

Islam in education: how marginalizing Islamic curriculum from Egypt's national education has contributed to religious extremism

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of marginalizing religious curriculum in the public-school system on the tolerance levels among Egyptian youth. Unlike previous research associating religious instruction with radicalization, this study offers new perspectives on the detrimental effects of marginalizing religious education in fostering tolerance. It argues that a balanced religious education can prevent the radicalization of young individuals by extremist groups. The central question is whether education significantly influences the radicalization process. The argument suggests that the secularization of education has intensified interest in Islam, leading to polarization fueled by radical factions with pre-existing objectives. Using a qualitative methodology, specifically a case study design, the research conducted interviews with 57 participants from the national school background. Findings reveal that marginalizing Islamic curricula has adverse effects on promoting tolerance among youth. The study aims to provide education officials with insights into the negative consequences of marginalizing religious curricula, emphasizing the need for a nuanced approach to religious education within the broader educational framework. Recognizing and addressing these consequences can contribute to building a more tolerant and cohesive society.

Keywords: Islamic education, National education, Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

Islam, for more than 1000 years has led and enhanced progress in many disciplines, especially in sciences. More than 60 learning centers were established all over the Islamic empire from the east in Iraq to the west in Cordoba (Hilgendorf, 2003). The rise of Islam in recent decades has had a significant impact on both regional and global arenas. Understanding this has become necessary because of the discussions between religious leaders and politicians on how much of the public sphere Islam should be permitted to occupy (Cook, 2000). In Egypt, as in the majority of North African nations, Islam serves as both the official religion and a fundamental component of both cultural nationalism and Arabian ancestry. To promote unity in the country, politicians employ education (Rosenthal EIJ, 1965).

Al-Azhar was the only Islamic institution of higher learning in Egypt, which was different from most of North Africa. In the 19th century, Muhammad Ali Pasha established the national education system as a separate system from Al-Azhar, which was resistant to modernization at the time. The religious curriculum in the national education system is considered less important than that of Al-Azhar schools (Cook, 2000) resulting in students not receiving adequate information about their religion (Petersen, 1997). As a result, many students from this sector seek other ways to gain sufficient knowledge, making them more susceptible to other ideologies that fulfill their "Passion for Islam," as described by Caryle Murphy in her book about the ideologies of some extremist groups.

The Al-Azhar system is primarily focused on studying classical Islamic texts, such as the rule of *Isnad* and *al-tallaqi-almubasher*, with a teaching style that emphasizes direct contact between the student and teacher. However, in recent times, this teaching method has made it challenging to disseminate the curriculum to a wider audience. In contrast, 80% of public schools are now part of the national education system, with the majority of students coming from this sector (Nakissa, 2019). The teaching of religion is largely ignored in the national education system, and students are not graded based on their performance in the course. As a result, students tend to concentrate on other courses (Cook, 2000), with just two to three hours set aside for religion in the curriculum (Neill, 2006).

Over the years, online education has become increasingly popular due to its convenience and affordability (Rahmat & Fachrunnisa, 2021). Online courses offer students more flexibility in their schedule as they can study from home or on the go, and do not require a specific location. While there are many advantages to online learning, there are also

Potential drawbacks. Online courses tend to be cheaper than traditional classes, more flexible to accommodate student schedules, and offer more opportunities to learn (Mantovani, 2012). A study by Moaz Ibrahim (2014) found that social media, such as Facebook, can be a suitable medium through which persuasion, attraction, and gaining trust can happen. The study highlighted the success that extremists achieved through using this media and emphasized the deep need for authentic Islamic institutions to use it to keep up with the modern era and fight extremist ideas. Sabic-El-Rayess (2021) emphasized that the educational channels used by extremists, including informal programs held in virtual environments, play a big role in transforming the minds of youth and adults, as they often undermine the value of official legitimate institutions.

The argument presented in this study is that the marginalization of religious education in public schools has contributed to the rise of religious extremism in Egypt. Two main extremist groups are identified: the Muslim Brotherhood, which is known for its political agenda and involvement in extremist actions, and the Salafi-Wahabi group, which is known for its strict interpretation of Islam and inflexible approach. Both groups have a history of using education to propagate their beliefs and recruit young people. Despite the existence of legitimate state institutions, such as Al-Azhar, the Fatwa Council, and Dar al-Iftaa al-misriyah, these groups often contradict their teachings and promote their own extremist ideas.

Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifaa al-Misriyyah are respected Islamic institutions that provide religious guidance and adhere to the same methodology (Bano & Benadi, 2018). In Egypt, the Fatwa Council of al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifaa are trusted sources for Islamic fatwa, and they play a crucial role in promoting Islamic moderation and resolving religious issues faced by Egyptian Muslims (Mas'al, 2021). Is contradicting these entities reflect a kind of intolerance? Or does education play a role in such contradiction?

The findings of this study reveal a pronounced enthusiasm among Egyptian youth for actively seeking Islamic guidance and teachings, leading them to engage extensively in rapidly conducted online courses characterized by a puritanical discourse. This heightened interest can be attributed to the marginalization of the Islamic curriculum from the national education system. Consequently, this exclusion has had a notable impact on their receptivity to diverse perspectives, as they become polarized towards extremist groups with pre-established goals, thereby diminishing their tolerance for more moderate viewpoints.

Djilali (2016) conducted a dissertation thesis that investigated the impact of the Wahabi fatwa on the culture of Algerian society. The findings of the study revealed that the attitudes and behaviors of young people in Algeria have changed as a result of this fatwa, leading to a rejection of their own culture and a decreased tolerance towards those who differ from them emotionally, intellectually, and behaviorally. The research concludes that the Wahabi fatwa has led to a lack of flexibility in legal opinions, with a tendency to reject the consideration of (maslaha) or (Maqasid al-Shari'ah). Brik (2015) conducted a study on the Dar al-Ifta observatory center, which monitors takfiri fatwas and extremist religious ideologies. The research focused on the use of internet media by extremists to spread their ideologies and the response of Dar al-Ifta to this phenomenon. The study presented statistical information on the types and percentages of extremist issues, with Islamic misconceptions such as (al-Walaa wa Baraa, establishing the Islamic caliphate) being the most prevalent, followed by incitement to violence, murder in the name of religion, and advocacy of intolerance. The statistics also showed that international extremist activities ranked first. The study concluded that Dar al-Ifta addresses these issues in a critical and exegetical manner based on religious, humane, cultural, and historical perspectives.

Concluding from the results of the analysis of previous literature studies, previous research has mainly focused on the description of the current educational system in Egypt and the reform that had happened and brought the national education system to existence arguing that religious curriculums would be related to extremism. However, I didn't find any research involving an analysis of the importance of including a proper religious curriculum in the educational system so that it contributes to the enhancement of moderation and tolerance. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill the gaps between previous literature studies. Consequently, the novelty of this research lies in the aim that it will rank among the most recent studies on the topic of Islam in education in the Egyptian context and offer a framework for future research on the same subject.

METHODS

To examine the impact of removing religious curricula from education on tolerance among young Egyptians, this study employed a semi-structured qualitative research method. The study used a case study methodology and focused on the implications of the religious curriculum in national education. Since case studies are particularly useful for placing current

events in perspective, they are excellent for examining how education affects tolerance in the Egyptian context (Yin, 2013). A total of fifty-seven individuals were selected for participation in the study through a purposeful sampling technique. This group consisted of ten teachers from national education systems, twenty users of online education platforms, and 27 youth students with a national education background. The primary criteria for selecting individuals for the study were their role, knowledge, and experiences in relation to the research subject (Patton, 2002).

The data for this study was collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and digital ethnography. The inclusion of open-ended questions in the interview guide facilitated the expression of participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The data was analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis methodology devised by Braun and Clarke (2006). This methodology provides a comprehensive and systematic technique for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Education System in Egypt

Muslim educators and their pupils were confronted with secular educational institutions that not only disregarded religious matters entirely, but also implemented entirely novel curricula, school frameworks, and teaching methods (Kadi, 2006). The educational system in Egypt is composed of two separate systems, the national schools, and the Islamic Azhari Schools. Al-Azhar is one of the oldest Islamic institutions that teach Islamic studies around the world. It was established in the 10th century by the Shi'ites in the Fatimid era and later transformed into Sunni during the 12th century. The institution reached its peak during the Ottoman period in the 16th century, and it became the primary destination for students who started their studies at Kuttab before continuing to al-Azhar. Over time, al-Azhar has undergone several reforms, particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries. In an effort to modernize the country, Muhammed Ali, the ruler of Egypt from 1805 to 1848, established schools that taught various subjects such as engineering, medicine, science, translation, and law. However, due to the resistance of al-Azhar scholars to modernization, the national education system was established in the 1860s (Nakissa, 2019).

