

Artículo de investigación

Al-Taher Bin Ashour's Educational Reforms

Las reformas educativas de Al-Taher Bin Ashour

Reformas Educacionais de Al-Taher Bin Ashour

Recibido: 19 de febrero de 2019. Aceptado: 22 de abril de 2019

Written by:

Omar Abu Al-Majd Husain Kassem Mohamad (Corresponding Author)¹²⁵Abdullah Omar Al-Haj Ibraheem¹²⁶**Abstract**

The aim of this research is identify comprehensive view of Al-Taher bin Ashour's educational reforms, both theoretical and practical. This is an analytical-logical research done by content analysis method. the paper critiques reductionist approaches to this book by showing that Ibn Ashour's educational reforms are part and parcel of his larger reformist project delineated in Maqasid Al-Sharia Al-Islamiah (The Objectives of Islamic Sharia) and Usul Al-Nitham Al-Ijtimai fi Al-Islam (The Foundations of the Social System in Islam). This paper claims that Ibn Ashour had pioneering reformist views in education relative to the era he had inhabited. His family connections made the political environment conducive to his reforms, and he made use of the varied and multifarious knowledge he had accumulated, which made him more than a mere individual and more of a powerful force in the Tunisian and Arab-Islamic reformist process.

Keywords: Ibn-e-Ashour, educational reforms, educational approached, psychological motivation, Saudi Arabia.

Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación es identificar una visión integral de las reformas educativas de Al-Taher bin Ashour, tanto teóricas como prácticas. Esta es una investigación analítico-lógica realizada por el método de análisis de contenido. El periódico critica los enfoques reduccionistas de este libro al mostrar que las reformas educativas de Ibn Ashour son parte integrante de su proyecto reformista más amplio delineado en Maqasid Al-Sharia Al-Islamiah (Los Objetivos de la Sharia Islámica) y Usul Al-Nitham Al-Ijtimai fi Al-Islam (Los fundamentos del sistema social en el Islam). Este documento afirma que Ibn Ashour tenía puntos de vista reformistas pioneros en la educación en relación con la época en que había habitado. Sus conexiones familiares hicieron que el entorno político fuera propicio para sus reformas, e hizo uso del variado y variado conocimiento que había acumulado, lo que lo convirtió en más que una simple y más poderosa fuerza en el proceso reformista tunecino y árabe-islámico.

Palabras claves: Ibn-e-Ashour, reformas educativas, enfoque educativo, motivación psicológica, Arabia Saudita.

Resumo

O objetivo desta pesquisa é identificar a visão abrangente das reformas educacionais de Al-Taher bin Ashour, tanto teóricas quanto práticas. Esta é uma pesquisa analítica-lógica feita pelo método de análise de conteúdo. o artigo critica abordagens reducionistas a este livro mostrando que as reformas educacionais de Ibn Ashour são parte integrante de seu projeto reformista mais amplo delineado em Maqasid Al-Sharia Al-Islamiah (Os Objetivos da Sharia Islâmica) e Usul Al-Nitham Al-Ijtimai fi Al-Islam (As Fundações do Sistema Social no Islã). Este artigo alega que Ibn Ashour teve visões reformistas pioneiras em educação em relação à época em que ele havia habitado. Suas conexões familiares tornavam o ambiente político propício para suas reformas, e ele fazia uso do conhecimento variado e multifacetado que acumulara, o que

¹²⁵ Professor, Faculty of Education, Salman Bin Abdul Aziz University, Alkharj, 11942, Saudi Arabia
Official; Email: a.alnoimi@psau.edu.sa

¹²⁶ Professor, King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals, Saudi Arabia

o tornou mais do que um mero indivíduo e mais uma força poderosa no processo reformista tunisiano e árabe-islâmico.

Palavras-chave: Ibn-e-Ashour, reformas educacionais, abordagem educacional, motivação psicológica, Arábia Saudita.

