

CIVIL RIGHTS, NEGATIVE POLICY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRAN

Niloufar Zarei

PhD candidature of creative industry faculty,
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane,
Australia

Vahideh Karimi Mansoob

Master of architecture, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran,

Abstract

After Islamic revolution in IRAN, it was forbidden for men to teach in girls` schools and for women to teach in boys` schools. This religion-based approach was exactly to limit the opposite sexes` interaction in schools to prevent sexual abnormalities. There appeared, however, some conflicts in teaching affairs especially in elementary schools for 6 to 11 year-old students who were in close memory of mother at home, needing loving attention. The artistic plays and role plays performed by women attracted the students more and more to the environments. The somehow strict behaviour of men in treating children caused the children not to show much motivation in their school subjects and the academic failure rose dramatically in boys` schools. The governmental schools could not attract little children who came from kindergarten with women tutors as they felt they lost the motherhood love and attention. On the other hand, lack of academic potentiality in women to teach some basic courses in high schools such as mathematics and physics drove the girls to participate in private classes in which men teachers taught. The emerged confusion and paradox along with the protests of feminist activists forced the authorities to modify the rules and to simplify the presence of opposite sexes in schools. This negative approach brought difficulties for university students and reduced their academic abilities at least at entry level. The increasing number of girls seeking for higher degrees of education occupied the universities which were believed to be the shelter of males. This paper investigates the psychological effects of gender distribution in higher education.

Keywords: Iran school, education, system, negative impact

1. Introduction

Education has always been the battleground for traditional ideas and progressive reforms. Meanwhile, each society's educational programs are designed and compiled according to its political, economical and cultural structure as well as dominant ideologies. The most important basis to see the ideology of a government is the curriculum and system of education. In fact, as Althusser (1973) said school is believed to be the government's ideological apparatus. By internalizing ideologies that legitimate the present circumstances through a complex and long-lasting mechanism, educational system converts people into its desirable ones to serve national or ideological purposes compiled by the leaders, politicians and ideology makers. Hence, school is considered to be the cornerstone of next generation preparation to assume higher responsibilities in the society. The representation of ideology in school can be identified in all aspects of school and particularly in its flowing educational content.

One of the main ideologies forming children in the process of education in school is gender ideology based on which education is performed differently for genders and the responsibilities taken for each gender are due to ideological definitions for that gender. This is especially true for countries which base their official arrangement and structure on the foundations of ideology or religion, the story of education in Iran is a relatively ideological, religious and secular, system influenced by the thoughts of dominant governments. Throughout the history of education in Iran, which was shaped in different arrays from Mosque-based education to modern based education, what made the real content of education system was the purposes of government to establish its ideology and thought. To reveal the outcomes of shaping education based on ideology and gender separation in education, we first look at the history and genesis of education in Iran and focus on higher education system.

2. History of education in Iran

Iran is the most populous country with the second largest economy in the Middle East with a population of 68 million, a growth of 1.08 per cent per year and a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$115 billion which has let the authorities to implement different programs of development and welfare in the country. The focus of development and education in Iran can date back to many years ago while two major periods of development have been distinguished: before and after 1979. The issue of reforming style life and social changes practically started from 1961-2 when the country aimed at creating industrial revolution. The capitalism- based ideology of the regime tried to keep the gap between the rural and urban areas and made the accessibility of villagers to urban areas restricted. The red lines were always kept to preserve the borders among different settlements .This notion was once taken common in Sassanid era in which education was allocated to the rich class.

2.1 The education system of Iran

The education system of Iran is taken from old education system of France and is of centralized type.

Policymaking and educational decisions are controlled by central government; therefore, there remains no chance to innovate or take fresh actions or any specific measures for provinces and local groups to try their ideas. The existence of this centralized system causes long delays and excessive bureaucracy in administrative policies. In 1951, first movements were made to transfer parts of the power and important authorities to the provincial and city departments and the responsibilities such as employment, moving teaches and staff inside provinces, allocation of financial resources of each province to certain expenses and some expenditure was assigned to the authorities of the provinces.

