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The Kurdish educational curriculum: an unreflected philosophical base

Summary

At this point in time, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, an educational philosophy underpinning the educational system is being neither reflected upon nor consciously implemented. This serious situation is the subject of this research and will be presented using logical and political explanations as well as analytical methodology. The facts and conclusions included will be assessed for accuracy. The entire contents of the educational plan and curriculum of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region will be explained in a manner that is both understandable and problematized when necessary. Later in the study, the current curriculum and programmes in Iraq, and especially the educational system of Iraq, will be more generally explained and analyzed. At another point, as education and philosophy are discussed, an attempt will be made to determine whether there is any relation between the current educational model and a philosophy. At a final point, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's educational philosophy is discussed with a view to analyzing its impact, if any, on the educational system and curricula. In addition, the study looks at whether the aim and philosophy of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's education system is clear and understandable by international standards.

Keywords: the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the Kurdish educational curriculum, educational philosophy

Introduction

The experience of developed countries has shown that the field of education is one of the most important elements in determining the outcome of human life. Attempts are routinely made to perfect and organize an expertly developed educational system. In every country, nonetheless, the educational system is dependent on an acknowledged or unacknowledged educational philosophy. Since each system is unique to its population, it fulfils its idea using its curriculum, teachers, teaching methods, and teaching aids. The specifics of the idea of an educational philosophy differ between countries, according to the national belief system, the atmosphere, and other considerations. Thus, a philosophy is developed, elaborated, and is intended to be achieved by the formal educational system.

Unfortunately, without such an educational philosophy, any educational system is meaningless and is devoid of any clear aims. As is true in most other countries in the world, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has developed an educational system which it uses to obtain its own specific educational aims.

In this research, we will try to discover whether any educational philosophy can be identified and reflected upon to clarify the aims of education in the curriculum and educational system. We also intend to ascertain if the educational system is truly a philosophy which suits the environment and aims of the Kurdistan Regional Government and Kurdish society in general. Moreover the methods used include an accurate description and analysis of the contents of the research, in order to achieve the above things.

The Kurdistan Region in brief

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) administers the semi-autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan. With a population of 5.2 million and growing, the three subsidiary governorates of Erbil, Silemani, and Duhok cover approximately 40,000 square kilometres, which is larger than the Netherlands and four times the area of Lebanon. This includes all the governorates administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government, but does not include areas of Kurdistan, such as Kirkuk, which are outside of the KRG administration's area.

The capital as well as the seat of the Kurdistan Regional Government is Erbil, a city known in Kurdish as Hawler. The next largest cities are Silemani and Duhok.

Iraq's Constitution formally recognizes the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Kurdistan Parliament as the region's formal governing institutions and the Peshmerga forces as the Region's legitimate security guard.

The Kurdish language is of Indo-European origin and is among the family of Iranian languages which include Persian and Pashto, and is linguistically distinct from Arabic. The two main dialects are Sorani and Kurmanji.¹



¹ Kurdistan Regional Government/Kurdistan in brief <http://www.gov.krd/p/p.aspx?l=12&s=020000&r=300&p=210> [11/5/2014].

The non-reflective educational philosophy in the Kurdish educational curriculum

One of the important bases of the educational process is the books which are chosen for pupils to study and which are the source of the content of their learning. This means that the programme is one of the three major basic elements in the educational process. If one of them is not available, true education cannot be achieved. To this end the programme and the books are written by well-intentioned human beings with the assistance of the government. This is usually done through a committee that consists of a group of educational and other scientific experts. These curricula and programmes are supposed to be set up in a way that is consistent with contemporary science and development as well as with consideration for democratic principles, human values, and human rights. In addition, they are also classified according to the students' educational level and age. If we choose to describe the programmes or the books which have been selected, we can appropriately determine the following:

It is specifically a group of instruments of staged learning with information which has been arranged and classified in accordance with the levels that fit the various ages of the students. The teachers use the programme and attempt to transfer it to their students by means of teaching courses with the support of available and suitable learning equipment. The curriculum itself has numerous definitions, which is inevitably confusing. In its broadest sense, the word is used to refer to all the courses offered at a single school. This is particularly true of studies at the university level, where the diversity of potential classes might be attractive bait to a potential student (Omer Muhamad Amin Raza 2009: 25–30).

Curricula in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

When we examine the curricula of the area historically from the establishment of Iraq as a nation, we note that the curricula applied to the Kurdistan Region reflect the Arab nation and its history, rather than any Kurdistan content. This was true until the inauguration of the Baath regime. Since the Baath regime ruled as dictators in Iraq, all institutions were under its control and in its service. The educational system plans and educational strategies were by necessity and decree reflections of the philosophy of the regime. To a degree, the curriculum applied in the educational system was in the service and use of an individual dictatorial party. The philosophical ideas of the Baath regime were consequently reflected in the curriculum, studies, and schools. The programme of studies had lost any real independent and sanctified qualities because of the fact that all of the study materials for all stages of learning were circling the narrow ideology of a chauvinistic Arab Baath Party. In addition, it was not serving any individuals in the society, be they Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Chaldeans or Assyrians (Chinar Saad Abdulla 2010: 147–150).

