Reconceptualizing Education Transformation in Muslim Societies: The Human Development Approach

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This article presents a conceptual framework for an empirical research initiative that aims to contribute evidence-based knowledge on the state of education and, more specifically, on students in a manner that is authentic and sensitive to Muslim societies. While prior educational research and interventions have emphasized education for employment or citizen development, the authors argue for a broader and more developmental approach to young people's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral well-being, consistent with the tenets of Islam. This conceptual framework was used to launch empirical research during 2018 in 16 geographical areas, where data analysis is underway to assess four key constructs among high

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school and university students: empathy, forgiveness, community mindedness, and moral reasoning. This article advocates for a new approach to studying education in predominantly Muslim societies. Ultimately, the research will produce policy recommendations and curriculum adaptations intended to advance education in Muslim societies. The uniqueness of this article stems from its emphasis on the human development approach as a pathway for a transformation that is grounded in localized cultural, religious, and social contexts.

Keywords: Human development, Education reform, Transformative education, Muslim societies, Wellbeing, Values-based education

INTRODUCTION

The idea of promoting education through acquiring knowledge, morals, and values, as well as teaching by personal example, was encouraged by the early teachers of Islam (Halstead, 2004). When the public education system was introduced in Western countries in the 19th century—mainly in France and England, and later through colonial expansion (Wagner, 2018)—one-on-one as well as community education was already part of the fabric of life in Muslim societies. Those societies continue to consider the transmission of knowledge through schooling of central importance.

However, many issues and challenges face educational systems in Muslim societies, with youths being disproportionately affected. For example, the lack of socio-economic opportunities has produced a "brain drain" as educated and talented young people permanently immigrate to the West. Meanwhile, conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere have sent millions of youths fleeing as refugees. Those who stay face limited economic prospects. For example, the World Bank (2018) reports that the Middle East suffers from some of the highest youth unemployment rates of any region in the world. Amid the ongoing political instability, persistent violence, and entrenched conflicts, many voices in Muslim societies say that education is central to systemic change.

RATIONALE

Many Muslim countries have been the recipients of interventions and funding from Western governments and intergovernmental bodies, international foundations, non-governmental organizations, and non-profits. For example, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan receive large amounts of aid from the U.S. government to reform their education systems but have shown no overall improvement in education attainment (Colclough, King, & McGrath, 2010). The picture is bleak on dropout rates, achievement on international tests, and gender gaps (World Bank, 2018). Farah (2017), for example, concludes that specific investments aimed at increasing enrollment in countries like Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon did

have a positive impact on attendance, but did not actually increase the quality of education. In other cases, local communities have resisted international organizations' investment in educational activities, such as those that promote civic education in Muslim societies (Kapoor, 2014), especially when such initiatives do not consider local religious and cultural traditions and beliefs (Hargreaves, Earl, Shawn, & Manning, 2001; Sahlberg, Hasek, & Rodriguez, 2016). In general, empirical research on educational reform in predominantly Muslim societies is lacking, and the few existing studies do not provide an in-depth look at the local and global factors at play in reform.

In sum, externally driven investments show mixed results. On the one hand they tend to overlook education's broader purposes and importance for the holistic development of human beings (Epstein & Yuthas, 2013), and on the other hand they promote reform movements that are neither authentic nor organic (Kapoor, 2014). This issue has been recognized through renewed critiques of the globalized approach to education as an "ideological package" of reform ideas (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Adamson, Astrand, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). This includes, for example, the so-called Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) of privatization, standardized testing, accountability, and school choice. GERM's rationale is based on economic investments in the private and corporate sectors of education, and the resulting reforms are typically driven by top-down policies and imports from developed countries (Adamson et al., 2016). For example, Chile imported the neoliberal (free market) model of education developed in the United States to improve education through competition and school choice. Such scenarios, however, have often been criticized for how school choice disproportionately benefits wealthier communities, as opposed to those living in poverty. In Muslim societies, school choice has led to a flourishing private educational market and tutoring industry in places like Egypt (El-Bilawi & Nasser, 2017). In these cases, governments may give up on viewing public education as part of their responsibility toward their citizens (https://www.abidjanprinciples.org).

Part of the challenge is that current data on educational attainment, policies, and expenditures throughout the Muslim world gathered by the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and similar organizations only tell part of the story about the varied educational experiences in K-12 schooling and higher education. For example, we lack empirical information from many Muslim societies about children's schooling experiences, particularly as they relate to developing the whole person. While this latter point is true for many societies, our focus on predominantly Muslim societies leads us to note the gaps in understanding the experiences of Muslim learners. For instance, we are aware that teachers in the Middle East report favoring democratic practices in the classroom, yet we know little about whether and how their views on democratic teaching translate into a practice that is both authentic and organic to the local context—an important concern, given that children in the same study testified to the harsh strategies used in the family and in schools (Faour, 2011).

Reforming education systems is a long-term process that, ideally, requires a comprehensive plan involving multiple stakeholders coming together to impact policies, curricula, and teaching practices. With full awareness of the enormous tasks that a fully democratic and thorough reform agenda entails, we attempt to offer an empirical research framework that is goal-oriented and complex and, at the same time, has potential in Muslim contexts. This requires grounding in theories and perspectives specific to Muslim contexts such as the idea of *tawḥīd* (Islamic monotheism), which is central to Muslim societies, and ways it relates to existing models of reform. This article considers how data-driven and evidence-based recommendations and policies may contribute to comprehensive reform efforts implemented by governments and education systems in Muslim societies.