According to Nakissa (2019), the Al-Azhar education system currently includes institutes for students from K1 to K12, which are divided into preparatory, primary, and secondary levels. These institutes follow the same curriculum as public national schools but with a greater emphasis on Islamic subjects. Students in these institutes study a variety of Islamic topics, such as the Quran, its interpretation, Islamic beliefs, culture, Prophetic sayings, Arabic language, and Islamic law.

Al-Azhar teaches the four Madhahib of Fiqh, namely Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali. Students are allowed to choose the Madhhab they prefer, and they understand that there are variations among the four Madhahib, providing them with a solid foundation and aiding them in embracing diverse jurisprudential viewpoints (Petersen, 1997).

The modern approach to education involves teaching through topic-based courses, with students being presented with topics and receiving instruction through lectures and readings from various sources. In contrast, the traditional al-Azhar methodology is based on texts that are tailored to the student's level of proficiency (beginner, intermediate, advanced) (Nakissa, 2019). While online learning has made it easier for institutions to reach students worldwide, al-Azhar's educational system is not course-based but instead is centered on the rule of *Isnad*. Islamic scholar Dr. Abd alFattāḥ Abū Ghudda has emphasized the importance of *Isnad* as the primary means of transmitting knowledge in Islam (Ghudda, 2014). Another essential concept for learning at al-Azhar is *al-Tallaqi al-Mubasher*, or direct receipt of knowledge. Despite the significance of these traditional learning methods, they may not be the most effective means of spreading moderate Islamic teachings to a broad audience (Nakissa, 2019).

Recently, the majority of public schools, which account for 80%, are part of the national education system, while the remaining 20% are under the control of al-Azhar (Nakissa, 2019). However, religious education is not given much importance in the national system, and students tend to focus on other subjects, as the grades in the religion course are not included in their overall score (Cook, 2000). Although it is compulsory for students to take a religion course, only two to three hours are allocated to it (Neill, 2006). The former Minister of Education during President Mubarak's time once stated that he believes the number of hours dedicated to religious education is sufficient and there is no need for additional religious education (Cook, 2000).

The education system in Egypt has been a subject of debate, with some critics arguing that the curriculum is influenced by secularism. According to a survey conducted among university students in 1998, the majority of respondents believed that the national education system in Egypt is largely westernized (Cook, 2000). Additionally, Charlotte M. Neill (2006) noted that even religious education in national schools shows a secular influence, with an emphasis on basic religious ethics and national unity rather than a comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings (Neill, 2006).

Westernizing education has been seen as a drawback and has faced significant opposition from Islamists (Cook, 1999). According to Dr. Sayed Ismail Ali from the Faculty of Education at the University of Ain-Shams, the national education system fails to provide society with ethical and religious foundations (Cook, 2000). Individuals who attend public national schools lack knowledge of their cultural heritage and traditions (Cook, 1999). In an effort to address opposition, policymakers in Egypt attempted to integrate religious education into the national education system. However, the outcome was a superficial curriculum that combined both Western and Islamic education (Cook, 2000).

Based on the information provided, it can be inferred that students who attend public national schools in Egypt lack proper knowledge of their religion, while students who attend al-Azhar Islamic schools have a good understanding of Islamic sciences and the methodology of al-Azhar. Additionally, those with an Islamic education background are less likely to adopt a single truth claims attitude compared to those without this background.

Exploring the Different Ideologies for Education

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood group and Salafi groups in Egypt marked the beginning of extremism in the country. The Muslim Brotherhood aims to establish an Islamic system based on Shari'a law and views education as a key means of attracting youth and achieving political power (Murphy, 2002). Esam Erian and Maamoun Hodeiby, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, have stated that education is a more effective way to achieve their objective of establishing a state ruled by Shari'a than revolution (Murphy, 2002). This is because education allows them to reach and influence more people, particularly young people who are easily attracted to ideological movements and seek identity and purpose in their society (Fā'ūr, 2012). However, the Muslim Brotherhood does not recognize al-Azhar scholars as spiritual guides because they are considered "Ulama Muwazzafun" who work for the state and receive salaries, and thus have their own spiritual references (Petersen, 1997).

