



Dutch Education: A System Subjected to Constant Change

The culture of any nation is the backbone of its existence and survival. Based on this culture a civilisation is founded, her goals and objectives are defined, and the way of life determined. The individuals within this society will be moulded by this culture in such a way that they become distinguished from the rest of nations.

When the foundation on which a culture is founded upon is confused and reactionary, as secularism is, we also witness this confusion and reactionary approach in the manner by which states who embrace this ideology organise their various systems of life, such that they are constantly subject to change. Is it therefore possible to even consider an education system built upon this secular culture and foundation as a model to improve the education systems within the Muslim world?

When one looks closely at the Dutch education system, change is actually one thing that stands out more than anything. We see that in the last decades many changes have been made to the system. Changes which on the one hand have been initiated and influenced through the secular nature of Dutch society and its liberal values, and changes which on the other hand have been reversed through problems created by these changes.

Let's start with the so called "eeuwige student", the "forever student" - students who in the eighties could study at leisure, sometimes taking as long as 14 years to finish a Master's degree which could actually be finished in four years. There wasn't much studying done back then, it was a lot more partying and drinking. This same generation was also the first who had the luxury of receiving a student grant funded by the government without making any real demands on the speed of graduation. These were freedoms that could never be upheld when considering the economic backlashes this would eventually bring with it.

This meant that the offspring of this same generation could never enjoy the same educational rights as their parent did. And so we see that they are facing a very different reality. To begin with, the times that students could study at leisure are officially over. Students are put under a lot of pressure to pass a certain number of exams to be able to continue studying. Often students need to pass at least 75% of all exams, and in some cases as high as 100% in the first year, to be able to continue with the second year of university, a far cry from the student life of their parents.

Also, from getting a full grant 30 years ago, students through the years gradually started to receive less and less in grants, until finally last year the grant completely changed into a full loan. This change has brought many alterations to the way students study. First of all, it forces students to complete their degree in the least amount of time, allowing little space for students to follow other subjects besides the compulsory ones. It also minimizes the possibilities to follow an internship in a different country, all because these extra-curricular activities will only increase the debt that students will be forced to pay when graduating. Young adults are forced to begin their working lives with a big debt which brings us to another so-called freedom that is under heavy strain. The times when the aim was to provide equal chances for everyone to study were officially over when the government allowed the tuition fees to be raised and the grants to be turned into loans.

Another concern with the Dutch education system, which is clearly connected to the culture within Dutch society, is the attitude this system has towards students. Students as we know belong to the "youth" of a society. And the youth in Dutch society are seen as

youngsters in the midst of their life. It is seen as a period in which it is allowed to seek as much pleasure as one can. A time for entertainment, fun and stimulation. A time where it is considered normal for youngsters to get away with almost anything just because they are teenagers. This attitude that society has on youth is having a great impact on how the Dutch student themselves look at education but also how the system looks upon them. What we see is that students are increasingly less motivated in achieving educational goals and that when they opt for further education, ease and fun are important motives in choosing, leaving out future job prospects. A result is that difficult subjects, such as engineering and sciences, which will offer better job prospects are only chosen by a few, creating difficulties for the future generations. We also see that teachers are experiencing more and more difficulties when teaching these types of students - students who lack intrinsic motivation and first need to be stimulated and motivated to even attend class let alone actually finish their studies.

These few examples are only the tip of the iceberg of a more serious problem affecting Dutch society and simultaneously its education system. When goals are set by an ever-changing culture because it is built upon the idea that pursuing one's desires is the goal in life no matter what the costs, we will naturally see the consequences upon society in every aspect of life. Members of that society will also continually be subjected to these constant changes.

Therefore any education system which has been built upon a culture, different than the Islamic one, must be viewed with caution when deciding if it can be taken as an example for improving the education system in the Muslim world. Education in Islam, with its own specific culture already provides a very clear and crystallized idea about what the aim should be with education. This is to produce the Islamic personality, in thinking and behaviour and to provide students with the knowledge connected with life's affairs. The only culture that should influence this system will be derived from the Islamic creed which also constitutes the basis upon which the education policy is built. The curriculum and methods of teaching will be designed to prevent any aberration from this basis.

It is only an ideology that has a clear and sound basis such as Islam that can create an education system that has clear, unchanging goals and an effective and elevated education policy that is not constantly subject to change.

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «لا يؤمن أحدكم حتى يكون هواه تبعا لما جئت به»

The Prophet (saw) said, “**None of you will be true believers until his desires follow what I came with**”.

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