilemma of the inaccessibility of *turāth* books by authoring new books. But his critics considered this to be a first step towards a complete disconnection with the *turāth*. Al-Ṭayyib disagreed with Tantawi's approach, which is why he brought back the teaching of four madhāhib. But al-Ṭayyib is aware that middle and high school students are not yet specialized in the study of religion. Additionally, after high school, when students go to college, fewer than 30% of them choose further studies in colleges in colleges of shariah, *uṣūl al-Dīn*, while the rest study at secular colleges. With this mind, al-Azhar at least ensures that students grasp the basic foundational knowledge, and have an appreciation of *turāth*, part of their identity.

The second reason for modifications is to solve the problem of the condensed study plan for middle and high school students. The law of 1961, approved by sheikhs and al-Azhar representatives[1], stressed the role of al-Azhar as the protector of the religious and sacred knowledge. The Law also instituted that al-Azhar degrees must be equivalent to the degrees of public school system. This meant that students in al-Azhar were required to study the same religious subject in addition to the secular subjects taught at the public schools. The incorporation of seculars subjects resulted in the reduction of the number of classes assigned religious subjects by 35%. [2,3]

This reduction in the number of classes assigned to Islamic and Arabic studies continue was not one time reduction. It started in 1961 and continues to decrease to this day. Yusn in her study compared between the study plan of 1979/1980 and 2000/2001 and noticed a significant decrease in the Quran, Islamic and Arabic studies classes. This reduction was due to the newly introduced secular subjects, the incorporation of extracurricular activities. In 1998 the problem culminated when the study period of high school was reduced from 4 years to 3 years. [4] Education specialist and teachers expressed their concern that the study plan based on a 3-year high school makes it difficult for the high school to excel in

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[1] Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*, 57.

[2] Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*, 56.

[3] ʿAfāf Rizq Moḥamed, "Taṣawr Muqtaraḥ Li-Lḥad Min Taḥwīl al-Ṭulāb Min al-Tʿalīm al-Azharī Ila al-Tʿalīm al-ʿAām," *Mijalit Kulliyat Al-Tarbiyah Bil-Manṣurah* 108, no. 4 (2019): 28.

[4] Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*, 57–75.

achieving proper Islamic education or even master the secular knowledge as their counterpart in public schools. [1] Simplifying the content makes it possible for the students to achieve and excel not only in Islamic and Arabic studies subject, but also in the secular subjects.

The third reason is to increase enrollment in al-Azhar. The difficulty of the Islamic studies subjects and the condensed study plan causes a decrease in the ratio of enrollment compared to the increase in the overall population. Not only that, but it also increased the percentage of transfers from al-Azhar to public school. [2] Rizq traced the percentage of enrollment and transfer from 2014-2017 and noticed a decrease in the number of enrollments, decrease in the transfers from public schools to al-Azhar and increase in the number of transfers from al-Azhar to the public schools. [3] According to Rizq, the main reason for the decrease in the number of students are three: 1) the difficulty of the religious studies curriculum as students were required to study *turāth* books; 2) condensed study plans; 3) the lack of extracurricular. These factors also account for the high percentage of failure in both middle and high school.[4]

Many researchers also pointed out that past efforts were not successful because there were caught in the dilemma of modernizing the curriculum while preserving *turāth*.[5] Al-Azhar responded to this first by omitting sections from *turāth* books. Education experts found this to be inefficient and led to more confusion and difficulties. They called for return for *turāth* books as they give full instructions and context of topics instead of parts. Rizq, Yusn and others emphasized the need to author new books instead of removing sections. But this will risk the loss of *turāth*.[6] The author think the approach al-Azhar took is better *turāth* while maintain the simplicity. Both *al-Taysīr* and *al-Taqrīb* were also presented in a way that gives students full understanding, sequence that does not interrupt understanding that is why.

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[1] Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*, 79.

[2] Rizq Moḥamed, "Taṣawr Muqtaraḥ Li-Lḥad Min Taḥwīl al-Ṭulāb Min al-Tʿalīm al-Azharī Ila al-Tʿalīm al-ʿAām."

