



The Components of Taha Hussein's Philosophy of Education Through His Book : The Future of Culture in Egypt

Saida ZAOUT

University of Emir Abdelkader Constantine,
Islamic Creed, Algeria,

Email: zaoutsaida@gmail.com

Tilani DALLAL

University of Algiers 1 Benyoucef Benkhadda,
Religious Belief, Algeria,

Email: dallelcon25@gmail.com

Abstract:

*The philosophy of education provides a comprehensive framework for educational objectives, curricula, methods and techniques. Representing an intellectual perspective, it provides a holistic view that directs educational activities and the educational system. The contemporary Egyptian writer and thinker Taha Hussein was deeply concerned with educational reform, a topic that occupied a significant place in his intellectual life. This was particularly evident when he put his theories into practice while serving as Minister of Education in the 1950s. As a teacher, dean and Minister of Education, Taha Hussein was not only a practitioner of education, but also a philosophical theorist. Thus, his educational philosophy sought to establish a comprehensive educational model, as highlighted in his book *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, in which he presented important theories that continue to provoke debate to this day.*

Keywords: culture; education; Egypt; book; philosophy; Taha Hussein

Les composantes de la philosophie de l'éducation de Taha Hussein à travers son ouvrage : L'avenir de la culture en Égypte

Résumé:

La philosophie de l'éducation offre un cadre global pour les objectifs, les programmes, les méthodes et les techniques pédagogiques. Représentant une perspective intellectuelle, elle offre une vision holistique qui oriente les activités et le système éducatifs. L'écrivain et penseur égyptien contemporain Taha Hussein était profondément préoccupé par la réforme de l'éducation, un sujet qui occupait une place importante dans sa vie intellectuelle. Cela était particulièrement évident lorsqu'il a mis ses théories en pratique alors qu'il était ministre de l'Éducation dans les années 1950. Enseignant, doyen et ministre de l'Éducation, Taha Hussein était non seulement un praticien de l'éducation, mais aussi un théoricien philosophique. Ainsi, sa philosophie éducative cherchait à établir un modèle éducatif complet, comme le souligne son livre L'avenir de la culture en Égypte, dans lequel il présente des théories importantes qui continuent de susciter des débats à ce jour.

Mots-clés: culture ; éducation ; Egypte ; ouvrage; philosophie ; Taha Hussein



Introduction:

The Arab world experienced a period of stagnation and decline, which was reflected in its political, social and cultural life. It was confronted with the Western world, characterised by its robust culture, advanced sciences, and military, economic, and political superiority. This led to the modern Arab intellectual renaissance. Various Arab intellectual elites emerged with diverse ideologies, and the issue of reconstructing educational systems became one of the most contentious topics among these elites due to its central importance in the modernisation process. Each intellectual movement called for the establishment of educational systems based on their ideological and doctrinal backgrounds. One of the most significant Arab thinkers to devote considerable attention to educational reform was the contemporary Egyptian writer and thinker Taha Hussein. His theories were realised when he became Minister of Education in the 1950s, and his educational ideas continue to be discussed to this day. In this research, we will explore his educational philosophy, analysing the underlying principles of his educational theory. We will seek to answer the following critical question: What are the components of Taha Hussein's philosophy of education, as presented in his book *The Future of Culture in Egypt*? What constitutes a philosophy of education? What are the main criticisms of Taha Hussein's educational philosophy?

1. The concept of philosophy of education:

The term 'philosophy of education' consists of two words: 'philosophy' and 'education'. What do these terms mean?

1.1. The meaning of philosophy:

According to Al-Ma'jam Al-Wasit, 'to philosophise about something is to interpret it philosophically'. To philosophise is to follow the path of philosophers in one's inquiries. Philosophy is the study of fundamental principles and the rational interpretation of knowledge. Historically, it encompassed all sciences, but in this era it is limited to logic, ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics¹.

Thus, philosophy is an organised method of thinking involving contemplation, analysis, and criticism, and the exploration of the concepts, principles, and ideas inherent in human experience. It does not exclude any area of life or scientific field. Therefore, every science has its own philosophy: there is a philosophy of history, a philosophy of science, a philosophy of religion and a philosophy of education.