During the first half of the 20th century, the term Salafi was used to describe different movements that aimed to understand Islamic heritage in a modern, rational, and conservative manner. However, in the latter half of the century, the term was reserved exclusively for the group known as "Ahlussunnah wal-Jama'ah," who claimed to be reviving true Islamic heritage by adhering to the literal interpretation of the Quran and Hadith. They reject other Muslim groups whom they deem to promote "Bid'ah" or religious innovations because they do not follow the interpretation of "al-Salaf al-Salih." They recognize certain scholars, such as Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyah, and Ibn al-Qayim, but reject other references. Their mission is based on education, proselytization, and preaching, and they consider spreading the true doctrine of al-Salaf al-Salih a duty. However, this has led them to disregard the moderate Islamic traditions and diverse Islamic heritage, putting them at odds with al-Azhar, the official Islamic institution that promotes moderate Islamic understanding (El-Sherif, 2015).

As per the sources mentioned, it is apparent that extremists have their own educational program, which they strive to propagate and spread globally. They prefer to use their own curriculum to inculcate their thoughts, values, and beliefs in students rather than relying on the government's curriculum, which they perceive as a Western-made fabrication. Their method was devoid of critical thinking and open discourse. Dr. Kamal Mogheis as cited in Cook, affirms that extremist teachers persist in teaching their "hidden curriculum," which remains embedded in students' minds for a long time. The Egyptian government faces challenges in curbing its ideology, as expressed by the Minister of Youth during the Mubarak era, who admitted to the difficulty in managing it (Cook, 2000; Fā'ūr, 2012; Murphy, 2002; Neill, 2006). The Egyptian authorities struggled to control their ideology, and the minister of youth in Mubarak time expressed the difficulty of handling it saying: "But how can you handle thousands of Islamic schools and teachers who have their own sympathies? You change the curriculum and they refuse to teach it! How do you handle it?" (Murphy, 2002)

Using Cyberspace as a Modern Way to Disseminate Curriculum

Digital technology has brought about significant changes in people's lives, including in the field of education. Online learning and teaching have become increasingly popular, especially in higher education institutions, and offer several advantages over traditional learning environments. One of the main benefits of online education is its flexibility in terms of time and location, which allows individuals to select their own learning pace and environment. This flexibility also extends to individuals with disabilities who may have difficulty learning in conventional settings (Hartnett, 2016).

However, it is important to note that the Puritan ideology of Salafis, known for their rigid thinking, can be spread through online and offline educational channels, potentially leading to radicalization. These teachers often undermine the value of other educational institutions and teachers, believing that anything coming from the West is a contradiction to Islam, including formal educational systems (El-Rayess, 2021). Extremists in Egypt, who have been marginalized by the current regime, have turned to online education to reach and cultivate the youth and adults with their extreme thoughts that go against the moderate methodology of al-Azhar. This group is most likely to be interested in learning more about their religion, as they have been deprived of obtaining enough religious knowledge through the public national education system (Bano & Benadi, 2018).

Extremism and intolerance to fatwas

The establishment of the Egyptian Dar al-Ifta occurred on November 21, 1895. Prior to its establishment, Muftis belonging to the Hanafi and Maliki schools had served as members of the consultative council (Majlis as-Shura) in the 19th century. After the creation of the parliament, the Hanafi Mufti was consulted on certain legislation to ensure it did not contravene Sharia law, but his opinion was not mandatory. Subsequently, with the establishment of the Shari'a courts, the position of the Mufti gained official status as "Mufti of the Egyptian lands" (Mufti al-Diyar al-Misriyyah) (Petersen, 1997). The Mufti was initially appointed directly by the Khedive and subsequently by the president of the country. In the late 19th century, the Mufti was authorized to deliver legal rulings on issues of doubt. However, the situation changed in 1931 when Mufti lost his authority and could only be consulted for opinions when required (Petersen, 1997).

According to Bano & Benadi (2018), the establishment of Dar al-Ifta in the 19th century was a response to modernity, in order for the state to be able to compete effectively in the modern world. Despite having different structures and following different methodologies for issuing fatwas, Dar al-Ifta and al-Azhar have worked together in recent times (Bano & Benadi, 2018). Petersen (1997) notes that Dar al-Ifta has been recording the questions and answers of fatwas since its establishment, with most of them pertaining to personal matters and Islamic rituals. At times, Dar al-Ifta's fatwas confirm national unity among the Egyptian people.