[3] Rizq Moḥamed, "Taṣawr Muqtaraḥ Li-Lḥad Min Taḥwīl al-Ṭulāb Min al-Tʿalīm al-Azharī Ila al-Tʿalīm al-ʿAām," 14.

[4] Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*, 181–95.

[5] Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*, 129.

[6] Rizq Moḥamed, "Taṣawr Muqtaraḥ Li-Lḥad Min Taḥwīl al-Ṭulāb Min al-Tʿalīm al-Azharī Ila al-Tʿalīm al-ʿAām"; Yusn, *Al-Taleem Al-Azhari Qabl Aljamīʿe Bayna Almadi Wal-Hadir*.

In summary, the approach al-Azhar took in the recent modifications addressed many pedagogical issues but continued to ignore spiritual education. *Fiqh* books are of the most difficult, as they require terminology. As a result, difficult terminologies were removed. For more simplicity, in the middle school *Al-Taysīr* the *matn* was not included, memorization of the *matn* is not required. Whereas in the high school level, the *matn* is included but the clarification still makes it easier to digest. Such modifications show that al-Azhar believes in *tajdīd* that is not only reviving books of *turāth*, but also a renewal that produces new set of knowledge and the authoring of new books. There is another reason for this *tajdīd* which is to increase enrollment in al-Azhar. Research suggests that this *tajdīd* will lead to a significant increase in al-Azhar enrollments by 2030. [1]

3.2. Age appropriateness

In al-Azhar, students begin the systemic learning of Islamic studies subjects such as *fiqh, ḥadīth*, *tafsīr* and *tawḥīd* from the first year in middle school. Their ages are between 12-14 years old. Students continue more advanced studies in high school years, ages between 14-17 years old. If modification of the *fiqh* textbooks is the solution, then, pedagogically speaking, what topics should be taught? What topics are appropriate for middle and high school students?

What makes the simplification of *fiqh* textbooks difficult is the wide scope of topics taught under *fiqh. Fiqh is* comprehensive and covers many sections: 1) *Al-ʾibadat* (Rituals or devotional matters), which covers cleanliness (*Ṭahara*), ritual prayer (*Ṣalah*), fasting (*Ṣawm*), and pilgrimage (*Ḥajj*); 2) *Al-Mu'amalāt* (civil transactions), which includes financial transactions, matrimonial law, equity and trusts, civil litigation, and administration of estates; 3) A*l-Jinyat wal-ḥudūd*, which covers crimes and penalties. [2] Of all these topics, what is suitable for the students to learn at the middle school and high school stage? What topics or passages should be kept or omitted? Know that students in middle and high school are not trained to be scholars, do they need to study all topics in depth? After all, in middle and high school they are given the

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[1] Raslān, Naṣr, and Maḥmod, "Al-Ṭalab al-ʾIjtimāʾiī Ala al-Tʿalīm al-ʾAzharī Qabl al-Jamʾiī Ḥattā ʿAām 2030."

[2] Nadeem A. Memon, Mariam Alhashmi, and Mohamad Abdalla, *CURRICULUM RENEWAL FOR ISLAMIC EDUCATION Critical Perspectives on Teaching.*, Routledge Research in Religion and Education Ser. (S.l: ROUTLEDGE, 2021).

foundation to be prepared for further advanced studies at the university level.

The curriculum development committee chose to make the textbooks more age appropriate by omitting topics, sections, and passages. This principle was stated in the introduction of the book where it says, "to modify (*tanqīḥ*) the textbook to be suitable for the middle level students". The above Analysis of the topics showed some of the topics that were removed. For example, the topics (restrictions) *al-ḥajr,* testimonies *(al-Iqrār),* Reconciliation *(al-sulḥ),* poll tax *(jizyāh),* sodomy *(al-liwāṭ)* and apostasy *(al-riddah*) were removed entirely from the middle school and high school *fiqh* textbooks.

Other topics were removed only from middle school but kept in the high school textbook. For example, *jihad* was removed from the middle school textbook but included in the high school textbook. Some sections such as *jihad* were removed from Taysīr but included in al-Mukhtār. Even when included in the high school textbooks, sections on *al-ghanāʾim* were removed. Also, the chapter on marriage sections on the ruling regarding the disobedient wife(*nushūz*) and polygamy *(taʿddud)* were removed from the middle school curriculum but included in the high school al-Mukhtār also. Such modification shows that age appropriateness for the new curriculum was a goal, while keeping in mind the difference in aptitude between middle and high school students.

