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The State of Education in Algeria through Arabization during the French Occupation

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Abstract:

Algeria endured severe political conditions during the French occupation, particularly in education. Education was essential to enlighten the minds of young people and therefore had to be extended throughout the country. As colonial control deepened, a group of educated Algerian notables became increasingly involved in educational affairs. They possessed considerable cultural knowledge. This study therefore addresses three themes: (1) the leading pioneers of education in Algeria; (2) the state of education under French occupation; and (3) the educational and cultural situation in colonial Algeria. It asks the following question: Who were the principal pioneers of education in Algeria, and how did the educated elite contribute to spreading knowledge and learning under French colonial rule?

Keywords: Translation - State of education - Algerian schools

Résumé:

L'Algérie a souffert pendant l'occupation française en raison des conditions politiques Caire vécues par, en particulier dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la nécessité d'être ceux pour l'informer l'esprit des nouvelles à ce moment-là, et il devait être distribué dans tous les pays de l'Algérie, et avec le passage et la pénétration du colonialisme au Le pays, le peuple d'élite éduqué de l'Algérie a commencé à prendre l'éducation, d'autant plus qu'ils étaient dans une culture élevée et à la lumière de cela, nous allons être exposés aux points suivants: Les pionniers les plus importants de l'éducation en Algérie 2 positions de l'éducation en Algérie pendant l'occupation française 3 vision sur la réalité de l'éducation et de la culture en Algérie de l'occupation française qui sont des pionniers les plus importants de l'éducation en Algérie et comment la classe instruite a contribué à la diffusion de la science et de l'éducation en Algérie sous le règne du colonialisme français?

les mots clés: Translation - La réalité de l'éducation - Les écoles algériennes

Introduction:

During the period of French colonial rule, educational institutions were not sufficiently widespread among ordinary Algerians. This situation prompted calls for an educational project. In practice, most teachers and instructors were foreigners, while only a small and marginalized minority were Algerian. Algerians consequently encountered several difficulties, including the following:

Algerians opposed sending their children to schools supervised by the French, even when their own language, the language of the Quran, was taught there. Nevertheless, educated Algerians emphasized the value of knowledge and learning. They invoked the Quranic verse, "Say, Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" They also cited the Prophet's saying, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim," and the Quranic verse, "He created man. He taught him eloquent speech" (55:3-4). Accordingly, this paper examines the following points:

1. An overview of the educational situation in Algeria under French occupation.
2. The state of education in Algeria during the French occupation.
3. The leading pioneers of education in Algeria during the French occupation. Who were these pioneers, and how did the educated class contribute to spreading knowledge and education in Algeria under French colonial rule?

1. An Overview of the Educational and Cultural Situation in Algeria under French Occupation:

The question of education in Algeria under French occupation became closely linked to the question of the Algerian people's destiny and its aspirations for the future. The French government therefore pursued policies intended to keep Algerians uneducated. It confined many of them to caves and mountainous areas, removed them from urban centres, imposed French as the language of instruction, and sought to marginalize Arabic and Islam. Despite these measures, Algerians never accepted French rule as permanent. "European migration to Algeria thus expanded, while growing European economic activity encouraged settlers to spread across the entire country. Algeria would become a place in which all nationalities were absorbed. Once this occurred, a single people would emerge on Algerian soil, and that people would be called the French people."¹ This project encompassed history, education, and politics.

Official statistics on educational institutions, particularly the French census of 1902, provide the following figures:

"The number of Algerian pupils studying French reached 25,629. The number studying Arabic was 308, while the total number of Algerian teachers and trainee teachers was 180."² These figures are extremely low. They show that French colonial policy obstructed cultural and scientific progress. "In 1836, the French government considered establishing an Arab-French school to foster closer relations between the local population and the French by teaching children the French language. A school for adults was established in 1837. In 1841, schools were opened in Algiers, Annaba, and Oran. Together, they enrolled 1,029 Christian and Muslim pupils."³ Through these schools, France attempted to spread French throughout Algeria. "In 1857, two Arab-French colleges were founded, one in Algiers and the other in Constantine. Each enrolled 100 pupils."³.