Although ministry of education has increased the power and responsibilities of affiliated departments in the province centers and towns, decision-making is centralized and is the power of central government.

2.2 Funds of Education System

The education expenses of the country are merely funded from general budget and the collection of budget figures in six years (1982-1987) shows that the share of public education (2,448,819 x 10) Rials is 14 percent of total budget (17,167,819 x 10) and this figure is similar to the percent of education budget in many countries. The population growth in war years (1980-1988) weakened the power of government to provide high level education and part of the system was delegated to private section which polarized education in the country. The rich could use the private schools while the poor were doomed to educate in governmental schools with out of norm levels.

2.3 Ancient education system

Dating from the seventeenth century A.D., Iranians got interested in European ideas, languages and way of life through some familiarity with the western culture in some commercial trips. Consequently, several schools modelled on Western line were established during the nineteenth century. For example, in 1834, the American Presbyterian missionaries opened a school at Rezaiahe, followed by several others in other parts of the country. British, German, French and Russian schools were established over the years. These institutions provided education up to introductory college level and several hundreds of Iranian boys and girls benefitted from these institutions over the years. The most famous of these was the Alborz College with which was associated the Sage College for Women. The adoption of the Constitution in 1906 can be considered as an important event in the development of education in the country. Education now became the State responsibility and the Ministry of Education was created in 1911. Subsequently, several reforms were introduced in the country which in turn meant an increased need for specialized personnel and higher civil servants.

To meet these need institutions such as the School of Political Science (1901), the Agricultural College (1902) and the School of Law (1921) were established during this period. The proclamation of Reza Shah (1925-41), the Great, as Shah of Iran on 25 December 1925 heralded the beginning of an era of significant developments in the country. During the rather short span of 16 years, he completely changed the face of the country and laid solid foundations for the emergence of a modern and self-confident Iran obeying his Turk counterpart. Being strictly secular minded and inherently an Atatürk like nationalist, he began resourceful assaults on the authority of traditions in the Iranian society. He soon recognized the need of properly trained professional personnel for implementing his administrative, political, educational, economic and military reforms and acted ambitiously in all directions. At the level of higher education, several scattered colleges namely colleges of law, science, literature, theology and medicine were expanded under his regime.

These colleges were combined in 1934 to establish Iran's first modern university namely Teheran University. By 1942, the number of the Government sponsored higher education institutions reached 12 which included agricultural and technical colleges, a military academy, teacher's training colleges (including one for women) and the University of Teheran. Furthermore, most higher education institutions, whether governmental or private, was also located in Tehran. Access to these universities was difficult for the poor and marginalized people of the rural and nomadic communities. As a result not many participated in social, political and economic development of the society. According to Aghajanian (1983), in the 1960s and 1970s, the existing gap was further widened by centralized and urban biased economic growth. This was possible only because of the government's unique access to the increasing oil revenues which were generated with the help of foreigners, while on-paper rule in post-1979 is completely different.

During the Pahlavi era (1925–1979), the government implemented a number of policies aimed at modernizing the country and expanded the education system. Modern college and university education was developed under the Pahlavis. According to Abrahamian (1982), before 1925 there were fewer than 600 students in the country's six institutions of higher secular learning. These were all located in the capital city. This, however, changed after 1925.

The number of students expanded rapidly from 22,849 at the start of the Third Plan (1960–1965) to 38,096 in 1966 (Abrahamian, 1982). This expansion lagged behind the rapid increases of the secondary level, from whence an ever-larger flood of graduates with one primary goal, to gain admission to university, continued to burst. During the 1970s, these universities were further expanded and colleges and vocational institutes were set up in several cities. However, higher education in Iran was unable to admit the students based on their talents and aptitude. Expansion of universities did not result in, and had not been meant for, expanding job opportunities and the quality was also at low level.