In the modern digital world, it is crucial for authentic fatwa institutions to have a strategy for providing access to their fatwa online. Without such access, there is a risk of misinformation and confusion among the public, which can lead to a loss of trust in the fatwa entities. Specialization is also important in this field, as only scholars who have deeply studied

The fiqh, usulalfiqh, and rules for giving a fatwa are qualified to issue one. Collaboration between specialized scholars and experts is necessary to ensure the proper understanding and response with a fatwa that is suitable for the individual and society. The Egyptian Dar al-Ifta follows the four madhhabs characterized by Isnad but may depart from them in certain circumstances for the public good. On the other hand, extremist groups use anomalous methodology and issue fatwas that can lead to intellectual chaos. These fatwas are often spread through unqualified and unprofessional websites, taking advantage of scientific, intellectual, and media openness (Mas'al, 2021).

The issuance of moderate fatwas is crucial, as it helps prevent extreme ideas and radicalism by promoting knowledge and unity within the Muslim community, while also ensuring that Muslims perform their religious duties properly. According to Mahmoud H. Othman (2010), moderation in both the scientific methodology and the fatwas issued by the Mufti can have a significant impact. In his research titled "Fatwa Resilience in Islamic Law in the Egyptian Dar al-Iftaa as an Example," Hassan M. Abdurra'uf (2020) explains that resilience in fatwas is not absolute, but rather based on consistent texts and adheres to a moderate methodology. The Dar al-Ifta institution follows a methodology that combines resilience and consistency, while also considering variations and promoting moderation.

Petersen (1997) analyzed the evolution of Dar al-Ifta since its establishment, focusing on the role of the Grand Mufti and the changes that occurred over time. One key aspect he discussed was the emergence of other fatwa bodies in the early 20th century, including the Salafi movement and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Salafi movement considered themselves as intellectuals (Mufakirun) who tested the knowledge of scholars through Ijtihad, while the Muslim Brotherhood began as an educational movement in response to secularizing education and the marginalization of Islamic curriculum in schools. They later embraced the idea of establishing an Islamic state based on Sharia, and their rejection of the state led them to not recognize the legitimacy of official religious entities such as al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta. The Muslim Brotherhood viewed these entities as government employees who received their salaries from the state (Ulama Muwazzafun) and therefore established their own religious guides and authorities. Petersen also noted their open criticism of the Mufti and Dar al-Ifta through their newspaper "Liwaul Islam 1988." In her book "Passion for Islam", Caryle Murphy discusses the tactics used by extremist groups to attract more followers. One of their strategies involves targeting public national schools and universities and disregarding the curriculum set by the state. Instead, they use their own curriculum to indoctrinate students with their ideas and values. Through education, they aim to spread a "hidden curriculum" that erodes

trust in legitimate state entities such as al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta. The Salafi movement in Egypt follows a similar approach, influenced by the Wahhabism of Najdi Salafism. Their goal is to spread the true doctrine of as-salaf as-Salih through education, proselytization, and preaching. They reject other Muslims as promoting Bid'ah, and as a result, they do not recognize other legitimate Islamic institutions (El-Sherif, 2015).

The influence of the Salafi-Wahabi doctrine on Islamic education in Egypt

Educational theory encompasses a set of interconnected principles that inform the educational process and govern instructional methodologies. According to Kaufman, educational theory involves the concepts of personification and healing. The field of Educational Theory encompasses the study and analysis of strategies and approaches for effectively managing and instructing pupils, hence providing guidance and direction for educational practitioners (Kaufman, 2003).

Arab Islamic education, in accordance with the principles and teachings of Islam, embodies the profound lessons and lofty doctrines of the religion. In addition to disseminating its fundamental tenets of faith and belief, Islam also advocates for the cultivation of virtuous moral values, which it deems essential for leading a righteous and devout religious existence. On the contrary, westernized education forbids pupils from receiving the proper religious instruction that would help them understand the essence of religion and not to deviate towards the other extreme ideologies.