1.2. The Meaning of Education:

Raising a child means nourishing, developing and educating them. The subject is the person who raises, while the object is the person who is raised². In Lisan al-Arab, Ibn Manzur states that 'to raise' refers to fostering, organising, and educating someone until they surpass childhood, whether they are one's own child or not³. Thus, in these senses, education signifies reform and care.

¹- The Intermediate Dictionary, Al-Shorouk International Library, 4th edition, Egypt, 2004/1425, p. 700.

²- The Intermediate Dictionary, previous source, p. 321.

³- Ibn Manzur, The Language of the Arabs, edited by Abd Ali Al-Kabir, Muhammad Ahmad Hasab Allah and Hashim Muhammad Al-Shadhili, vol. 3, Dar Al-Ma'arif, no date, Cairo, p. 1547.



It could be argued that the Arabic concept of education encompasses governance, leadership and development. Consequently, some Arab philosophers referred to this art of education as 'politics', as is evident in Avicenna's treatise *The Governance of One's Family and Children*⁴.

The Lalande Dictionary of Philosophy defines education as 'a context that develops gradually, performing one or several functions through training as a result of that context'⁵.

Phoenix, meanwhile, defines education as 'an intentional process through which individuals are directed towards growth as human beings'⁶. Education can also be defined as the identification and extraction of innate potential in a child, rather than the imposition of predetermined directions. This aligns with the definition of the psychologist Henry Julli (H. Jully), who describes education as 'a set of efforts aimed at facilitating the individual's complete possession of, and proper use of, their various faculties'⁷.

Based on all of the above, education is the process that ensures comprehensive development and positive adaptation to the environment, nature and society. Therefore, its most important functions are shaping the essence of humanity, creating and transmitting knowledge

⁴- F. Al-Jayousi and I. Al-Shamas, *General Education*, Damascus University Publications, no date, Damascus, p. 41.

⁵- A. Lalande, *Technical and Critical Vocabulary of Philosophy*, Paris: P.U.F., 17th edition (1st edition 1926).

⁶- Philip H. Phoenix, previous source, p. 37.

⁷- Fatima Al-Jayousi and Issa Al-Shamas, *General Education*, Damascus University Publications, no date, 2003, Damascus, p. 20.

from generation to generation, and building human civilisation.

1.3. The Meaning of Philosophy of Education:

The intersection of philosophy and education is known as the 'philosophy of education'. The definitions established to describe this concept vary from school to school and from philosopher to philosopher. Among the definitions we have chosen are the following:

'Philosophy of education is the application of philosophical methods and perspectives in the field of education.' This involves searching for concepts that coordinate the various aspects within a comprehensive plan, clarifying educational terms, presenting the fundamental principles or hypotheses upon which specific educational practices are based, and revealing the classifications that link education with other areas of interest⁸.

Muhammad Munir Mursi defines it as follows: 'The philosophy of education selects the logic inherent in our concepts and assesses its effectiveness in confronting realities in need of interpretation. It exposes the contradictions present among our theories and directs attention to the set of precise theories that remain after contradictions have been eliminated. It studies the vast proliferation of specialised educational concepts. Above all, it strives to clarify the countless meanings associated with terms such as freedom, compatibility, growth, experience, interest and maturity.'⁹

⁸- Philip H. Phoenix, previous source, p. 39.

⁹- Munir Mursi, previous source, pp. 29–30.



These various definitions are united by the emphasis that the philosophy of education serves as the comprehensive framework driving educational objectives, curricula, methods and techniques. It is generally an intellectual perspective that provides a holistic view from which the general objectives guiding educational activities and the educational system arise.

2. The Components of Taha Hussein's Philosophy of Education

The contemporary Egyptian writer and thinker Taha Hussein was deeply concerned with the issue of educational reform, a topic that occupied a significant place in his intellectual life. This concern was particularly evident when he put his theories into practice while serving as Minister of Education in the 1950s. Taha Hussein was not merely a practitioner in the field of education; he was also a philosophical theorist, having served as a teacher, dean, and Minister of Education. Consequently, his educational philosophy sought to establish a comprehensive educational model, as set out in his book *The Future of Culture in Egypt*.