Introduction

Ibn Ashour's work has been the subject of numerous studies –theological, sociological, literary and other. None however seems to have specifically addressed his ideas about educational reforms in detail. Some studies, like Dr. Balkassem Al-Ghali's *Min A'lam Al-Zaitounah*, Sheikh Al-Jame' Al-A'zam Mohamad Al-Taheer bin Ashour: *Hayatuhu wa A'tharuhu* (Of Al-Zaitounah's Renowned Scholars, the Sheikh of the Grand Mosque Mohamad Al-Taheer bin Ashour: His Life and Works), briefly tackle these educational reformist ideas in the form of headnotes and cursory allusions. Dr Al-Ghali lists such headings as "Reasons for the backwardness of Al-Zaitounah educational system," which are mainly the lack of an overarching educational plan and ignoring the need for close educational supervision and control; the lack of a sequential staging of levels of education; "the need to reform the teaching of specific sciences," like mathematics, history and Arab linguistics; "the need to develop the critical faculty" of both teachers and students, etc. Yet, even though it is quite bulky (264 pages), the book barely allocates half a page to discussing Ibn Ashour's educational reforms (Balkassem, 1996).

Similarly, Mohammad Mahfouth gives only two lines to Ibn Ashour's educational reforms. In his *Tarajem Al-Mu'alifeen Al-Tunisieen* (The Writings of Tunisian Writers), he merely says: "In the two times Ibn Ashour held the position of the Grand Imam of Al-Zaitounah Mosque, he introduced significant reforms to the educational system. In the second time in particular, he employed specialized teachers and introduced new subjects like physics, chemistry and algebra" (Mahfouth, 1984).

Slightly more comprehensive and relevant is Dr. Mohamad Taheer Al-Missawi's "Introduction" to the annotated edition of Ibn Ashour's *Maqased Al-Sharia' Al-Islamiah*, though educational reforms themselves are by no means the focus of the study. Al-Missawi discusses Ibn Ashour's educational reforms under such headings as "the pre-requisites of the educational reformer"; "the tangible changes Ibn Ashour had brought to Al-Zaitounah and Al-Zaitouneen"; "the support Al-

Khaldouniah Association had given to Ibn Ashour"; and "the methodological discourse of the Grand Imam", which merely enumerates the educational reforms Ibn Ashour himself had listed in *Alais Al-Subhu Bikareeb* (Al-Misawi, 2000).

Al-Sadeq Al-Zamarli's *A'lam Al-Tunisieen* (Renowned Tunisians) and Mohammad Al-Aziz Ibn Ashour's *Jame' Al-Zaitounah wa Rijalah* (Al-Zaitounah Mosque and its Men) are more thorough going and relevant to Ibn Ashour's educational reforms and are credited accordingly in the present study. What they lack, we believe, is the adequate taxonomical framework to encompass the wide ranging reformist details and their specific educational implications (Al-Zamarli, 1981; Ibn Ashour, 1991).

Dr Jamal Abu Hassan's more recent article, "Al-Imam Mohamad Al-Taheer Ibn Ashour: *Siratuhu wa Mawakifuhu*," ("Imam Mohamad Al-Taheer Ibn Ashour: His Biography and Attitudes") hints at Ibn Ashour's educational reforms and his multiple relations to Al-Khaldouniah Association, but labours to turn Ibn Ashour into a disciple of the Egyptian reformist scholar Mohamad Abdu (Abu Hassan, 2009)." The present study, we believe, fulfills this basic need.

Mohamad Al-Taheer bin Ashour: His Character

Sheikh Mohamad Al-Taheer, son of Mohamad, son of Mohamad Al-Taheer, son of Mohamad Al-Shathili, son Abdulkader, son of Mohamad, son of Ashour was a prominent religious figure both in Tunisia and in the Maghrebi (North African) social milieu before and shortly after Tunisia's independence. He was born in Al-Mursi, a somnolent Mediterranean suburb north of the capital Tunis, in the year 1296H (AD 1879). His family played a major role in shaping his scholarly and social standing as it was a wealthy family of Andalusian origins. It was also a learned family, in both religious and Arabic language studies, in addition to its high political profile. His grandfather, Mohamad Al-Aziz Bua'tour, was a minister in the Tunisian state before independence.

Bin Ashour was an ambitious man, always longing for change and reform in his own way and according to his own convictions. This attracted “the attention of the higher authorities which decided to put his rare aptitudes to good use in reforming the educational system at Al-Zaitounah Mosque (Al-Zamarli, 1981).” Although the positions he had occupied remained largely in the middle echelons, his realism empowered him to carry out some of his ambitious reforms in the educational field. It also equipped him with an insightful vision of the primary objective that later crystalized itself in his “wide ranging reforms (Bin Ashour, 2006).”