Some other topics were removed because of their irrelevance to the social context. These topics are not only difficult, but they were also socially irrelevant to the modern context. For example, the waiting period for the slave women and the *jiziyāh*.

Some of the removed topics which are difficult to understand why are eclipse prayer (*salat al-kusūf*), fear prayer (*salat al-khawf*), rain prayer (*salat al-istisqāʾ*). These topics were included in *Taqrīb Fatḥ al-Qarīb*,[1] and al-Iqnāʿ but removed from *Taysīr and al-mukhtār*. It is true that these prayers are *sunnah* and they are the least often repeated prayer because they are prayed in special circumstances. For example, eclipse prayer is only offered during the solar or lunar eclipse which does not happen as often. Rain prayer is only offered when there is a drought. It is a prayer to ask God to send down rain.

While it can be argued that the purpose of removing these topics is for suitability of the age as stated in the introduction, there is also an

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[1] Al-Sheikh, Al-Burulus, and Al-ʿĪsawī, *Taqrīb Fatḥ Al-Qarīb Fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfiʿī: Al-Juzʾ al-Awwal*, 1:97–101.

ideological dimension for all these changes. The introduction and the simplification approach did not mention the ideological purposes of the modification. This is because the *fiqh* was the most highlighted in the attack on Al-Azhar. It was criticized by media commentators for containing too much of the *turāth* texts, including sections from *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence that deal with slavery, the *jizyah* tax, and jihad.

Conclusion

In Egypt, particularly, Al-Azhar is entrusted with the preservation of the Islamic identity of the country and its citizens. While the institution of al-Azhar does not enjoy the power or freedom to influence government decisions, al-Azhar finds in its educational curriculum the leeway to construct the spiritual and the ideological identity of the public. Through its learning system, al-Azhar continues to fulfill its mission regardless of the orientation of the government, secular or religious. Such a stand is what gained al-Azhar its credibility and the trust of the Egyptians and millions of Muslims across the world.

Moreover, Al-Azhar's adaptability to modern challenges is one of the key factors that makes al-Azhar what it is today. Its authentic (*aṣīl*) approach to the renewal of the Islamic tradition and learning is what continues to make it one of the leading Islamic institutions in the world. Without authentic renewal of religious discourse, al-Azhar will have no value and impact in everyday life.[1]

In this study, the author demonstrated how al-Azhar led a renewal project to modify its curricula to adapt to modern society and the needs of the modern learners. The modifications in the *fiqh* curriculum show that al-Azhar continues to teach *turāth* books but in a new fashion that relates to the modern context. Al-Azhar considers the preservation of *turāth* integral to preservation of the Islamic identity.

In the study, the author argued that the curricular changes were an ʿ*ulamā*-led effort for the purpose of countering extremism. Someone may raise the concern that the changes and the renewal project in its entirety were state-sponsored and served other purposes. For example, Bosmat Yefet states that the calls to renewal serve another purpose and that is to legitimize the rule of the President.[2] Yefet bases his argument on the

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[1] Mustafa, "Al-Azhar's Renewal of Religious Discourse and Power After the 2011 Egyptian Revolution."

[2] Bosmat Yefet, "Defending the Egyptian Nation: National Unity and Muslim Attitudes toward the Coptic Minority," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 4 (July 4, 2019): 638–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2019.1573365.

wider calls of renewal which includes many facets. Yefet agrees with me that the calls to renewal were aimed at combating religious radicalism and terrorism through the promotion of a moderate understanding of Islam and its true values.

The study recommends that the curricular changes and modifications introduced by al-Azhar serve as a model for Islamic educational institutions worldwide. These changes effectively blend *turāth* and *tajdīd*, as well as *aṣālah* and *muʿāṣarah*, creating a balance between tradition and modernity. It is my conviction that this mechanism of *tajdīd* established by al-Azhar will guide future reforms in educational curricula and Islamic learning globally throughout the 21st century.

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التجديد

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بحوث ودراسات

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