2.1. The Concept of Education and Its Goals According to Taha Hussein:

Education, according to Taha Hussein, is: 'The responsibility of shaping the intellect and heart of the child, protecting their body from diseases and ailments, and enabling continuous growth that is free from disturbances or corruption.' Education must provide an excellent environment for physical and mental development, ensuring

that the nation produces generations with sound bodies and minds.^{10'}

This perspective is widely shared by many educational thinkers and can be traced back to Greek philosophers and even earlier. For example, Plato argued that: ‘The nature of man and his complex life require the intervention of education to reconcile its complex elements. To unify these elements, it is necessary to reconcile the demands of the body and the mind, giving equal attention to physical training and knowledge.’ In the first ten years of life, children should undergo training to strengthen their bodies, because a sound body is the only abode for a sound mind. Thus, primary school should have a classroom for lessons and discussions, as well as a sports field.^{11''}

Taha Hussein emphasises the importance of developing both the mind and body in the education of young people as part of his broader educational approach. He does not limit this to a technical concept alone. For him, education encompasses nurturing and cultivation, capturing the attention of a thinker and minister who integrated education with culture and upbringing with knowledge. This is evident in his focus on educational policies, objectives, goals, strategies and priorities – issues that extend beyond the technical matters emphasised by practitioners in the field¹².

¹⁰⁻ Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, Dar Al-Ma'arif, 2nd edition, no date, Cairo, p. 69.

¹¹⁻ Said Ismail Ali, *Education in Greek Civilisation*, previous source, pp. 170, 172.

¹²⁻ Taha Hussein, 'The Question of Education', *Al-Siyasah*, 22 June 1923, cited in Said Ismail Ali, *The Legacy of Taha Hussein: Journalistic Articles, 1908–1967*, Dar Al-Kutub, Cairo, 2002, pp. 140–141.



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In light of this reasoning, Taha Hussein posed the question, 'Why do we study science?' in one of his articles. For him, the issue is not merely about teaching people how to study science; it is about the purpose of education. He answers this question by stating: 'There is no doubt that primary education shapes the child's mind and develops their various faculties, but the development of the child's mind and faculties is not everything. This development necessitates contemplation of another aspect: the form in which you wish to shape the child's mind, morals, and faculties, and the image you intend to embody in them¹³. This has two dimensions: firstly, you want to raise a man and provide him with the educational tools that will enable him to cope with life; and secondly, you want him to be a member of the nation, someone who aligns with and embodies the ideals that this nation aspires to.¹⁴'

For Taha Hussein, upbringing is the nation's obligation to its citizens, ensuring that young people are provided with an environment in which they can grow into beneficial individuals for themselves and their nation. Therefore, state-employed educators should ensure that students leave school with well-developed bodies and minds, pure hearts and sound morals, having become better people than when they started. This is what their parents and the nation hope for: Parents send their children to school expecting them to grow up healthy, to develop good character and conduct, and to become righteous, reformative members of their

¹³- Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, previous source, pp. 70–71.

¹⁴- Taha Hussein, 'National Education', *The New Magazine*, May 1930, cited in Said Ismail Ali, previous source, p. 16.

community, capable of bearing the national responsibility of protecting the homeland, establishing security and justice, and enabling them to strive for a better future¹⁵.

These are the highest goals sought from education. Education is now a national issue, rather than an individual matter as it was in the past. 'Education is therefore a national matter, whereas previously it was left to individuals to pursue their various and divergent paths.'¹⁶

Saeed Ismail Ali argues that Taha Hussein's definition of these goals stems from his national sentiments and a vast reservoir of knowledge derived from specialised reading in the philosophy of education and its social implications, which he employed to serve culture. Hussein established national educational objectives, including transmitting parental heritage and the intellectual, artistic and literary legacy of humanity. In this way, the nation preserves its identity and components as an independent unit, while simultaneously strengthening its ties with other nations and fostering solidarity to achieve progress and stability that will advance humanity. He continuously affirmed that the nation must retain its identity in order to live independently, while also living in solidarity with other¹⁷.

These ideas are fundamentally those advocated by Western philosophers, and before them, by Greek philosophers. This is evident in Plato's Republic, which sets out the purpose of education: 'Children should be taught the

¹⁵- Said Ismail Ali, 'The Legacy of Taha Hussein', previous source, pp. 16–17.

¹⁶- Said Ismail Ali, 'Education in Greek Civilisation', previous source, p. 168.

¹⁷- Taha Hussein, 'National Education', The New Magazine, May 1930, cited in Said Ismail Ali, previous source, p. 17.