We note the critical importance of not overemphasizing the salience of boundaries like East-West, secular-religious, or global North-global South on epistemological and methodological understandings. We acknowledge that such boundaries are often fluid and contradictory, particularly because of globalization and the impact of multigenerational immigrant communities and perspectives within society. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that external reform efforts aimed at the Muslim world have often been rooted in concepts and measures designed for societies characterized by secular, individualistic, and consumerist ideals. When these measures and constructs are implemented in societies influenced more strongly by religious, collectivist, and community ideals, a mismatch often occurs (Davies, 2015). Typically, educational reforms driven by international development donors have focused heavily on developing individual and collective human capital, framing education as an investment in national and regional GDP or as a means for economic development. In many instances, this approach has not served the needs of local populations in any meaningful fashion (Marcia, 2012; Dhillon et al., 2009).

We elaborate here on the neglected area of educational research in Muslim societies and argue that such research efforts in Muslim societies have been plagued by poor grounding in local and cultural norms as well as religious values. Such grounding, we suggest, would increase both research validity and reliability and could even encourage local stakeholders to "buy in" (Abu-Nimer & Nasser, 2017).

An extensive review of the literature revealed a scarcity of research on the "whole person" approach and, more specifically, on the socio-emotional aspects of education as a necessary step for educational change on both the individual and systemic levels in Muslim societies. Despite its importance, this area of research is lagging in Muslim societies. For example, Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 school-based programs in socio-emotional education (SEE)—mostly in Western contexts. Their results suggest that SEE aspects "not only improve achievement by an average of 11 percentile points, but also increase prosocial behaviors (such as kindness, sharing, and empathy), improve student attitudes toward school, and reduce depression and stress among students" (p. 405). The authors argue that SEL (socio-emotional learning) appears to promote many key skills, including

self-awareness and self-management, as well as relationship skills. Another meta-analysis conducted by Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017) confirms this. In this article, we introduce a conceptual framework that focuses on these aspects in a way that is research-based and stems from within the global Muslim societies' realities and needs.

The empirical research approach at the heart of the Advancing Education in Muslim Societies (AEMS) initiative will ultimately produce recommendations for new strategies in pedagogy, curriculum, leadership, assessment, and policy based on engaging the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of education. In the long term, AEMS will contribute to education reform efforts in Muslim contexts and educational thinking. The research results will contribute to the idea that schools can equip young people with tools to respond better to the pressures resulting from ongoing rapid global changes and promote required new skill sets, like accessing information and problem solving (Cefi, Bartolo, Cavioni, & Downes, 2018).

Youths who are searching for meaning and roots need strategies to interpret the messages they encounter in everyday life, from religious rulings (fatwas) and speeches by religious preachers who present narrow interpretations of Qur'anic messages to the contradictory discourses provided by media outlets. An in-depth articulation and understanding of Islamic beliefs may also help young people critically engage in reconciling conflicting ideas and articulating their convictions with understanding (Abu-Nimer, Khoury, & Welty, 2007). According to Abu-Nimer et al., (2007), some Muslim participants in interfaith dialogue groups have a hard time explaining their faith. Thus, engaging religious leaders and educators in these dialogues is important (Sahin, 2013).

Religious education teachers may use alternative skills to shift from focusing solely on rote memorization of Qur'anic verses in Islamic instructions to interpreting Islam's theoretical, theological, and epistemological underpinnings in ways that foster complex thinking and deeper levels of understanding of Qur'anic concepts as they relate to modern life (Sahin, 2013). This does not necessarily mean that rote memorization is not a legitimate way to learn, but that it can, when used as the only method of learning, produce learners who lack the skills to think independently and engage in problem solving and decision making—skills that are deemed necessary for the 21st century (Jahan, 2016). For example, multiple sources of information exist and are available through social media, and the ability to sift through the information critically is more important than the ability to memorize.

AEMS'S EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The empirical research agenda launched by the AEMS research team addresses what skills and mindsets are needed to help improve the educational experiences in Muslim societies. There are many studies with accumulated knowledge and programs on education for employment and citizenship, but hardly any research

on the socio-emotional and spiritual aspects in Muslim societies. We situate our research agenda in what we call the "third space," as opposed to the first (education for employment) and second (education for citizenship) spaces. This choice of focus is based on our contention that education is something more than just learning knowledge and skills and that acquiring a more meaningful existence in the socio-emotional, moral-religious, and cognitive and behavioral aspects of well-being is a goal in itself. Such a holistic approach is both an attainable goal and a worthwhile investment in the individual and the society at large. The "third space" denotes an education for well-being, an approach that views acquiring values and skills (for example, empathy and forgiveness) as integral parts of learning on the same level of academic achievements as mathematics and sciences.

This approach aligns well with the "learning to be" dimension identified by the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report on education and learning (Faure et al., 1972; DeLors et al., 1996). It is one of the least researched pillars of education out of the four mentioned in the UNESCO report on life-long learning**:** learning to know, to do (competencies), to live with others, and to be (for example, memory, self-knowledge, reasoning power, individual judgement, and sense of personal responsibility). Scholarship on "learning to be" identifies a broad range of social and emotional values and skills that are equally important to academic competencies (for example, literacy, numeracy, and science) and civic engagement skills (for example, communication, problem solving, and critical reasoning) for ensuring the well-being and healthy development of individuals and societies.