3. New era; 1979-2011

The Islamic Revolution swept into power in 1979 espousing a strong pro-poor and egalitarian agenda, but, three decades later Iranian politics is still dominated by populism and issues related to poverty and the distribution of income and wealth. The revolution has been successful in bringing down the poverty rate to single digits based on the so-called international two-dollars-a-day. The Islamic Republic continues to identify the poor as its main social base and proclaims social justice as its key policy objective especially in the field of education. Although the Iranian government made significant efforts to protect the environment, the conditions on approvals by the DoE were often not carried out due to weaknesses in implementation and compliance mechanisms, and a lack of an appropriate management and monitoring system.

The trend of development after the 1979 revolution sped up on behalf of the mottoes of justice and equality for all taken from religious idealism. Tavassoli et al. (2000) argued that the Islamic constitutional form of government is held to guarantee the integrity of a strong nation-state while providing some formal guarantees to ethnic minorities, of whom there are several in Iran. One of the issues that Iran confronts in its attempt to construct a modern nation state is the implications of its complex ethnic and linguistic composition along with education. The ethnic and linguistics minorities have traditionally lived in geographically distinct and marginalised areas near the border of the neighbouring countries while 'Persians' occupy the central parts of the country. Along with these residential separations, social and economic distance has long persisted and still continues among ethnic communities. Although there has been some internal and external migration of the people to and from various ethnic communities, the majority of people still live where their ancestors lived.

3.1 Public education in the Islamic context

With the establishment of literacy corps in cooperation with army, the literacy rate has reached more than 79 per cent and education is compulsory through high school (up to the age of 16). Currently, there are approximately 18 million students in education and about 2.3 million staff working in government organizations dedicated to teaching (Kousha and Abdoli, 2004). According to a United Nations Report, Iran has placed great emphasis on human development and social protection with good progress to date (UNDP, 1999). For example, life expectancy rose from 61.6 in 1988 to 69.5 years in 1997. Adult literacy rose from 41.8 per cent on the eve of the revolution (1979) to 51.5 per cent in 1988 and jumped to 74.5 per cent in 1997, although still 10.7 million people aged 6 or over are illiterate (Tavassoli et al., 2000). What is most important is the nature and applicability of this public literacy. As some politicians believe this attempt to increase literacy is aimed at enabling people to learn Islamic principles.

The implementation of newly designed system of education in Islamic republic of Iran was commenced with the segregation of boys and girls and assigning specific roles for teachers. The men teachers were obliged to teach in boys' schools and women in girls' schools. The aim was to separate the sexual relationships between boys and girls, based on religious teachings prescribed in Islam. There were provided two relatively different textbooks for students in schools. Some skills and teachings were solely provided for girls and some for boys. The students were confronted with a world dominated with masculine thoughts while the girls were taught to obey the males at home, work and even in the society. When the students enter the high schools, they confront with the foundations of science while they are forced to be taught by low competent teachers especial for girls. The tendency of families to enjoy high level education attracts the students to the private classes in which men mostly teach. Although the pressure applied by educational experts and feminists has made government modify its interpretations about using women teachers at primary schools, there is a long way to pave to normalize the situation in the schools. Meanwhile, the phenomenon of leveling off (removing ethnic cultures and languages) has affected education system a lot and created conflicts among the minorities.

3.2-Higher education in the Islamic context

Religious education, namely Islamic education, is emphasized throughout all levels of the school system in Iran and there are some efforts to implement this education in higher education system to synchronize the science with religion. The focus of government on higher education can be considered as the vehicle to promote the international status of government. A large portion of the national budget has been appropriated to each province for physical and human development of higher education (MSRT, 2005). There has been an increased recognition of the education system based on equity; students from impoverished and marginalized areas have been given more opportunities for higher education. The universities were also open to older students. There is now a body of learners of varied social, economic and cultural levels in higher education. A large number of new institutions such as technical schools, vocational colleges, junior colleges and similar institutions have been opened.