The Kurds were in fact, the nationality most affected by the regime since the plans and programmes of the regime were applied very intentionally in the educational system. They included Arabization which was intended to weaken any sense of nationalism in the

Kurds. These programmes were accomplished through engendering fear, including Arab principles, while erasing the Kurdish nation's concepts and principles and even the Kurdish language (Omer Muhamad Amin Raza 2009: 18–19).

These aims were clearly reflected in different stages of the study curriculum. They were meant to eradicate the Kurdish nation by using the curriculum of the educational process. The Baath government chose not to value the Kurdish nation in its imposed educational policy.

Most of the study materials of the time focused on Arab ideology and the Baath party. In only one example, a geography book for the second stage in the secondary school, both Iraq and Kurdistan are considered to be a country with only Arab inhabitants. If we continue to examine the subject matter of that time, we can clearly see that Kurds were marginalized intentionally (Chinar Saad Abdulla 2010: 159–160).

After the uprising of 1991 and the beginning of de facto self-rule in Kurdistan, small changes began occurring in the educational system. Curriculum and programmes were changed even though the changes were slow, owing to the economic and political situations of the time.

Other complicating factors occurred after the struggles and conflicts between the two ruling parties (PDK, and PUK), and the occurrence of civil war in 1994 when the situation in Kurdistan gradually became worse. The new situation had a serious negative effect on every aspect of life. The educational system, as others, was left with negative conditions to rectify.

This new situation was a reason for deciding to inject the principles and philosophical ideologies of a political party into the educational system. A further deleterious effect of the civil war was the division of authority into two essentially competing governments. The Erbil governorate which was under the power of PDK, and the Sulaimany governorate which was under the power of PUK were rivals rather than complementary systems. This was the reason that many of the national concerns and all living conditions were divided into the two narrow ideologies of the two parties. Later the philosophy and ideology of the two parties became part of every field of influence, especially in education and the educational system. All of this resulted in the formation of two types of education, each fundamentally different from the other. They were based simply on the principles and ideologies of the respective political parties. This created great harm for the educational system in KR since all the values of the educational system were based and evaluated on the concepts and principles of the party in power.

The situation continued until the Iraq liberation in 2003. The Baath regime was toppled by intervention from the United States. Despite the disruption, this was a promising step for KR and its opening to the world (Chinar Saad Abdulla 2010: 193–195).

The main satisfaction was the union of the two administrations. An administration finally existed of one government that included all of the Kurdistan Region. Here during the educational conference in 2007, changes were made to the entire educational system of the Kurdistan Region.

When the campaign of initiating changes started, experts from the educational field participated in renewing and planning for a standard curriculum in KR. As a result, they were able to establish a new system by applying a new curriculum serving a new realization of free ideology, philosophy, and democratic principles, in which each individual's rights are preserved in society (Omer Muhamad Amin Raza 2009: 2).

The Kurdistan Region Government administers teaching and education policies through its ministry of education. It also has responsibility for preparing study plans and the renewed curriculum, including the course books. Thus, choosing the study materials, their contents, objectives and aims, as well as deciding the number of hours each subject is studied are all responsibilities of the ministry of education.

This specific educational system is currently being applied in Kurdistan and the main objectives are as follows:

- The ability to create a personality, to develop the mental, physical and spiritual aspects of the person. The ability to endow an individual with a sound body and a clear soul, so as to create a positive person for the betterment of society.
- The embodying of love towards the country and respect towards human rights.
- The aim of establishing an equal healthy society that is able to incorporate the products of globalization without discrimination of sex, religion, ability, social and economic status, and political views.
- The practice of having a personal passion for work, which include applying proper methods for continuation of work and becoming familiar with all the work utilities. Thus, the goal of this system is to build a good as well as a wealthy society.
- The taking to heart of the goal of building a democratic, trustworthy generation, which honours the nation and country and the generalizing of democratic principles among the individuals in the society².

The question here then is whether or not the philosophy articulated by the new educational system is reflected in its plans and curriculum. A second question is whether or not a graduate in Kurdistan is adequately prepared in this way. Has he/she freedom in any sphere? Does he or she believe and trust himself/herself? Honour the country? Have an equal vision with regards to all of the individuals, nationalities and religions in the society? Is he/she well-prepared to work? Of course, in order to answer the above questions, we need to know if the educational philosophy has been reflected in the curriculum.