In fact, previous research suggests high correlations between skills such as SEE and academic achievement (Halbert & Kaser, 2015). The Aspen Institute report (2019), based on a survey that examined SEE/SEL, suggested that students from high schools that are strong in SEE "report a more positive social climate and learning environment, doing better academically, and being better prepared for life than those in weak SEL schools" (p. 3). However, the lack of existing research on SEE in Muslim societies means that the exact mechanisms at work across these domains are undertheorized.

The proposed design of this empirical research allows us to examine SEE's role in assuring well-being and healthy development for individuals and communities. We suspect—but need empirical evidence to assert—that formal educational systems in the Muslim world have neglected these domains when implementing curriculum reform plans that have focused on those academic skills deemed necessary for improving overall national and regional economic growth and democratic development. These areas—what we call the "first" and "second" spaces in education reform movements—are critical but insufficient for ensuring individual and social well-being. We theorize that a more comprehensive reform movement, one that considers all types of learning and performance, will yield better results than an exclusive focus on achievement scores on international tests, as reflected by investments in the OECD-conducted Program for International Student Assessment.

The research agenda proposed here was conceived of during months of in-depth literature reviews as well as deliberations and debates among researchers from various disciplines based in the AEMS initiative. Feedback from Islamic studies and Muslim scholars globally was also incorporated. AEMS seeks to organize future educational research and reform initiatives in the Muslim world around both utilitarian and quality-of-life goals—namely, educating young people so that they can achieve an accomplished and meaningful life, understanding educational equity as being broader than inputs (student enrollments) and outputs (student graduation rates), and understanding the importance of the quality of curricular and pedagogical content. In other words, the current narrow focus on developing employment skills will be expanded to incorporate a holistic growth trajectory that emphasizes cultivating young people's moral and ethical development and their sense of the broader social good to strengthen social capital and community. All of this, however, requires the creation of new authentic research concepts, constructs, measures, and eventual interventions designed to reflect a holistic, meaningful approach to education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Our theoretical framework is situated in the field of human development. Its selected constructs are important for SEE as well as the high value placed on spiritual and moral growth within many Muslim communities and societies. The empirical research we describe here, the "Mapping the Terrain" study (described later), promotes a research agenda intended to contribute new knowledge on Muslim youths. To realize the initiative's goal, we draw on and refine existing human development theories, so they can be applied in predominantly Muslim societies and thereby create a more culturally relevant developmental trajectory. We then empirically explore correlates that contribute to the overall well-being of Muslim learners and their immediate communities, such as teachers, parents, and administrators.

Philosophers and thinkers from distinct ages and civilizations have suggested that education both can and should enable the whole human being to achieve her/his highest potential in all domains of life—that it should teach character and well-being (Bresler, Cooper, & Palmer, 2001). We define well-being as "having effective social and emotional functioning, positive affect, and the perceived ability to self-regulate and feel a sense of fulfillment. Its goal is to pursue virtue, meaning and purpose, through doing good and making a positive difference in one's life." (AEMS research team, 2018) Broadly speaking, well-being (as the long-term outcome) encompasses health, faith, and the socio-emotional and psychological aspects of the person's development. On the collective and individual levels, it is an important part of "learning to be." The purpose of this "Mapping the Terrain" study is to establish a baseline that will inform the areas of pedagogy, policy, and curriculum so that this goal will be achieved. Our focus is on the socio-emotional aspects of well-being, within a human development trajectory, as

opposed to the physical and mental health domains, which are beyond the scope of this paper and initiative.

The constructs included in the study provide a partial list of socio-emotional aspects like empathy, cognitive aspects such as problem solving, and many other factors that are relevant to Muslim societies (Tawil & Cougoureux, 2013). This does not mean that academic performance and achievement are not important, but that our approach adds weight to the emotional, cognitive, and spiritual well-being aspects of human development as a way of drawing focus toward a more holistic approach to education. The first wave of the "Mapping the Terrain" study examines the conditions and status of SEE in 16 Muslim societies[1] not only to provide baseline knowledge, but also to formulate evidence-based recommendations and address gaps in empirical knowledge on Muslim youths' well-being. Our focus is on four constructs—empathy, forgiveness, moral reasoning, and community mindedness—that are both universal and foundational to Islamic values. They were selected because of their relevance to critical areas of learning, for each one is seen as key to realizing the overall goal of individual and community well-being.

Developmental Trajectory

We chose the developmental approach because it provides the most fluid framework for growth and change and focuses on the "richness of human lives rather than on the richness of economies" (Jahan, 2016, p. 2). In the case of AEMS, it also presents education as a positive influence in the dynamic process of growth that has the potential to move the person in cognitive and socio-emotional domains of development at different rates. And, at the same time, this ongoing growth in each area affects growth in other areas. For example, developing cognitive capabilities is key to developing both social skills and academic ones, such as literacy. Adopting this approach suggests the possibility of reversing the "damage" done in fragile conditions (Shonkhoff, 2000) and moves the conversation away from the deficit model toward an asset-based one.