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art of participating in life with others. They must learn that all individuals are integral parts of the human body... Children should be nurtured in a way that makes them aware that we are all members of one body, complementing one another.^{18'}

As well as this, another objective of education is to understand the secrets of nature and the phenomena of the universe. This enables people to control and harness these forces to satisfy their various needs and achieve comfort and sufficiency in life. They also study science, literature and art in order to engage in industry, agriculture and commerce, and other activities required by civilisation¹⁹.

Taha Hussein redefined the concept of education, linking it to the goals and objectives of society and the state, and to the individual. Ultimately, the responsibility for the upbringing of the individual lies with the state, a perspective that aligns with modern views presented by educators and European sociologists, who were influenced by Greek philosophers²⁰.

His view of education was neither simplistic nor devoid of philosophical insight, but rather a comprehensive perspective that integrated education with knowledge and culture. Thus, he rejected the traditional view of schools and universities as places solely for studying science and shaping the mind in specific ways. While attention is given to the intellect and the acquisition of knowledge, knowledge alone is not sufficient. 'It is time to believe – and to be

¹⁸- Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, previous source, p. 247.

¹⁹- Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, previous source, p. 77.

²⁰- The same source, p. 78.

certain – that educational institutions are not merely schools. First and foremost, they are environments for culture in its broadest sense and civilisation in its widest meaning. A student's connection with educational institutions should not be merely a means of acquiring knowledge and advancing before returning to apply what they have learned to various aspects of life. Rather, we should understand that the university is an environment where the scholar and the cultured, civilised individual who seeks to be more than just educated are formed. These individuals aim to be a source of culture. Civilisation is not enough for them; they must also strive to contribute to it.²¹"

Thus, thought and culture are two intertwined elements that are important for achieving the desired civilisation. Culture is a right for everyone. Children who are forced to leave school early have the right to seek the knowledge that will close the gap between themselves and ignorance and bring them closer to understanding. They should work with their minds and hearts as well as their hands²². Taha Hussein therefore believes that one of the state's primary duties is to balance the material need to earn a living with the intellectual need to acquire culture. This will help to diminish the disparities between educated and uneducated individuals in society.

. Taha Hussein holds the state responsible for upbringing, education, and cultural enlightenment. The state must find ways to encourage and motivate these individuals to rise above the mental stagnation they are forced into. It must open the doors of knowledge for them and prepare the

²¹- Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, previous source, p. 269.

²²- Said Ismail Ali, 'The Legacy of Taha Hussein: Journalistic Articles', previous source, p. 18.



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means of access. 'The state is capable of enabling these individuals to gradually pursue culture, so that by the time they reach adulthood, the distance between them and their peers who have attended school and acquired knowledge is not vast.'

Culture is not confined to schools and institutions alone; the entire population must embrace its various forms and types. Taha Hussein therefore calls on the state and the people to collaborate in spreading culture as widely as possible throughout society, ensuring that it is broad, deep and varied enough to establish a mental and emotional connection between the elite and other social classes who may be distracted by daily life from dedicating themselves to knowledge. This can only be achieved by encouraging cultural production that transcends national culture to connect with other cultures. 'The state and the people must cooperate to enable intellectuals to produce works that contribute to, renew, and participate in the development of human wealth through knowledge, philosophy, literature, and art. They must allow humanity to benefit from the knowledge produced in daily practical life. The state and the people must cooperate to ensure that culture transcends national boundaries and reaches other nations that may need this nourishment. It must also connect with other advanced nations that may not need our culture, but whose acknowledgement that we are neither idle nor inert, nor dependent on them is important to us.'

This call for cultural engagement and openness to foreign cultures comes at a time when the political and intellectual elites in Egypt are seeking to redirect the country towards Western civilisation, given that it has achieved progress and

prosperity, whereas Egypt has only just begun its journey as a newly independent nation. Taha Hussein continues the path initiated by Muhammad Ali in cultural reform. 'This strong bond between education and culture is evident in what education has achieved in Egyptian culture since Muhammad Ali introduced the modern Western educational model. This model completely contradicted the prevailing model at Al-Azhar and its institutes, with their traditional schools and mosques. Adopting modern Renaissance principles led to the employment of European scholars and teachers who worked, organised, and researched.