French colonial policy generally sought to integrate French into education while neglecting Arabic.⁴

2.1. The State of Education in Algeria during the French Occupation:

The state of education in Algeria at that time was extremely poor because ignorance and limited access to knowledge were widespread. Some Algerians prevented their children from attending French schools. They also kept boys away from schools established by the colonial government in the early 1950s. They believed that children who attended the schools prepared for them by the administration would abandon their religion.⁵ Some Algerian intellectuals nevertheless advocated bilingualism. They called for French to receive a prominent place in education and viewed its teaching as one means of combating ignorance. This position attracted criticism from some Algerians, who regarded such intellectuals as overly receptive to foreign cultures and impressed by Western science. The intellectuals nonetheless encouraged learning and urged people to reduce ignorance gradually by studying the sciences, arts, crafts, and professions.⁶ Education also contributes positively to many aspects of individual development.

"A strong command of language enriches an individual's linguistic and intellectual resources and opens wider horizons for mastering different fields of knowledge."⁷ The pursuit of knowledge and learning was therefore essential to life in general. "Algeria appears in earlier times to have pursued knowledge through every possible means and approached it from every direction. It mastered both rational and transmitted learning and became firmly grounded in their principles. It embraced the sciences of its age and raised their banners, like its two Maghrebi neighbours, the Far and Near Maghreb. Algeria thus held a prominent place among the regions and acquired renown in history. Its scholars built their works on the foundations of verification and fortified them with meticulous inquiry. In their age, they were guiding stars and models to be followed. Yet the cycle of upheaval carried them away as their light approached its setting. They departed, as if saying: 'These are our traces; they bear witness to us. After we are gone, look to the traces.'"⁷ Moreover, Algerians valued learning. The role of the *zawiyas* in disseminating knowledge, Islamic jurisprudence, and religion must also be recognized. These institutions illuminated minds darkened by ignorance. Historically, Algerians pursued knowledge through every available means and acquired both rational and transmitted learning. Some intellectuals also took the initiative to establish clubs and charitable associations.

3.1. The Leading Pioneers of Education in Algeria during the French Occupation:

Teachers under French occupation encouraged people to learn and deepen their understanding. They explained the benefits of knowledge and education. The following section presents the most prominent figures whose reputations spread across Algeria and whose work was recorded by history as a model for later generations.

1/ Mustapha al-Sadat: "Mr Mustapha al-Sadat was a man of learning and a teacher in our country during the 1950s. He later served as director and teacher at the Islamic School in Constantine, which the French reopened and renamed the French-Islamic School." He had a solid educational background. His work as a teacher and educator made him an intellectual and an advocate for spreading knowledge, education, and reading. He did not confine himself to advising Algerians to send their children to that school and to other schools. Instead, he chose the broader public sphere of journalism to address a wider audience. In long articles published in *Al-Mubashshir*, he explained the many benefits of education. He supported his arguments by citing the statements of sages and scholars.⁸ His most important articles included the following:⁹

1. *To Those Who Withdrew from the Contest of Pens and the Flow of Ink:* This article refers to an earlier French scholar who stated that a person unable to write, even if able to spell and read, resembles a bird missing one wing. The author continues by describing an illiterate person who cannot express ideas in writing. He eventually states: "He hears what is said but cannot give a proper reply. His senses of hearing and sight are complete, but his speech is deficient when conveying information."

2. *Whoever Follows the Path Reaches the Destination:* In this article, he calls on people to learn and deepen their knowledge. He was clearly a learned man who understood the course of the scientific renaissance in Europe. That movement had spread throughout the continent and was beginning to reach the Arab East.

3. *Precious Counsel on Raising Children*: In this article, he again advocated learning and advised those who remained unaware of its value. He presented an important event to the readers of *Al-Mubashshir* as more than a reporter. His style also conveyed advice and guidance. He described the site on which the school was built and the atmosphere of joy among the city's inhabitants. He sought to reassure Algerians who feared that their children might lose their way or doubted that education could lead them to senior or administrative positions in fields such as the judiciary and translation. He therefore advised people to learn French, the language of public employment, to qualify for such positions. He stressed that perseverance was the path to distinction.¹⁰ He was himself a skilled translator with a strong command of languages.