Individual growth does not happen in a vacuum, for it involves a process that relies heavily upon the human capacity to move backward and forward at various stages of life and is influenced by life conditions and circumstances. Unlike many classical human development theorists such as Kohlberg (1984), Gilligan (1993), Maslow (1943, 1954), and Kegan (1982), who assert a linear progression from the basic stages of existence to the higher ones through maturation, the model chosen proposes a spiral movement toward higher states. In the predominant human development theories, such as those about moral development, the person progresses to a stage such as the one that Kohlberg identified as "postconventional morality"—where and when the person sees order as a contract between people and a way to protect individual rights (Kohlberg, 1984). Another example is Kohlberg's higher stage, called "universal ethical principles," an ideal stage that is reached where and when people adhere to a few abstract, universal principles such as equality and respect for human dignity.

Kegan (1982), on the other hand, presents a stage-like progression of human development based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969), where the person moves to the highest stage of psychological maturity of the mind. In the classical theories of Maslow (1943, 1954), Kohlberg, and Kegan, the highest stages are very hard to achieve and therefore primarily aspirational. Gilligan's stages, on the other hand, strive for a level she calls the "morality of nonviolence," a heightened understanding of choice between one's own needs and care for others. She appropriately calls this approach the "ethics of care," a theory developed in response to Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Gilligan, 1993). All the above-mentioned theories contend that the person cannot reach the highest stages even though the theorists deem them important and critical for moral development and growth.

We chose Beck and Cowan's (2006) Spiral Dynamics model of intrapersonal development as our framework to represent the human developmental trajectory because of its dynamic nature and how it illustrates the changing developmental pathways involved in the various states of consciousness. In this model, individual growth is determined early in life by age and, later, by life circumstances. We use "states" instead of "stages" because the former represents temporary conditions, whereas the latter are developmentally permanent conditions. Stage theories begin in infancy and some claim universality, whereas the Spiral Dynamic model is flexible and contextual in its emphasis on life conditions (Wilber, 2007). Beck and Cowan (2006) attribute this particular model to Grave's work, based on over 30 years of observing how people behave and think in different ways about virtually everything in life. According to them: "Spirals are alive, magical, powerful, and multidimensional" (p. 26). In addition, they reflect thought in a way that is open-ended, continuous, and dynamic.

The model's spiral nature illustrates the complex processes, as well as turns and twists, that are part of individuals' development and evolving thought and reasoning processes. And while the spiral itself is a straight line—suggesting some patterns or even universals in how thought processes evolve—it explains variations in our thinking, intelligences, and worldviews.

Beck and Cowan's model proposes eight states of consciousness in which supporters of reform (whether groups or individuals) promote growth from the "instinctive" to the "worldly" (as shown in Table 1, below). We have adapted this model so that it can represent three distinct but flexible and fluid levels and clusters, with three states in each—including the addition of a ninth state, namely, an integrated and universal state of consciousness that we see as essential for understanding ways of thinking and reasoning in Muslim societies. For devout Muslims, God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) is the developmental model's highest state of mind. It is worth noting that there are variations of this concept, ranging from a narrow view of the Creator's mighty power to a broader and a more holistic view of God. Muslims therefore use it not only to describe God as the Creator, but also as the universal power (Aslan, 2011) enabling humans and creatures to live in harmony with self, others, and their surroundings (Al Faruqi, 2000). In the case

of predominantly Muslim societies, state and religion are intertwined to such a degree that schooling, for example, includes Islamic studies as a distinct subject or as an integrated part of the school curriculum and learning. In other words, spiritual and religious thinking is critical to understanding many local communities and what they deem important to a meaningful life. We argue, therefore, that educational reformers who want to develop culturally sensitive and competent curricula, pedagogy, and educational policies must consider this additional stage of development as part of the aspired trajectory for Muslim societies.

This ninth state of *tawḥīd* may be viewed as parallel to the worldly/holistic state described in previous models, as one that applies to other faiths and views about the existence or non-existence of one God. Although the worldly is a state of universal ethical principles proposed through research conducted by Kohlberg and others on moral development, it is achievable through an expansion and a deeper understanding of *tawḥīd* by investing in the person's spiritual growth and understanding. In our approach, the *tawḥīd* state may be the ultimate for devout Muslims. And yet it is not exclusive to them, for it holds relevance for individuals belonging to other religions and convictions. This model is aligned with Wilber's (2007) articulation that moral development tends to move from "me" (egocentric) to "us" (ethnocentric) to "all of us" (worldly)—a good example of the unfolding waves of consciousness (p. 34). Our model goes a step further by emphasizing the "beyond us" state as a higher goal in the developmental trajectory.

The above-mentioned developmental model guides the analysis of AEMS's empirical research findings and will be adapted and revised as we interpret the results of our studies. This approach will allow us to continue to add meaning to the theoretical framework as well as to the interpretation of our education-reform research agenda. For example, our initiative is ultimately interested in discovering what kinds of pedagogical and policy interventions will help education systems promote growth trajectories for young people and address those factors that are particularly salient in Muslim societies. The goal is also to find ways to disrupt the trajectory from transmission to transformation in a positive way to ensure meaningful educational experiences and life outcomes for young people. Here, transformation means empowering people to be active participants in improving their lives. It is about being active in the change process, like Freire's idea that education "liberates, enlightens, empowers and emancipates the human individual" (Hussien, 2007, p. 85)

Table 1 provides a brief description of the Spiral Dynamics model's states of consciousness based on Beck and Cowan's (2006) articulation of the model, with our proposed ninth level of *tawḥīd*.