This paper presents an interview conducted in the national education sector with 57 participants. The interview results reveal that all of the respondents reported not receiving adequate religious education in schools, which has resulted in their strong desire to gain knowledge about their religion. Consequently, they sought out institutions that offered religious education, most of which were identified as belonging to the Salafi-Wahabi group. This group is known for its strict adherence to conservative values and intolerance towards other viewpoints. Some respondents cited the convenience of online access or following Salafi-Wahabi scholars on YouTube as reasons for their involvement in these institutions. When asked about their tolerance towards different fatwa views, half of the respondents reported that they do not accept other views and object to the official fatwas issued by Dar al-Iftaa. This is due to the belief that the official entity's fatwas follow the whims of people rather than the teachings of Islam.

I conducted interviews with individuals who have a background in public national education, and most of them reported enrolling in online Islamic education programs. The

institutions mentioned were Zad Academy, Minbar al-Nis'a, and Taj al-Karamah. I visited the websites of all three institutions and found that Zad Academy is an online education platform that focuses on providing Islamic sciences courses. The platform aims to increase Muslims' awareness of their religion and to spread and establish Islamic legal knowledge based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, according to the understanding of the best generations, "alSalaf al-Salih." All lecturers on the platform are from Saudi Arabia, and their mission is to disseminate authentic Islamic legal knowledge through cyberspace. Their vision is to reach 500,000 people through online education, in order to teach them the authentic legal knowledge of Ahlussunna wal-Jama'ah. Zad Academy does not have any admission requirements, and applicants do not need to provide any former education certificates. Each level of their courses lasts for three months, and the courses are open to anyone who wants to enroll, free of charge. On the other hand, Minbar al-Nis'a and Taj al-Karamah launch their online learning programs through Facebook pages. Minbar al-Nis'a provides lectures for Islamic sciences online and offline, but it is limited to women. Their offline sessions are held inside different mosques without permission from legal authorities, and they declare their Salafi Madh'hab. Teachers are only women, and they teach various Islamic subjects, including Jurisprudence (Fiqh), which differs from the four known madhhabs and is based on literal textual evidence (Fiqhuddalil). Both online and offline lectures are free of charge, and the institution aims to promote Da'wah through the acquisition of knowledge and the removal of religious ignorance. Taj al-Karamah online institute is specialized in teaching the Qur'an in a way that, as described on their page, will make the individual befriend the Qur'an and learn the taddabur. The introductory video for this program does not provide any information about the teachers or the curriculum and methodology used. Furthermore, there is no information regarding the position of the sheikh himself.

While the institutes mentioned in the previous paragraph have no admission requirements, the al-Azhar online education program is a four-year faculty for Islamic sciences that is only available to those who have obtained an Azhari secondary school. The registration requirements are listed on the official website, which states that applicants must hold a Secondary School Certificate from al-Azhar or an equivalent certificate, including the Egyptian General Secondary School certificate, and must pass an exam to be on equal footing with al-Azhar certificate holders. I could not find any publicly available programs offered by al-

Azhar for individuals without an al-Azhar background, with the exception of the Riwaq-Azhar Mosque Katateeb, which was recently reopened to promote moderate Islam. Lectures at this institution are held offline inside the Azhar mosque in Cairo and in several branches located in provinces. Dr. Muhammad Muhanna, a supervisor of the Sharia court and a former member of Al-Azhar's administration committee, has stated that the decision to reopen this kuttab was made to counteract the influence of extremist groups that have been spreading their puritanical speeches and ideas for a long time (Mokbel, 2015). However, due to the "Tallaqi and Isnad" rule, the lectures at these Azhar Riwaq Katateeb cannot be accessed online. In late 2021, the Riwaq administration allowed students to register for the educational program and decided to deliver the lectures online during the pandemic, with plans to return to in-person instruction once the pandemic is over.

The individuals I interviewed have different opinions. They all came from a public national school background and they have the same opinion that the religious subject that had been taught to them is so much superficial and it doesn't give them the least amount of needed religious knowledge. Dina (pseudo name), a pharmacist, said that she had to find other sources in order to gain the necessary Islamic knowledge. She mostly depended on the radio and TV program episodes for the Azhari scholars and reading some of their books. To her, al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta is the trustiest entities to receive Fatwa. Whenever she needs to know whether something is allowed or forbidden in the Shari'a, she resorts to Dar al-Ifta. She notices the comments that oppose Dar al-Ifta. In her opinion, Islamists oppose Dar al-Ifta for political reasons regardless of the legitimacy of Fatwa. For them, she says, the entity of Dar al-Ifta is politicized and consequently, the Fatwas are untrusted. They oppose any fatwa for the sake of objection because they don't trust the source of the Fatwa itself.