2/ **Mr Hassan Ben Brihmat**: He was born in Algiers and belonged to a respected Algerian family known for learning and culture. He studied in Algiers and received a bilingual education. He was probably among the first Algerians to attend the French school that opened in Algiers around 1836.¹¹ After graduating from the French-Islamic School in the capital, he entered public service and was appointed an adviser in the provincial administration in 1865. He took an interest in education and in the internal organization of the bilingual school. He left three sons, Ibrahim, Ahmed, and Ammar. All three worked as translators in the French army.¹² Their father had also worked as a translator.

3/ **Mahmoud al-Shaykh Ali**: This teacher was a pioneer of the cultural renaissance of his time. He was a skilled translator, had a strong command of languages, and wrote in both Arabic and French for the press. His extensive knowledge of Eastern peoples' efforts to catch up with Europe informed his writing. In a long article, he noted that Muhammad Ali the Great had sent forty students to Paris years earlier to study and translate books of Western civilization.¹³ Translation was therefore highly active during the French colonial period. In a lengthy article published in *Al-Mubashshir* in 1866, he urged people to seek knowledge and explained its benefits. The article suggests that many Algerians no longer understood the meaning or value of knowledge. They had neglected it and had become indifferent to it. He believed it was his duty to remind them of its merits. He was also moved to write because many people understood knowledge only in religious terms. He explained: "What prompted me to pursue this aim was the widespread misconception that knowledge is confined to religious learning." He therefore believed that he had to awaken people from their slumber and replace this mistaken understanding with a sound one. He was well informed about current events and the rapid pace of progress.¹⁴ These details portray Mahmoud Ben Cheikh Ali as a modern figure with broad knowledge of scientific and political affairs, the progress of the European renaissance, and developments in both East and West. He was both a translator and a scholar. He understood the efforts of Arab and Muslim societies to achieve a scientific and cultural renaissance and to catch up with Western civilization. These societies sent student missions to acquire European sciences and cultures. He also understood the role of French in the advancement of Western civilization and was aware of Paris's cultural and scientific prominence. In his articles, he urged Algerians to teach French to their children while they remained in their own country and had access to the language nearby. He also referred to the Rightly Guided Caliphs and the rulers of al-Andalus, who translated many sciences from other languages into Arabic and brought foreign scholars to teach them. Through these efforts, they reached the highest levels of achievement, refinement, and civilization.¹⁵ He was ambitious for development and progress and sought to join the advance of civilization. He taught at the Royal School in Algiers and had an excellent command of French. No information about the dates of his birth and death could be located.¹⁶

4/ **Mohammed al-Badawi**: "He was the son of Mr Ahmed al-Badawi and was born in Algiers. No information about his date of birth could be located. He completed his primary education in the capital. For higher education, he attended the Arab College for Arabic and the Lycée of Algiers for French. After graduating from these two major institutions, he worked in education and journalism."¹⁷ Mohammed Ben Ahmed al-Badawi pursued several fields besides education, including journalism, translation, and politics. He was an undisputed cultural activist. The most important newspapers to which he contributed were:¹⁸

1. *Al-Akhbar* newspaper.
2. *The Algerian Radical* (*Le Radical algérien*). He possessed wide knowledge, a rich cultural background, and notable eloquence. He was also an accomplished political orator. By 1870-1871, he had formed a political organization with a group of intellectuals.¹⁹ He was therefore a politician, an intellectual, and an accomplished teacher. He resisted French colonialism and called for Algerian independence.

Conclusion:

French colonial rule sought to erase Algerian identity. Algerians resisted with determination and refused to retreat. A group of educated notables therefore emerged.

They sought to restore the standing of Algerian identity and promote education and cultural development.

They opposed ignorance and backwardness by:

- encouraging education, the pursuit of knowledge, and language learning;
- examining developments in the sciences, arts, industries, and inventions; and
- emphasizing the benefits of education and early learning, as derived from Islam and the Prophet's Sunnah.

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