Among the few recent large-scale empirical studies examining the Spiral Dynamic model, Stambolovic's (2002) analysis conducted in Serbia/Yugoslavia suggests that each level of psychosocial existence develops in response to those life conditions that are formative for cultures and/or countries. Stambolovic asserts, "Cultures/countries are formed around a specific centre of gravity (determined by a specific level of existence) that determines boundaries of optimal behavior,

Table 1. The adapted human development states of consciousness model[2]

Instinctive: Natural instincts and reflexes direct existence
Animistic: Live according to traditions and rituals of group/clan
Egocentric: Asserting self for dominance, impulsive and immediate
Absolutistic: Obedience as higher authority and rules direct search for truth
Multiplistic: Act pragmatically and calculate to get desired results
Relativistic: Empathy to feel and desire to respond
Systemic: Interconnections and layered causes
Holistic/Global: Experiential learning, transpersonal living
Tawḥīd: High consciousness of human interconnectedness with a larger universe and a larger force. Focuses on God's oneness as well as humanity's oneness with the environment and each other.

thinking and even perception. To understand the processes in a certain community it is necessary to discover the centre of gravity" (p. 60). Based on this understanding, we suggest that in many (but not all) Muslim societies, where state and religion are more intertwined than many Western researchers acknowledge, many communities' ways of thinking will regard spiritual and religious thinking as core to their children's development. These understandings must be acknowledged as part of educational research in these contexts.

A Transformative Model

To enhance people's abilities to gain access to all levels of development described in the Spiral Dynamics model, AEMS's research framework utilizes a comprehensive approach to change as well as a process that allows for transformation. In this case, the Head-Heart-Hands model is appealing because it involves all aspects and levels (Bloom, Masia, & Krathwohl, 1964; Orr, 1992; Sipos, Battisti, & Grimm, 2008) needed for change (see Figure 1, below). In this model, the "Head" (knowledge, perceptions, thoughts, and metacognition), "Heart" (relational knowledge of emotional and social values and insights), and "Hands" (referring to deep engagement in doing and active use of concepts) all work together and simultaneously (Sipos, et al., 2008). This "3Hs" approach suggests that any transformation should take into consideration the whole person.

This transformative model aligns well with Islamic teachings, where connections among one's head, heart, and hands are discussed in the writings of scholars of Islamic education (for example, Alkilany, 1997), especially in the areas of cognition, intuition, and their relationship with action. "Head" corresponds to the Qur'anic concept of *ʿaql* (head or intellect), which is seen as the repository of cognition, belief, reflections, and perceptions. "Heart" links with the Qur'anic concept of *fu'ād* (inner heart), which is responsible for emotions (Agustiar, 2015). Finally, "hands" relate to the Qur'anic concept of *ʿamal*, a translation of conscious

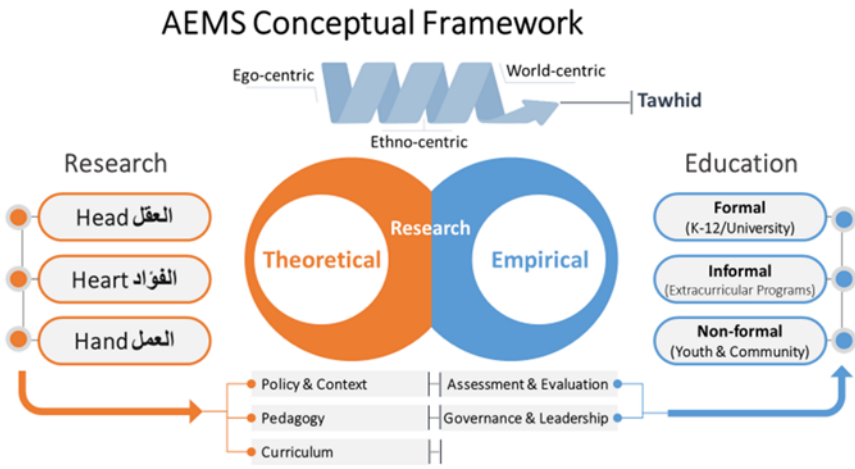

Figure 1. AEMS framework

action combined with intentionality (*niyyah*). As such, the first wave of AEMS research represents a comprehensive study to map the education terrain focusing on the whole person and, more specifically, the person's social and spiritual aspects as presented both in the psychological literature as well as grounding in Islamic concepts and teachings.

Combining the Spiral Dynamic developmental model with the 3Hs model provides a complex mechanism for transformation, one that responds to the "learning to be" and is situated in the "third space." Both are critical for the well-being of the individual regardless of whether they are directly related to economic or academic gains. Figure 1 above represents the interactions among the 3Hs, as each one is needed to make the proposed educational interventions transformative.

MODES OF INTERVENTION TO ADVANCE EDUCATION

Overall, it is anticipated that investigating beliefs and attitudes, along with analyzing policies and practices, about the identified constructs will generate new knowledge that will inform the next steps in pedagogy, curriculum, leadership, policy, and assessment. We have identified these five key areas as modes of intervention for educational reform. We will use our empirical-based findings to develop educational interventions in each of these key areas in tandem with our partners overseas representing the various local and state authorities, including the ministries of education and local school authorities. Education (in the above model) is defined in its broadest sense, meaning that it is not limited to K-12 schooling and higher education, but it also can be emphasized in several contexts such as formal and non-formal (private schools and religious schools) as well as informal (such as extracurricular enrichment activities and education programs).

