

Conference, Symposium, and Panel Reports

Globalization: Its Impact on and Challenges to Education in the Muslim World

More than thirty years ago, the first World Conference on Muslim Education embarked upon the “Islamization of Knowledge,” a process articulated and expounded upon by the late Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (Temple University) and Naguib al-Attas, retired (ISTAC, Malaysia). The organizers of this conference, the seventh in this series, hoped to continue in this spirit by aiming “to be as dynamic and as influential as its predecessors” and to develop themes discussed in earlier conferences by locating them within “the current globalized atmosphere.” Moreover, it “expected to usher in a new era of Muslim education which will counteract the negative effects of globalization...”

The organizers listed three special themes: “Curriculum for Muslim Education,” “Making Basic Teachings of Islam Relevant,” and “Religion and Youth” and twelve subthemes, among them “Integration of Knowledge,” “Madrasah Education,” “Quality of Muslim Education,” “Non-Muslim Perspectives on Muslim Education,” and “Principles of Critical and Creative Thinking in Muslim Education.” They also invited particular individuals to present papers, such as Wahbah Zuhayli (dean, Faculty of Islamic Law, University of Damascus [Syria]), Anis Ahmad (Riphah International University [Pakistan]; editor, *The Quarterly Journal of the West & Islam*), and Alparslan Acikgenc (Fatih University [Turkey]). Since the conference covered a variety of keynote speeches, presentations by well-known Malaysian scholars such as Osman Bakar (International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, Malaysia) and Kamal Hassan (International Islamic University Malaysia) and parallel sessions, I will comment briefly on the sessions and more extensively on some of the keynote speeches that set the tone for the discussions at the conference.

All of the accepted 186 papers were inserted into parallel sessions dealing with “Language and Education,” “Human Development,” “Educational Policy and Thought,” and “Teacher Education”; “Curriculum in the Muslim World,” “Madrasah and Traditional Educational Systems,” and “Methodology of Teaching and Learning,” and other topics.

The special individual sessions featured Osman Bakar, who spoke on “Interfaith Dialogue as a new approach to Islamic Education,” and Kamal Hassan, whose paper was entitled “The Mind of Islamic Intellectuals [*Ulu al-Albab*] in Accordance with the Qur’anic Paradigm of Integrated Knowledge.” One of Southeast Asia’s well-known Muslim philosophers, Bakar mentions that he considers this dialogue an open avenue through which Islamic values may be shared and disseminated and thus contribute toward a multicultural and multireligious environment. The ensuing debate discussed why philosophy is not part of the curriculum of mainstream Muslim educational institutions.

Hassan stressed the importance of Muslim nation-states and communities giving urgent attention to “the Qur’an’s paradigm of true human development and of integrated knowledge.” Besides defining *ulu al-albab*, he summarized the main ingredients of a fully integrated mind of “the possessor of intellect” and the educational implication of the integrated approach to the study of divine revelation in the Qur’an and the cosmos, respectively. After briefly identifying four major educational systems that Muslims are still being exposed to, he concluded that a carefully integrated system in which the religious and secular meaningfully converge “will be able to produce the so-called ‘intellectual-uluma’.”

Zuhayli echoed Selangor Minister of Education and Human Development Halimah binti Ali in his “Managing International Challenges in Education Based in the Jurisprudential Methodology.” Underlining the dangers of globalizing culture and its concomitant challenges, he argued for the adoption of legal (Islamic) methods in responding to those challenges; pointed out the need to reform the Muslim heartlands’ educational system by fully comprehending humanity’s role in the universe and determining the curriculum’s objectives; and urged all Muslims to derive inspiration from their own educational culture and, in turn, revitalize the rich Muslim educational heritage.

Ahmad addressed “Globalization: Its impact on and challenge to education in the Muslim world – a cross cultural and *da`wah* perspective.” Ahmad essentially tried to understand globalization’s origins, its impact on Muslim societies, and the challenges faced by the Muslim educational institutions in this global village. Like Zuhayli, he acknowledged its positive dimensions but considered this phenomenon a serious threat to the sustenance of (Muslim) cultural traditions and the Muslim worldview. He argued that a major challenge of (Muslim) education is “how to respond to the systematic westernization of (the Muslim) mind and soul...” In Ahmad’s view there is a desperate need to critically review the educational policies adopted by Muslim nation-states and to seriously evaluate the secular values that Muslims have

gradually imbibed through their exposure to a dual value-neutral educational system. According to Ahmad's experience and insights, the need for adopting a value-based education, as reflected by the Universal Islamic Values (UIVs), implies developing a holistic personality and one that seeks comprehensive, rather than partial, social development. Ahmad concluded that adopting the UIVs, which transcend religious, ethnic, linguistic, and race barriers and that are conceptualized as "objectives of Islamic law," would help prepare Muslim societies for and in the promotion of a multicultural (universal) environment in the coming years.

Participants also heard from Acikgenc, who concentrated on the "Turkish Experience in Islamic Education: Past, Present and Future" and provided a historical overview of Muslim education in Turkey. Starting off with a fairly good explanation of "Islamic education," an issue that was generally ignored, he outlined its essential nature and then moved on to Turkey's rich experience and shared thoughts on future prospects. Despite covering such a wide historical period, Acikgenc made an invaluable input and underscored the point that "without a well rounded philosophy of Islamic education it is not possible to establish a (viable and vibrant) system of education." This comment was reinforced earlier by Bakar, who briefly discussed the philosophy of Islamic education.

At the end of the conference, each keynote speaker was appointed as an honorary international advisory board member of Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor's newly established International Academy of Islamic Education (IAME). Its management team, with the support of these new board members, plans to rejuvenate and pursue the Islamization and Integration of Knowledge agenda. The team hopes that IAME's formation will encourage the establishment of similar institutes and the promotion of existing ones inside and outside the Muslim heartlands to cooperate in realizing the "Islamization of Knowledge" agenda.

This ambitious project intends to stimulate and encourage Muslim education through research and innovation, publications, workshops, seminars, and conferences. More importantly, IAME hopes to network and liaise with similar international institutions to pursue the idea of forming a global NGO that focuses purely on Muslim education and promotes reform of the educational system. Unfortunately, not one woman was selected to give a keynote address or to serve as a board member.

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