Education and philosophy

The countries of the world often intend to achieve their aims and strategies within their educational goals. General goals such as those involved in political, financial, social, and cultural spheres can best be achieved by means of educational goals. The policy and long-term goals of any government are composed while the educational system is recomposed,

² Government of Kurdistan region, Ministry of Education, System of primary school, system of secondary school, Erbil 2009: 9–11.

particularly with respect to the delineation of a programme and the setting of its goals. This is the essence of an educational philosophy.

Educational philosophy then is achieved and practised through the reconstruction of educational goals and by instituting and accomplishing the study programme or curriculum. As a result we are able to know that philosophy and education are both relevant terms which cannot be separated, and additionally they are actually two faces of the same thing. Indeed the clarification of educational goals leads to understanding the intimate relationship between philosophy and education. They are related in a way that acknowledges that education is human, and humanity is the basis of philosophical study. Educational subjects therefore, generally include the human. The human being is indeed the main subject of philosophy. One ancient example is the philosophical claim Socrates made: "You should be known by yourself". He claims that philosophy directs its research to the human and that educational tools are the more practical while philosophical tools are more rational. Both terms have a constant and dialectical relation with each other and neither of them is complete without the other (Hamay Ahmad Rasul 2012: 13).

Philosophy without the educational process, particularly the study of curriculum and programmes, cannot posit its thoughts practically. Education in its turn cannot be successful or productive without specific goals and purposes³.

This fact leads us to assert that philosophy is more general than education. On the other hand, the means of education are more concrete than those of philosophy, including curriculum and programmes and other means of teaching. These make it possible for the goals and especially educational philosophy to be practiced and achieved.

One of the problematic areas for new educational systems is the inadequacy of the programmes and the lack of reflection in the educational philosophy in these programmes. No reform or change of a programme in the educational system can be established without a clear opinion and an adequate ideology on the part of the government towards all the affected parties. It requires an intellectual, social, and political base which treats all areas of life in accordance with true and scientific research. The programmes of the new education system in the Kurdistan Region are going through a process of constant reform and change without adequate planning. As a consequence all the failings in this system can be distilled into a single inevitable point:

Considering the lack of reflection of any educational philosophy in the study programme in Kurdistan, what type of person is likely to be produced? In fact, is the result most likely to be a capitalist, industrialist, dictator, democrat, or peaceful or even fascist person? When educational philosophy is mentioned, it becomes difficult to ignore the relationship between educational philosophy and philosophy in society, especially with the philosophy of political governance. Only one example might be a specific country where a philosophical capitalism is followed (in fact such a philosophy is today followed in most countries of the world) and since it is followed, it becomes necessary to orient

³ Ministry of Education, Third conference of education, Sulamany, 2001. [http://moe-krq.com/ku/conference/8685\[1/5/2014\]](http://moe-krq.com/ku/conference/8685[1/5/2014]).

the educational philosophy toward the same end and to bring up a generation that serves a capitalistic and industrial society.

The same situation is evident in the philosophy of socialism and the other recognizable philosophies as well.

As an educational programme is set, the subjects, contents, purposes, goals, and all the knowledge and information that it contains must be based on an educational philosophy. This is necessary so that we can provide for a person who is required to reach particular levels of attainment deemed necessary by the educational system, especially when he/she completes his or her studies. In addition, at the time of any restructuring of educational philosophy, the social structure, cultural level, values, and symbols of that society as well as the time and place need to be taken into consideration by each country.

Kurdistan is an independent region inside federal Iraq. The Kurdistan region itself is a part of a larger Kurdistan that has been divided. The entire and complete Kurdish nation is still a trove of learning, developing, and spreading the pace in the area. Kurdistan has some unique features, among them its multi-ethnicity and religious tolerance as well as its having experienced unstable social conditions and historical oppression. Kurdistan survived, but civilian conflict and foreign threats continue to exist. Fortunately, there is now the possibility of benefiting from an educational system and new programmes that will be developed for study and that consider effective materials so as to create reform. The development that occurs when such an educational system is intentionally composed with all the vital essential items will be reflected in a secure and integral educational philosophy. We intend to produce a member of society who has the capability of accomplishing all the things necessary for a good life. But no precise educational philosophy can be found in the new educational system of Kurdistan. It is still unclear in Kurdistan what type of member is intended to be prepared: is he/she to be patriotic, materialistic, dictatorial, or democratic?

The basic goals of the educational system then, need to have an educational philosophy based on humanity, nationality, self-confidence, science, and education based on life as it is to be lived. It must also be able to change from classic to modern without skipping a beat. Unfortunately, as a result of being trapped in the current education system, the Kurds as people have a severe lack of self-confidence. Despite the notional issues subscribed to by society, we can find neither a racist person nor a patriotic one. The proof is a survey that shows forty percent of the media have the role of transferring information about the Kurdish nation. Despite the fact that we know that those media belong to some survey company it turns out sadly that thirty-six percent of the schools have less of a role in providing information about the Kurdistan nation than the media do (Chinar Saad Abdulla 2010: 78–87).