The five designated areas, listed below, have been highlighted in multiple studies and reports as key avenues for reform (World Bank, 2018). Reform in one of them is related to the others, for comprehensive reform requires coordinated interventions in all five areas of impact. For example, system assessments or evaluation, monitoring, and learning assessments cannot be made without affecting (or simultaneously working to improve) educational policies and curricula. Similarly, pedagogical practices affect educational attainments and student learning outcomes. In fact, pedagogy plays a vital role in curriculum decisions and implementation. We plan to use AEMS's accumulated empirical-based knowledge and research findings to undertake knowledge dissemination and educational interventions in each area, as follows:

1. *Educational policy*: This area, which involves decision-making processes at the highest levels of educational systems, impacts educational systems that set the bar for standards, guiding principles, teacher qualifications and accreditation, along with curriculum, among others. Reform on this level will ensure a "trickle-down" effect into other areas and levels of education. AEMS's "Mapping the Terrain" study and others will inform policy by making recommendations and sharing the results with the relevant decision makers, stakeholders, and larger audiences.
2. *Curriculum:* Reform efforts in this area involve deciding what, how, and why students learn. Thus, such efforts should take into consideration the need for an organic process of creating curriculum guidelines and materials that are both authentic and reflect the context of students in K-12 and higher education settings in Muslim societies. Incorporating materials that address life skills pertaining to living in harmony with self and others is another goal of AEMS's research agenda (Muskin, 2015).
3. *Pedagogy*: AEMS argues that there is power in teaching and investing in educators in a way that is learner-centered and addresses the needs and learning styles of all students, regardless of age. Preparing teachers to respond to the academic and the SEE needs of students (in K-12 and higher education) is integral to its overall vision. Another vehicle of transformation—namely, that of data-driven interventions in teacher training and practices—will be inspired by our empirical research.
4. *Leadership and administration*: Transforming educational systems begins with the leaders in the field who guide teachers, parents, and students. They also constitute the link between policy makers and schools as well as higher education institutions. Addressing their roles and needs, along with creating collaborative initiatives inspired by field-derived research and evidence, will promote the reform movement in education.
5. *Assessment and evaluation*: Many countries struggle with the design and implementation of assessment tools that not only measure academic attainment, but also measure socio-emotional gains in students (Johnson, 2017). AEMS will seek to develop authentic measures based on students' actual performance and evaluations of functionality, along with the educational systems' effectiveness, while keeping in mind the local contexts. Therefore, the process of educational transformation will be both informed and evidence-based.

The five areas described above have similar weights in the reform efforts; however, the focus may vary based on each community's needs as well as the degree of

access the research team is given. This will be determined with local partners and the expressed needs of the various ministries, schools, and/or universities with which we are collaborating. As such, AEMS's dynamic and non-imposing research agenda can make a unique contribution to Muslim societies' education systems by (1) collaborating with formal and non-formal education institutions and research entities; (2) engaging religious institutions, scholars, and decision makers in the different localities; and (3) partnering with local researchers with the intent to build capacity, strengthen the research platform, and improve the quality of empirical studies.

AEMS'S EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The AEMS team started its data collection efforts in 2018 in 16 Muslim societies (see Appendix 1) to establish a "Mapping the Terrain" baseline. The research agenda includes annual data collection to deepen our understanding of the constructs and values identified so we can build on the findings successively. Data collection is ongoing, and data analysis began in the spring of 2019. In the first wave, covering 25,000 participants, we narrowed down the constructs and selected four based on their relevance to well-being and their grounding in Islamic values: empathy, forgiveness, moral reasoning, and community mindedness. Those are closely related to the developmental states of consciousness we identified (see Table 1, above) and are hypothesized to help individuals move from egocentric and individual living/thinking into more ethnocentric ways of thinking. These would eventually be followed by the worldly state of mind (in the Spiral Dynamic model) and the *tawḥīd* state of consciousness that was added.

Although we do not see the states of consciousness as fully fixed or bounded, they are progressive in the sense that there are earlier and later states; the earlier states are purely instinctive and tribal, whereas the *tawḥīd* (the highest) state is universal and indicates interconnectedness. The four constructs are rooted in Islamic values and teachings, as there are numerous prophetic examples of empathy, forgiveness, moral reasoning, and community mindedness. One of the most emblematic instances is Prophet Muhammad's forgiveness and amnesty issued to the people of Makkah, his birthplace, after he and his followers, who had been driven out, marched back into it. He forgave his enemies, some of whom had murdered members of his family, close friends, and companions (Lings, 1983). Many other examples in Islamic teachings ground our research in authentic and historic contexts.

Current research confirms the viability of these constructs and their derivatives in the Arab and Islamic contexts. For example, research on forgiveness in the Middle East suggests that it be integrated into the curriculum and teacher training programs (Abu-Nimer & Nasser, 2013). Likewise, research among Muslim Indonesian students shows that Islamic beliefs lead to higher levels of moral reasoning within that population; Islamic beliefs are positively correlated with orthodox beliefs, prayer, and understanding of justice and equality (Chang-Ho, Yodi, & Soo, 2009). Evidence from Bangladesh suggests that happiness among Muslims is strongly related to belonging and connectedness (Devine, Hinks & Naveed, 2017).

