

CONCEPTUAL AND CURRICULAR DIMENSIONS OF 'ABDUH'S EDUCATIONAL REFORM'

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Introduction

Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849-1905), according to A. L. Tibawi, is the true author of the "philosophy" of modernism in education as in theology and other fields.¹ Indeed, it is this philosophical aspect that has influenced a great number of contemporary Muslim modernists at one ideological level or another up to our present day. In his study of 'Abduh's thought, Osman Amin concludes that the educational and ethical aspect of 'Abduh's modernism explains the pervasive influence this Egyptian reformer has had in some parts of the Muslim world.² While the importance of his educational thought has been acknowledged, the subject, as far as we know, remains insufficiently explored.³

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¹ A. L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National System* (London: Luzac & Company, 1976), 72, hereinafter cited as *Islamic Education*.

² Osman Amin, "The Modernist Movement in Egypt" in *Islam and The West*, Proceedings of the Harvard Summer School Conference on the Middle East July 25-27 1995, ed. Richard N. Frye (S. Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1957), 178, hereinafter cited as "The Modernist Movement in Egypt."

³ Apart from a few short paragraphs and allusions in works written for different purposes, the most recent studies on the subject are: Sami 'Abdullah Kaloti, "The Reformation of Islam and The Impact of Jamal al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh on Islamic Education," (Ph.D

Education had always been the most vital key to 'Abduh's efforts to halt the decline of the Muslim world. For him, the low level of education was a major sign of stagnation and a major obstacle in the path of any kind of development or progress.⁴ In fact, all other reforms, 'Abduh holds, could easily be realized through the reform of education. He continuously stresses:

Those who really desire for good of the country should turn their attention essentially to education. For it is by reforming education that one will most easily realize all other reforms.⁵

Thesis, Marquette University, 1974), and Mohammad Wageeh Zaky, "Educational Thought of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Ṭāha Ḥussein," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Connecticut, 1983. Kaloti focuses on the reformation of Islam and the impact of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh's on Islamic Education, while El-Sawy treats the educational thought of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Ṭāha Hussein. But neither work focuses exclusively on 'Abduh educational thought. Their efforts add little new information about or insight into what earlier commentators have said. Although it is praiseworthy and important to study a scholar's ideas in relation to those of his teachers or his students, this cannot be done at the expense of a deeper analysis of the scholar's own thought. In his *Islamic Education*, A. L. Tibawi devotes a number of pages to discussing 'Abduh's educational memorandum. He does not, however, provide an overall framework of 'Abduh's educational thought. Other works, such as that of Maḥmūd al-Ḥaqq, *Muḥammad 'Abduh: A Study of a Modern Thinker of Egypt* (Aligarh: Institute of Islamic Studies, 1978); Shaukat Ali, *Masters of Muslim Thought* (Lahore: Aziz Publisher, 1983); Yvonne Haddad, "Muḥammad 'Abduh: Pioneer of Islamic Reform" in *Pioneer of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnema (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1994) etc., are descriptive and historical in approach. The most recent published articles written by Yasien Mohammed, "al-Aẓhar and the Reforms of Muḥammad 'Abduh" in *Islamic University/al-Jāmi'ah*, 1, 1994, and "The Educational Life and Thought of Muḥammad 'Abduh" in *Muslim Educational Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1996, summarize some of the previous studies.

⁴ Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh, *al-A'māl al-Kāmilah li al-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh*, 5 vols., ed. Muḥammad 'Imārah (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1993), 3: 114, hereinafter cited as *al-A'māl al-Kāmilah*.

⁵ As quoted by Osman Amin, "The Modernist Movement in Egypt," 167-168.