As a result the contemporary Kurd may be an individual who does not totally believe in democracy, and has even less access to and familiarity with science and technology. He or she thus cannot be adequately prepared for appropriate work.

As the author explained above, the specific objectives of the education philosophy are based on some principles which it is being attempted to achieve through the curriculum of the education system. For example, one of the objectives of the education philosophy in the Kurdistan region is to respect all religions and all nations, but if we take the school book in religion entitled Islamic Education which is included in the curriculum concerning primary and secondary education in Kurdistan region, we will see that it demonstrates the importance of the Islamic religion only, neglecting other religions (we cannot find even any basic information about them) in spite of the variety of different religions in Kurdistan such as Yazidism, Kakeyizm, Judaism and, Christianity. It shows that the presented aims which educational philosophy tries to achieve are not reflected in the educational curriculum in the Kurdistan Region.

Another aim is to prepare a Kurdish person who loves and defends his country, but if we take the schoolbook for history and geography which are contained in the curriculum concerning primary and secondary education in the Kurdistan Region, we will see that the history and geography data are not sufficient about the other parts of Kurdistan or great Kurdistan. For example a lot of people who are living in the Kurdistan region do not have enough information about Kobani city, that is located in western Kurdistan in Syria. In fact this city has become a symbol of bravery and defence against the ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) as the Kurdish force in Kobani has been fighting for three months and finally ISIS collapsed.

Certainly these examples show us that the educational philosophy in Kurdistan region cannot achieve its objectives through the curriculum of the primary and secondary school in the education system; it means that the most of the specific objectives in the philosophy of the education system in Kurdistan region are not reflected in the curriculum of the education system.

Finally, it becomes clear that the educational objectives of the Region are not transparent, and when the objectives are unclear in any programme, it cannot bear any fruit. In order to achieve any success, the aims must be clear and transparent.

The common aim of students is to achieve a high degree and to be able to enter a field such as medicine or engineering, graduate, and then get adequate employment in order to be able to live a happy life. But although this goal is a simple one, it is remote for many. If that is true, what is the real reason for studying? Is it to obtain information and knowledge? There are many things that can be learned outside of the school environment. So what then is the reason for studying? In the Kurdistan Region it is still unknown.

This all needs to be clarified in the new educational system, that is, if the system is actually new. The objectives must be new as well. It needs to rely on a clear educational philosophy in order to succeed in society and in the world. The objectives themselves should be developed with the international level in mind.

The objectives of the former Baath regime were clear. For example, any graduate would have to be familiar with the social system and history of the Arab nation. Even if the student studied in a scientific area, he or she would have learned the names of Arab

scientists predominantly, because the names of Arab scientists were the ones inserted into the curriculum. The scientists were identified as Arabs not Muslims. Even if people did not participate in the Baath party, the ideology was introduced and inserted in their minds through the study materials. The same ideology is, unfortunately, still reflected in the society of today.

We, Kurds do not intend to repeat any of the Baath regime's deeds, but we do intend to build a new system that enables individuals to reclaim their rights, a system that grows into a democracy. At the same time, we intend not to lose our national cultural backgrounds and religion. We remain open to the positive changes taking place around and in the world and value our place in it.

We want to contribute to building a society that believes in democratic principles and owns a modern open mind. In this context, the primary obstacle to the development of our successful educational system is the lack of a transparent and basic objective.

What all this means is that there is up to this point no clear and general philosophy in the new education system in Kurdistan and, without any reflection on educational philosophy, we will not be able to understand the meaning and content of any educational system of any country.

There are additional gaps in this new system of education as well.

There are currently three types of (alphabet) books for the first basic stage in all three cities in Kurdistan even as recently as 2014, owing to political conflicts and problems.

There are no activity books to support the individual books to be studied in primary schools.

The content of most of the books intended for different educational stages is not suitable for the educational level of the child.

There are still partisan ideas that can be found in many subjects.

Technical and linguistic errors are also present in the required texts.

Conclusion

As a conclusion to this study, we can legitimately identify that the lack of the existence of a clear philosophy and the lack of reflective consideration of any of the principles in the educational system have become major obstacles for KRG's missing definite objective. In addition, when the paths of the educational system are unknown, there can be no identified goal for the educational system or indeed for the country. Is the aim of the government to build a wealthy society? Is it a resumption of communism? Can it be determined to be heading towards dictatorship or democracy? None of the above critical paths are clear at present. The lack of the existence of a clear philosophy and strategy has made it impossible for us to comprehend the current intent and basics of the KRG educational system.

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