The "Mapping the Terrain" research agenda aspires to provide an evidence-based, international study on four constructs that would not only improve our understanding at the conceptual level, but also—and most importantly —point to how these constructs may be integrated into religious and general education in Muslim societies. Ultimately, we also aim to show how these areas of socio-emotional growth correlate with academic learning and civic engagement in the "first" and "second" spaces of educational reform. The study is therefore a platform for deeper investigations and recommendations for advancing and maximizing educational experiences in Muslim societies.

"Mapping the Terrain" Constructs

Based on the review of previous studies and our interpretations of their relevance to Muslim societies, we launched the "Mapping the Terrain" study in July 2018. The following represents our definitions of the constructs based on the review of previous literature:

Empathy is the ability and willingness to care, feel, and take the perspective of others

Empathy has been mostly studied in the developmental psychology field. For example, scholars such as Davis (1994) emphasize both its cognitive and affective perspectives. Many cognitive theorists argue that empathy is grounded in social understanding, whereas moral and philosophical theorists suggest that it refers to an individual's sympathetic response to others' suffering (Zahavi & Overgaard, 2012) and his/her deliberate effort to understand, communicate, take, and act based upon others' perspectives (Gair, 2011; Hojat, 2007).

Forgiveness is the ability and willingness to let go of the hard feelings and the need to take revenge against someone who has wronged an individual or committed a perceived injustice against that individual or others

Forgiveness is a broad construct and a subjective concept that is perceived differently by individuals from different cultures or contexts. Enright and Gassin (1992) define it as the "willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love towards him or her" (p. 102). Nasser, Abu-Nimer, and Mahmoud (2014) suggest that forgiveness is a personal decision that originates in an intrinsic motivation to let go. Forgiveness education promotes the understanding of different perspectives and reduces stereotypes (Abu-Nimer, 2001).

Moral reasoning is the ability and willingness to make determinations about right and wrong and act accordingly on those

Moral reasoning is the ability to determine wrong and right and to make ethical decisions based on that understanding when facing an ethical dilemma (Rest, 1984). Classical theorists suggest that individuals develop the highest level of moral reasoning when they make decisions based on ethical principles without considering their own interests and/or benefits (Wells & Schminke, 2001). Research in the field

of moral reasoning and its relationship with other constructs is sparse in Muslim societies (Teymoori, Heydari, & Nasiri, 2014). Professional ethics programs and trainings can promote moral reasoning by enhancing individuals' knowledge of how to behave ethically when facing an ethical dilemma (Jones, 2009).

Community mindedness is seeing the self as interconnected to and acting for the benefit of an inclusive whole

Each community has its unique needs and characteristics. To promote community mindedness, therefore, one must formulate a framework that considers different perspectives and ideas in order to enhance collaborative thinking and positive interaction among community members. Such a framework must be developed by community leaders and scholars who are willing to utilize critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as to be open-minded and collaborate with the community's various groups. Service in community agencies and organizations is one way of introducing youths to their community and allowing them to understand its needs. This promotes community mindedness and results in youth engagement. Consequently, this type of service can advance their sense of belonging to a greater community (McIntosh, Metz, & Youniss, 2005).

When taken together, these interrelated constructs represent an approach to the person as an individual who is part of a collective whole. Furthermore, the literature review suggests that a sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and religiosity are possible predictors of a person's ability to empathize or forgive, and so on, and may play important roles in mediating the correlations among the four constructs. We defined the moderators as follows:

Religiosity is the degree of influence one's faith has on his/her values, behaviors, and everyday life

According to Huber and Huber (2012), religiosity consists of several dimensions, such as public practice, private practice, religious experience, ideology, and intellect. Taken as a whole, they can be considered as representative of the totality of religious values and how they are shaped and practiced in peoples' lives. As Teymoori, Heydari, and Nasiri (2014) state, "Religion is a social institution that dramatically influences individuals' behaviors and daily actions as well as their social and political orientations" (p. 93).

Teymoori, Heydari, and Nasiri (2014) argue that individuals seek religion when they are experiencing any kind of stress or hardship and that it can protect them from such mental health issues as depression and anxiety. According to this perspective, religion fulfills the human need for security—one of the basic needs of humans and a foundation for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1954).

Self-efficacy is the individual's belief in his/her ability to organize and execute certain behaviors that are necessary to complete a given task successfully

In social cognitive theory, Bandura (1986) suggests that self-efficacy is a key construct that positively and strongly correlates with one's cognitive and

behavioral engagement in a certain task. Bandura (1977, 1986, 1986b) defines self-efficacy as a person's belief in his/her ability to organize and execute certain behaviors that are necessary to succeed in a given task. It affects how people think and feel as well as influences their decision to initiate an action and their types of activity and level of motivation, along with the amount of effort and time they are willing to invest in completing it. Many studies support Bandura's claim that one's belief in his/her ability to be successful in a task plays a more important role in success than the capability itself. Self-efficacy is malleable and influenced by four main sources: past performance accomplishment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological/psychological states (Bandura, 1977).