This openness allowed for the absorption of modern European cultural influences, resulting in the emergence of a social class that embraced the modern Western mindset. This class came to dominate Egyptian life and manage affairs, in contrast to another group with opposing views, undoubtedly stemming from the Al-Azhar environment. Taha Hussein embodies the vision of modern education and civilisation.

2.2. The Components of Taha Hussein's Philosophy of Education as Set Out in His Book The Future of Culture in Egypt:

Taha Hussein considered the adoption of democratic values and the democratic system in Egypt during his lifetime to be a significant achievement that should be preserved. He advocated the establishment of a modern, secular Egyptian nation state that would cultivate citizens capable of shouldering the national responsibility of protecting the homeland, establishing justice and security, and enabling progress. He believed that this goal could only



be achieved if the state prioritised and oversaw education comprehensively. This was particularly important given that he wrote about education during a critical period in Egypt's history – a time of achieving political independence, negotiating treaties with the British and confronting the numerous cultural, economic and social issues left by colonialism. He also viewed education as a pathway to modernisation and alignment with the West, explicitly calling for the state to oversee all educational affairs for an extended period. He stated: 'The private life of Egypt and its modern development necessitate that all matters of education be taken seriously and decisively, that their organisation be precise, and that supervision be robust.' Only the state can establish curricula and programmes to ensure that education does not deviate from its intended path and does not end up serving a purpose contrary to that for which it was created.^{23'}

To this end, he criticised two types of education that fall outside the remit of state supervision and oversight: religious education and foreign education. While acknowledging the superiority of foreign education over formal education, and emphasising its importance as a gateway to Europe, he believed that national duty required the government and parliament to closely monitor these schools, ensuring they maintained a standard of education that aligned with the rights and responsibilities of Egyptian nationalism. These schools should instil a love for the homeland in their students and make Egyptian geography and language foundational elements of their education.

²³⁻ Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, previous source, p. 54.

Furthermore, he argued that inspections should prevent these foreign schools from leading students away from their parents' religion or using them as subjects for proselytisation and indoctrination²⁴.

The state's exclusive authority over educational affairs means that it alone should bear responsibility for upbringing, free from any obstacles. Taha Hussein believes that the Egyptian family, both this generation and the next, is far from being able to fulfil the duties of proper education for the body and morals. 'A long time must pass before the state can rely on the family for educational matters and expect their assistance in shaping children and young people.'²⁵

This viewpoint clearly reflects Greek perspectives, where Plato considered the state to be primarily an educational organisation. He asserted that the state could not leave this matter to private interests or allow it to become a source of commerce, but rather it must provide the necessary means itself and ensure that citizens are genuinely prepared for the education they require. Plato's project aimed to establish a compulsory educational system under state supervision. This would begin with the removal of all individuals over the age of ten from the community, with only the children remaining to be raised away from the harmful habits of their undesirable parents²⁶.

This stance echoes that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who rebelled against existing educational systems and advocated natural education. He asserted that children should not be

²⁴- The same source, pp. 57, 59.

²⁵- The same source, p. 69.

²⁶- Said Ismail Ali, *Education in Greek Civilisation*, previous source, p. 173.



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allowed to socialise during their upbringing, in order to prevent them from imitating bad examples and developing moral and social defects²⁷.

Undoubtedly, many Western philosophers have been influenced by Greek thought regarding the state's educational system and its values. With the emergence of modern nation-states, each country began to focus on a national education system that would shape its citizens in accordance with its goals and reinforce their sense of belonging: 'As a result of states being established based on different nationalities, each state began to take pride in its nationality, while the Roman Catholic Church lost its authority over schools and governments took on the Catholic Church's overarching authority over education²⁸.

The state should be responsible for educational matters, including supervision, setting objectives and goals, providing physical structures, training teachers and creating curricula. It is responsible for making education accessible and compulsory. Taha Hussein campaigned for the right of all Egyptians to education and culture. Upon becoming Minister of Education, he famously stated that education is like air and water, earning him the nickname 'the Minister of Water and Air'. He considered primary and compulsory education to be a cornerstone of genuine democratic life and an essential pillar of society, regardless of the governing system. 'It is a mistake to think that democracy guarantees people sustenance and protection from the ordinary

²⁷- Saad Mursi Ahmed, *The Development of Educational Thought*, Dar Alam Al-Kitab, 1st edition, no date, Cairo, p. 414.