The increasing accessibility of low income and rural areas inhabitants to higher education institutes has brought a great problem. About 70% of graduates avoid returning to their villages and do not tend to continue their father's profession. This has driven the population age of villages to over 45 and widened the economical gap of the families with those in cities. Today nearly 60 percent of college students are women. Among low-income and minority students, young women are 25 percent more likely than young men to enroll in some form of postsecondary education. While the enrollment gap differential was first evident in the late seventies, it has recently begun to attract attention from a broad spectrum of individuals. Most feminists believe that there are no extracurricular or sports activities for girls, and no television programs suitable for young adults.

Passing the Kunkur, Iran's notorious and captious national college entrance examination, has been a pinnacle event in girls' life. It is a rite of passage for Iranian youth, especially for young Iranian women, as it earns them unprecedented respect in a society where they are barely recognized and are treated as second-class citizens. Passing the test not only earns girls respect but also brings family honor. The examination seems to embody social status: Iran is a hierarchal society whose system of higher education was reserved for its elite under IRI's preceding regime (i.e., the Pahlavi Dynasty), exclusivity that has shaped the populace's yearning for post-secondary education. Although access has been widened under the IRI to encompass a wide spectrum of the socioeconomic strata, public higher education continues to be tightly limited to a small percentage of the population (capacity being approximately 10% of college-age population).

Consequently, for most Iranians, higher education continues to hold a promise of social mobility unachievable through any other means. The government has tried to maintain equal opportunities for all to enter the university, but the low level of quality in post graduate studies and allocation of some specific quotas in PhD degrees have limited the accessibility of candidates to their favorite studies.

Social conflicts are easily seen in different fields of society. Increasing the literacy rate along with increase of graduates has raised the marriage age among women and men and tightened the competition in the job market, but what has worried the authorities is the increasing rate of depression among the students, especially those at the entry level of university. The students coming to the university confront a mixed environment of sexes which seems strange to them.

The new freedom to talk to opposite sex brings about a new and unfamiliar sense for them which has been suppressed in several years of study. The efforts of government to establish gender-specific universities have failed to work and the students in these universities have suffered from required knowledge to participate in social activities.

Conclusion

Gender-based or ideology-based education has been concomitant with intricacies which could change the destiny and future of students easily towards depression, hater or disinterestedness of students toward the science .The separation of sexes in education system from the primary levels which is emphasized in Islamic teachings can bring about some devastating effects on children and retard their emotional and sexual maturity. The students having attempted a lot to enter university experience a different atmosphere which can bar their intellectual creativity and flourish their previously suppressed instincts. On the other front, inter mingling the scientific courses with religious education acts as a barrier to follow a structured trend in education for students who can think of refuting every point they learn.

References

- Abrahamian, E., 1982. *Iran between Two Revolutions*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey. Abrahamian, E., 1989. *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin*. I.B. TAURIS Publishers, London. Afshar, H., 1985. *Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil*. Macmillan Press, England.
- Aghajanian, A., 1983. Ethnic Inequality in Iran. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15 (May), 221–234
- Althusser, L. (1973). *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (Ben Brewster, translation). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Arasteh, Reza A. (1969). *Education and social awakening in Iran,1850–1968* (2nd ed.). Leiden, The Netherlands7 E. J. Brill.
- Bauer, Janet (1980). Iranian women: How many faces behind theveil? *East–West Perspectives*, 1(4), 21–25.
- Bazargan, A., 2000. Internal evaluation as an approach to revitalize university systems: the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Higher Education Policy* 13 (2), 173–180.
- Bazargan, A., 2005. Quality assurance in statistics education: from departmental self evaluation to accreditation. *International Statistical Institute, 55th Session*.
- Betteridge, Anne Henderson (1983). To veil or not to veil: A matter of protest. In Guity Nashat (Ed.), *Women and revolution in Iran*(pp. 109– 128). Boulder, CO, Westview Press.
- Center for Women’s Studies (2004). *Gender dimensions of labor market and employment patterns in the IRI*. Tehran Center for Women’s Studies in Tehran University.
- DoE. *The Environmental norms and standards: the human context*. Department of Environment, Iran; 2003 (in Farsi).
- DoE. *The collection of regulations and rules of environmental protection in Iran*. Iran: The Department of Environment; 2004 (in Farsi).
- Esfahani, H.S.(2005).Alternative public service delivery mechanisms in Iran. *The Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance*, 45(2/3), 497–525.