Sense of belonging is the feeling of being included, accepted, cared for, and supported

This context-related concept is influenced by environmental and situational variables. For example, in an academic institution this sense is defined as a student's perception of being supported, accepted, respected, and included in that institution (Goodenow, 1993). It is also strongly predicted by social support, which has been found to be positively correlated with coping mechanisms as well as physical and socio-emotional well-being. Social support has different sources with financial or mental dimensions. In terms of community social capital, it is the feeling or experience of having others who love and care for you, to whom you can turn for help in times of need. Social support and community social capital are multi-dimensional and positively and significantly correlated with individuals' mental health and students' academic achievement (Rothon, Goodwin, & Stansfeld, 2011).

Based on our review of previous studies, especially earlier meta-analyses conducted on some of the constructs investigated (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009), we hypothesized certain correlations between the constructs. The Structural Equation Model (Figure 2, below) outlines those expected correlations and proposes pathways and links to interpret the design and the results of our first wave of "Mapping the Terrain," which remains ongoing at the time of this writing. As this is a hypothesized model, we obviously do not have all of the evidence needed to support it in the design stage; however, the study's results will inform and suggest alternative directions and links among the constructs.

We mathematically calculated a composite and cumulative score of the above constructs to situate our research participants on the developmental trajectory described earlier. This hypothetical score was tested using simulated data sets that showed promise when used on real data (Cheema, 2018). Thus, we will be able to assess each participant's standing related to the developmental states described in Table 1 by assessing the total score of his/her attitude toward the constructs selected. Their total score on the survey's subscales (the total number of survey items is 146) will allow us to situate participants along the developmental trajectory. A maximum score would put an individual at the model's higher states, whereas a lower score would lower the developmental state. Although this hypothesis has yet to be proven, our initial mathematical calculations suggest

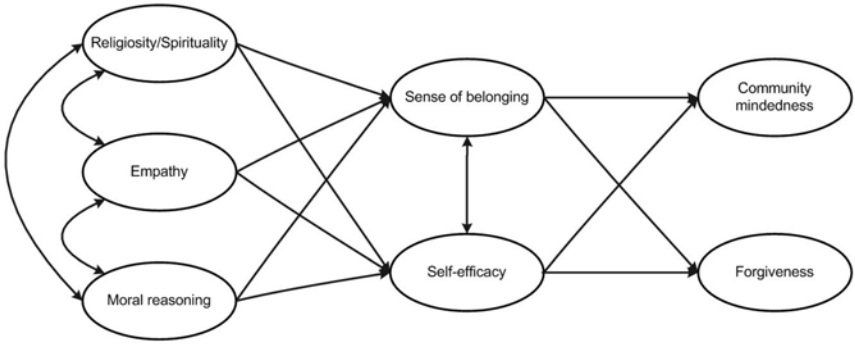

Figure 2. The Structural Equation Model

enough promise to allow the derivation of valid and meaningful interpretations of the results. This step is important for further instrument and construct refinement for the next research waves.

Future waves will continue to investigate constructs that are central to the overall well-being of students in Muslim countries and focus on correlates of the various states of the developmental trajectory described earlier. In addition to repeating some of the subscales (depending on which ones are the most telling in Wave 1 and on relevance to values such as empathy and forgiveness), concepts such as self-regulation and meaning making are important to empathy, forgiveness, and moral reasoning and are just as critical to higher states of consciousness. Meaning making is instrumental in research on happiness and emotional well-being (Fossas, 2018). As we move forward with the annual study, we will adjust, and add/eliminate constructs based on the empirical research results and the desired outcomes.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Education reform is not a panacea to every problem. It cannot solve all the difficulties Muslim societies are encountering, and it will work only if it is developed in tandem with reforms at the levels of policy and governance. Moreover, education's goals, content, strategies, and purposes are constantly and rigorously being debated and contested. The question of why students go to school, what they learn there, whether and how they can continue to post-secondary education, as well as how any or all of that education is needed for successful engagement as citizens, are highly politicized questions. As we have suggested here, education for employment and global citizenship is at the forefront of global collaboration initiatives. However, we argue that current education reform efforts are insufficient, for the billions of dollars already spent have shown mixed and unsatisfactory results on the status of education in various countries. In Muslim societies, the

challenge is even greater because of the lack of political and economic stability in some and the absence of resources in others.

This article provides the conceptual framework for a research agenda that will be empirically tested and closely examined as the data from "Mapping the Terrain" is collected in the envisaged waves over the coming years. It is the first effort to develop a locally grounded empirical approach to proposing educational reform policies and interventions. By developing theoretical frameworks, research instruments, constructs, and measures that reflect and include the person's religious and spiritual aspects, as they are constructed by contemporary Muslim societies, AEMS hopes to achieve greater local buy-in and engagement for more meaningful outcomes.

Note

1. See a list of Muslim societies in Appendix A.

2. A similar illustration can be found at cruxcatalyst.com/2013/09/26/spirla-dynamics-a-way-to-understanding-human-nature.

APPENDIX A

Muslim societies participating in Mapping the Terrain - Wave I

Bangladesh	Indonesia
Bosnia	Malaysia
Hong Kong	Mauritius
Kenya	Palestine
Azerbaijan	Sudan
Kurdistan- Iraq	Tanzania
Kyrgyzstan	Tatarstan
India	Uganda

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