²⁸- Sayyid Ibrahim Al-Jiyar, *Studies in the History of Educational Thought*, Gharib Library, Cairo, no date, p. 157.

experience of hunger. However, it must also ensure that they have the capacity to manage their affairs and transcend mere sustenance in order to enjoy the pleasures and delights that God has permitted." Education enables individuals to achieve this by helping them to understand themselves, their natural, national and human environments, and to acquire knowledge that aligns their needs with their capacities, surroundings and circumstances.²⁹"

Furthermore, Taha Hussein emphasised that a democratic state is obligated to promote and establish primary education, as it is primarily a means of creating national unity. It instils in the nation the right to independent and free existence. Indeed, it is the only means by which the nation can survive and endure, ensuring the unity of the national heritage that should be passed down to future generations³⁰.

When Taha Hussein became Minister of Education, he became known as the 'Minister of Air and Water' because he launched an education project, likening education to water and air – rights accessible to all people, especially as Egypt was preparing for a new phase in which ignorance and illiteracy had no place. Education and culture should benefit all social classes: 'In summary, public education must be accessible to everyone... I strongly reject and vehemently oppose any limitation of this education to a certain class of people or the creation of legal barriers that prevent the poor and destitute from accessing higher education, forcing them

²⁹- Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, previous source, pp. 65–66.

³⁰- The same source, p. 66.



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to settle for primary education and condemning them to a life of ignorance and inactivity.³¹

Modern democracies have not only permitted education, they have also made it mandatory and highly accessible. Therefore, Taha Hussein wanted Egypt to provide education to all Egyptians unconditionally.

Despite the economic conditions in Egypt, Taha Hussein fought for the education of all Egyptians. However, some of his opponents disagreed, presenting statistics that they claimed proved the ineffectiveness of his educational approach. They argued that he had failed to deliver on his promise of free education when he became Minister of Education. Even his friend, the orientalist Jeb Hamilton³², criticised his educational methods in a lecture, stating that they were not based on sound scientific principles and describing them as political destruction rather than scientific work. Out of respect for their friendship, he requested the audience not to spread this opinion outside the hall for fear that it might reach Taha Hussein. Thus, his vision for educational reform was considered somewhat superficial; he was seen as more of a literary figure and intellectual than a strategic researcher capable of anticipating the future and outlining the features and conditions of a renaissance. He failed to grasp the significant cultural disparity between Egyptian and European societies and attempted to impose

³¹- The same source, p. 90.

³²- Ahmad Dammoush, *Taha Hussein Between Liberation and Westernisation: A Critical Study of the Future of Culture in Egypt*, Electronic Publishing House, 2011, pp. 28–29.

Western concepts and educational policies on the Egyptian context³³.

However, it is only correct to evaluate Taha Hussein's intellectual and practical activities as failures when considered within their temporal context and the economic, political and social conditions of Egypt at that time. For example, the decision to reject free education was not proposed by the minister himself, but by a higher authority.

In any case, he was committed to modernising and developing Egypt, advocating democratic education as essential as air and water. He believed that it should be accessible to everyone; otherwise, one could not truly live. Taha Hussein sought for Egypt to emulate this logic, aspiring for it to be on par with modern states. His perspective had artistic and intellectual dimensions, regardless of its origins and references.

In his exploration of educational issues, Taha Hussein concluded that the problem lay not solely within the Ministry of Education, but rather in the prevailing social system. Saeed Ismail Ali viewed this as a clear warning preceding the July Revolution, issued by a thinker with the foresight to sound the alarm. 'The responsibility for all this lies with the social system, which must be reformed in all its aspects, and the political system, which must also change in all its dimensions.' This highlights the interconnected nature of the social system as a whole³⁴.

One of the key components of Taha Hussein's educational philosophy is his candid and bold call to adopt European civilisation's methods and educational methodologies. He

³³- Said Ismail Ali, 'The Legacy of Taha Hussein: Journalistic Articles', previous source, p. 20.

³⁴- Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, previous source, p. 33.



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articulates this in his book *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, in which he summarises his theory and educational philosophy, which he implemented when he became Minister of Education.