The other individuals had been involved in Islamic online education programs. Asmaa, a housewife who had a bachelor's degree in Arabic language, said that most of the fatwas issued by Dar al-Ifta is completely wrong. She has the ability to judge the fatwas either right or wrong because she had studied at Minbar al-Nisa and Taj al-Karamah online programs. There, she studied Fiqhuddalil on the issues that is necessary for women to know. Students there didn't study all the Fiqh, for example, they didn't study jurisprudence of felonies, sale, marriage, judicature, and inheritance for they are more convenient to men and not necessary for women to learn. She knew about the program from ads on social media. She

was enthusiastic to study there because the program is costless and is held online. Hala, a pharmacist, said that according to the knowledge she has, she finds that some of the fatwas of Dar al-Ifta are going against the Shari'a. According to her, what she had learned at national school was superficial and insufficient. She believes that when one gets older, he becomes in need of more knowledge and this is why she got involved in studying online at Zad Academy and Taj al-Karamah. She got her religious knowledge through them although she recognizes they are from the Salafi sector, yet she didn't find a way except for that. She blames al-Azhar for not launching such programs. She had to apply for Zad Academy and Taj al-Karamah because she was eager to learn about religion and it was the only option to study online as she knew about them from ads. In her speech, she mentioned that the Taj al-Karamah program has neither curriculum nor book references. It all depends on the speech of the Sheikh and the students write after him whatever he says. Nada, a psychologist who studied at Zad, is sure that many Fatwas issued by Dar al-Ifta are wrong. She mentioned as an example the fatwa of Zakat al-Fitr, which according to what she had learned at Zad, has to be in the form of grains yet Dar al-Ifta issued a fatwa that it could be given in the form of money. What encouraged her to study at Zad is that it is held online with no costs and that it is the most spread online Islamic educational program.

Based on the interviews I conducted in this paper; it is evident that there is a strong desire for religious education among individuals in the national education sector. The lack of adequate religious education in schools has led many to seek out institutions that offer such education, with a significant proportion of these institutions being identified as belonging to the Salafi-Wahabi group. These institutions offer online education programs that are easily accessible and free of charge, making them a convenient choice for those seeking religious education. However, it is concerning that the majority of respondents do not accept other fatwa views and object to the official fatwas issued by Dar al-Iftaa, due to the belief that they follow the whims of people rather than the teachings of Islam. This suggests a lack of tolerance towards different viewpoints and a narrow understanding of Islamic jurisprudence. The al-Azhar online education program, on the other hand, is a four-year faculty for Islamic sciences that is only available to those who have attended the Azhari secondary school. While it is encouraging to see efforts being made to promote moderate Islam through institutions such as the Riwaq-Azhar Mosque Katateeb, it is limited to those who meet specific admission requirements.

CONCLUSION

Education plays a critical role in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of Egyptian youth. In examining the impact of removing religious curricula from national education in Egypt, this study has shed light on the significant implications for individuals seeking religious education outside the formal school system. The findings underscore a pervasive desire for a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings among participants who perceive the national education system as providing only a superficial treatment of religious subjects. The emergence of online platforms, particularly those associated with the Salafi-Wahabi group, has become a prominent avenue for individuals seeking religious education. These platforms, such as Zad Academy, Minbar al-Nis'a, and Taj al-Karamah, offer easily accessible and cost-free programs, addressing the demand for religious knowledge left unmet by the national education curriculum. However, the study reveals a concerning lack of tolerance among participants, with many expressing a rejection of alternative fatwa views, particularly those issued by Dar al-Iftaa, citing concerns about the perceived politicization of the institution. On the other hand, the al-Azhar online education program, while commendable in its efforts to promote moderate Islam, poses challenges due to its limited accessibility, primarily catering to individuals with an Azhari secondary school background. The reopening of the Riwaq-Azhar Mosque Katateeb is a positive step toward countering the influence of extremist ideologies, yet its reach is constrained by the traditional in-person format.

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