- Ferdows, Adele (1983). Women and the Islamic revolution. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 15(2), 283–298.
- Geertz, Clifford (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York, Basic Books.
- Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MOHME), *Distribution of Health Budget, 2001-20021*
- ISTA. 2002. Population in Iran. <http://www.irantour.org/Iran/population.html>.
- Kazemipour, Shahla. 1999. Evaluation of Women's Expanded Participation in Higher Education. A report prepared for Iran's Ministry of Culture and Higher Education
- Kousha, K., Abdoli, M., 2004. Iran's national ICT Education Plan: An overview of the possibilities, problems and programs. 70th IFLA General Conference and Council, August 22–27th, 2004, Buenos Aires, Argentina. MSRT, 2005. Higher Education: A Register of Enrolled Students in the Year 2004/5 (Persian). Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, Iran.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sarah, & Davis, Jessica Hoffman (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass.
- Milani, Farzaneh (1999, Aug 19th). Lipstick politics in Iran. *New York, New York Times*.
- Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (2001). Increasing share of females in Iran's higher education. *Social and cultural studies*, issue 3. Tehran Office of Cultural and Social Planning.
- Mir-Hosseini, Ziba (1996). Stretching the limits: A feminist reading of the Sharia in post-Khomeini Iran. In Mai Yamani (Ed.), *Feminism and Islam: Legal and literary perspectives* (pp. 285–319). New York, New York University Press.
- Mojab, Shahrzad (1991). *The State and the University: The Islamic Cultural Revolution in Institutions of Higher Education of Iran, 1980–87*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- Murtiza, Ayatollah Mutahhari (1353/1974). *Nisam-I huquq-i zan dar Islam (Legal rights of women in Islam)*. Qom: Sadra Press.
- Najmabadi, Afsaneh (1998). Crafting an educated housewife in Iran. In Lila Abu-Lughod (Ed.), *Remaking women: Feminism and modernity in the Middle East* (pp. 91–123). Princeton, Princeton University Press
- Planning Organization. (1967). *Education in third development plan*. Tehran: Office of Publications.
- Salehi-Isfahani, D. (2003). Poverty measurement in Iran, working paper. Mimeo: Virginia Tech Department of Economics.
- Salehi-Isfahani, D. (2005). Human resources in Iran: Potentials and challenges. *Iranian Studies*, 38(1), 117–147.
- Salehi-Isfahani, D. (2008). Growing up in Iran: Tough times for the revolution's children. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 15(1), 63–74.
- Salehi-Isfahani, D. (2009). Poverty, inequality, and populist politics in Iran. *Journal of Economic Inequality*, 15(1), 5–24.

Salehi-Isfahani, D., & Egel, D. (2009). Beyond statism :Toward a new social contract for Iranian youth. In N .Dhillon, & T.Yousef (Eds.), *Generation in waiting: The unfulfilled promise of young people in the Middle East*. Washington ,DC:Brookings Institution Press.

Salehi-Isfahani, D., Abbasi, M.J., & Hosseini-Chavoshi, M. (2010). Family planning and fertility decline in rural Iran: A study in program evaluation. *Health Economics*, doi:10.1002/hec.1613.

Tavassoli, G., Welch, A.R., Houshyar, K., 2000. The struggle for quality and equality in Iranian education. In: Welch, A.R. (Ed.), *Third World Education: Quality and Equality*. Garland Publishing Inc., New York.

UNDP, 1999. Human Development Report of the Islamic Republic of Iran, United Nations Development Program