In the book, published in 1936, he begins to outline his developmental project and educational philosophy, establishing the general lines of Egyptian culture during this important and critical phase in Egypt's history. He considers contemporary European civilisation to be the foundation upon which all aspects of life, especially education, should be built: "Egypt's renaissance since the beginning of the last century has been clear and strong with a clear direction. Regardless of differing opinions, it is a renaissance that takes cues from modern life in the same way that Europeans do, without hesitation or confusion."^{35'}

He goes on to assert that the sole measure of progress and civilisation is the adoption of European life, stating: 'We can say that the measure of the advancement of individuals and groups in material life, regardless of class differences, is their adoption of the means of European life. Our spiritual life, in all its forms and colours, is purely European'^{36.'}

Rather than criticising this influence of European life, Taha Hussein considers it necessary: 'All of this indicates that, in this era, we want to connect with Europe in a way that grows stronger day by day, until we become part of it in word, meaning, reality and form, because the Egyptian mind is not fundamentally different from the European mind.'^{37'}

³⁵- The same source, p. 33.

³⁶- The same source, p. 34.

³⁷- The same source, p. 34.

Thus, Taha Hussein's message is clear: we must adhere to European governance, follow its administrative procedures and adopt its legislative and educational methods. Regarding education, he states: 'In whatever manner we have established its structures, laid out its curricula and programmes since the last century, education has been purely European; there is no doubt or dispute about this. We are raising our children in our schools with a European education.'³⁸

He sees no objection to basing education on the European model, and he expresses this bold stance in straightforward language. He emphasises the need for candour and courage in adopting the means of European civilisation, fully aware that some people will vehemently reject this way of thinking. This resistance stems from the erroneous perceptions that people hold about European civilisation. He reassures them, stating: '...We draw the attention of these honest individuals to the fact that not all aspects of European life are sinful, and that there is much good within it. A wise person who chooses what is good for themselves ought to consider what is best for their religion and worldly affairs.'³⁹

He emphasises that he is not calling for people to embrace Christianity as a religion, but rather to engage with European civilisation on a cultural level, exchanging mutual benefits. He cites Islamic civilisation itself as an example, noting how Islam engaged with various civilisations throughout different eras and adopted their practices without hesitation. 'Islam scarcely left the lands of the Arabs

³⁸- The same source, p. 34.

³⁹- Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, previous source, p. 34.



before it connected with foreign civilisations, which, at that time, were centred among Arabs and Muslims, just as Europe is now. Muslim Arabs did not hesitate to adopt the ways of Persian and Greek civilisation, just as the Persians and Romans did, even though they were not Muslims at that time.⁴⁰

Following a lengthy explanation and clarification, in which Taha Hussein uses history as a weapon to defend his idea, he reaches an inevitable conclusion based on the premises he set out: there is no threat to our identity and past in establishing a strong, open connection with Europe. Therefore, it is not shameful to base our educational curricula on European models.

2.3. Critique of the Components of Taha Hussein's Educational Philosophy:

Many Egyptian and Arab thinkers have discussed Taha Hussein's educational stance and ideas, particularly those presented in his book *The Future of Culture in Egypt*. Some considered his views dangerous and unacceptable, while others justified them. One of those who criticised Taha Hussein for being influenced by Western civilisation was his compatriot Sayyid Qutb, who argued that preserving the essential characteristics of Egyptian-Arab-Islamic identity does not require complete immersion in European culture. He proposed that civilisation should be analysed into two components: culture and civilisation. Culture encompasses religion, the arts, moral systems, traditions and even superstitions, enabling us to retain the past while renewing

⁴⁰- The same source, p. 35.

it in accordance with the natural course of development. In contrast, civilisation encompasses applied sciences and arts, which we can adopt from Europe. Distinguishing between these two aspects requires significant effort in order to maintain balance and focus on ethical and social development. This is similar to what Japan achieved: Japanese culture remains rooted in its origins, while European civilisation is adopted and enhanced⁴¹.

Similarly, Sa'ti al-Husri rejected Taha Hussein's⁴² view that the Egyptian mind is unified with the European mind and different from the Eastern mind. Like Sayyid Qutb, he questioned the idea that the European mind is superior to the Eastern mind in Egypt and its surrounding regions. However, he disagreed with the notion that there are no cultural differences between Egyptians and French, Syrians or Italians. He argued that denying the existence of cultural differences among the peoples surrounding the Mediterranean is akin to denying the existence of the sun in broad daylight. Comparisons between Egyptians and Europeans, and the denial of any differences between them – especially with regard to temperament and disposition – are exaggerated. Cultural distinctions between the two

⁴¹- The same source, p. 190.

⁴²- Sati' Al-Husri: A Syrian-Iraqi thinker and one of the founders of Arab national thought. He was born in 1880 and died in 1967. After studying in Turkish schools, he obtained several educational and administrative positions, including director of the Teacher's Institute in Istanbul. He later became a pioneer of Arab nationalism, moving to Damascus where he held several positions, including Minister of Education. He wrote several books, the most notable of which are on Arab nationalism, including *Opinions and Discussions on Arab Nationalism*, *A Defense of Arabism*, and *Arabism First*.



groups are self-evident, and differences in temperament and disposition can be consistently observed among European nations, as seen among the English, French, Germans and Italians. He deemed this assertion, which removes Egypt from its Arab identity, thoughtless and in need of reconsideration⁴³.

Other writers have criticised Taha Hussein's call to establish a nation-state based on interests rather than the unity of language and religion, as well as his proposal for a secular state. They accused Taha Hussein of lacking the courage to explicitly declare the inevitable result of such claims, suggesting he advocate a Latin-style government in Egypt instead. However, he appears to skirt around this objective in various instances, attempting to pave the way for it, believing that the time for an explicit call had not yet come. His statements imply a preference for a Latin-style government and his writing style distinguishes between an Islamic and a secular state, clearly hinting at his preference for the latter⁴⁴.

At a time when all of Egypt was looking forward to renewal after the treaty it signed with the British⁴⁵, Taha Hussein aimed to outline a path for educational revival. The circumstances compelled him to advocate these constraints while the internal environment was lagging behind. Egypt's political, cultural and social situation needed change. Taha Hussein saw himself as responsible for playing his part at

⁴³- Muhammad Mahdi al-Istanbuli, previous source, article on Sati al-Husri published in *Al-Risalah* magazine, 11 July 1939, p. 152-153.

⁴⁴- Mahdi Al-Istanbuli, previous source, Muhammad Muhammad Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, p. 203.

⁴⁵- Taha Hussein, *The Days*, previous source, p. 511.

this stage, drawing on his experiences in France – especially the influence of his teacher, Émile Durkheim, who was inspired by Saint-Simon’s ideas that good governance, achieving justice and promoting the advancement of the people, should be entrusted to scholars. Scholars are capable of reconciling the diverse results of science with the needs of the soul and its capacity for meaningful development towards progress.

Conclusion:

In this study, we examined the educational philosophy of Taha Hussein, a prominent Egyptian thinker who dedicated his life to teaching, nurturing, curriculum development and educational theorising. He also served as Minister of Education. We came to the following conclusion:

Educational philosophy serves as a comprehensive framework that organises educational reality, encompassing its goals, curricula, methods and strategies. It is an intellectual vision involving the application of philosophical theory to the field of education.

Taha Hussein presented his educational vision in his book *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, in which his secular orientation became apparent. He called for the establishment of an educational system aimed at serving Egypt’s national interests and advocated openness to Europe and the adoption of its curricula. His concept of education expanded to integrate thought with culture, considering it the most sacred right of a citizen.

Taha Hussein believed that education should be the sole responsibility of the state, which is accountable for raising



citizens and instilling democratic and civic values in them. He emphasised the state's responsibility to make education accessible to all social classes, likening it to air and water, which earned him the nickname "Minister of Air and Water".

He urged the adoption of European educational methods and systems, noting that they had previously borrowed from us.

Taha Hussein's educational project aimed to foster good citizens who are committed to national unity and open to all civilisations without prejudice.

He defined the ultimate goal of his educational vision and intellectual project as creating a generation and society that aligns with the principles of democracy and modern civil society. He ensured that his programmes and curricula aligned with these objectives.

Taha Hussein's educational philosophy was subject to much criticism, with some thinkers both inside and outside Egypt rejecting his ideas, particularly his call for alignment with Western civilisation.

In summary, Taha Hussein can be described as an educational philosopher who established the principle of free education during his time as Minister of Education. He advocated the right to education and culture for all social classes, famously stating that education is like air and water. Thanks to his efforts, thousands of classrooms were established and countless underprivileged individuals received an education. Despite his mistakes and the numerous criticisms he received, and regardless of the diverse and conflicting opinions about him, Taha Hussein remains one of the most prominent figures who worked to

advance his society towards a renaissance, progress and elevation.

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