A host of thinkers supported his overarching reformist project, and they voiced this support in such scholarly journals as *Al-Nahda* (The Renaissance) and *Al-Saout Al-Tunisi* (The Tunisian Voice) (Balkassem, 1996). He faced widespread opposition however from two fronts. The first was represented by the traditionalist group in the religious establishment, which used the scholarly journals of *Al-Sabah* (The Morning), *Al-Wazir* (The Minister) and *Al-Zahra* to attack his project and his character. The second was the French occupation authority which did not tolerate the idea of turning Al-Zaitounah Mosque “into an educational institution organized and equipped in the best modern ways” (Balkhojah, 2004). Ibn Ashour nevertheless continued his reformist efforts, and succeeded in bringing about some of them, especially the organizational and technical reforms, where he made use of various pioneering European experiments in the field of education (Harun, 1987). He was quite convinced by the ideas of the minister Khair Al-Deen Pasha, who called for a balanced methodological approach blending the traditional social values with the need to borrow from the modern European educational systems. This included supervising and revising the teaching of science by specialized academic councils, and establishing revisionist academic institutions similar to the Italian *Accademia della Crusca*, founded by the Italian poet Anton Grazzini to maintain “the purity of the Italian language” (Bin Ashour, 2006).

Ibn Ashour’s Conception of Reform

Al-Taher bin Ashour talked extensively about *al-Salah* (righteousness) and *al-Islah* (reform) which, etymologically and linguistically in Arabic, carry similar significations opposing both corruption and corrupting (Ibn Manthour, 1993). He distinguished between the two in that the former, whether complete or partial *salah*, is *ipso facto* self-motivated, inner and/or

psychologically oriented. Its very meaning combines what Ibn Ashour called “the righteousness of the deeds and the purity of the self and its intentions” (Al-Tahreer, 1984).

On the other hand, he saw *Al-Islah* –in its generic conception –as “the subject of the common denominators between finding something right and righteous, and between righting what is wrong and corrupt”. As such, reform for Ibn Ashour had a distinct comprehensive nature he summed up in saying: “Reform is generic and not limited to self-reform”. He considered the reforming act as “that which benefits the doer and others (i.e. the public),” always stressing the need to begin with intellectual reforms. Hence the specific emphasis he laid on reforming education and renewing its teaching methods and materials (Al-Tahreer, 1984).

Ibn Ashour accordingly specified six objectives for the overall reformist educational process. First, “to develop the most sublime species of people from those who are veteran practitioners, who are blessed with good intentions and talents, who wish to follow the most righteous path, and who have a passion for knowledge and have distinguished themselves by their sensibility and dedication to fulfilling their duties” This statement categorically shows that Ibn Ashour’s conception of reform transcends the level of academic excellence aspired for in today’s student output, constantly seeking the level of absolute creativity. Second, to seek the general welfare of the whole nation by “bringing about benefits and avoiding harm.” Third, to elevate the human mind to the level of acknowledging facts. Fourth, to enable the learner to benefit others by what he had acquired and learned. Fifth, to consolidate education among students, for “good education disciplines the learner and sets for him the rules and means that enable him to achieve the aspired knowledge and the skills needed” (Al-Tahreer, 1984). Finally, six, to help the learner reach the level of self-satisfaction and faith in himself by acquiring the education and the knowledge he had hoped for (Bin Ashour, 2006).

Ibn Ashour’s Reformist Applications

Ibn Ashour actively endeavored to reform the educational system, and he developed a clear vision of the specific reformist applications he aspired for. He was aided in this by thinking critically about the three educational models prevalent at his time. The first was the Ottoman Turkish model, the early reforms of which were carried out by sultan Suleiman I (Suleiman the

Magnificent 1994-1566) who made many changes to the Islamic system of teachers and learned scholars (Bek, 1981). The Tunisian minister Khair Al-Deen Pasha attributed reforming the Ottoman education system rather to sultan Mahmoud Adli II and his two sons, sultan Abdul Majeed and sultan Abdul Aziz. He dedicated a whole chapter in *Akwam Al-Massalek* (The Straightest of Paths) to detailing the new Ottoman arrangements and educational reforms, prerogated by the western advancement of knowledge and by the impact it had on the Ottoman modes of thinking (Al-Tunisi, 1869). The second was the Egyptian model, represented by the reforms introduced by the Egyptian sultan Mohamad Ali Pasha in whose reign numerous modern schools were opened and many educational missions were sent to Europe (Al-Zamarli, 1981). This hybrid model blends the Islamic heritage with products of the European civilization. The third is the pure European model. Minister Khair Al-Deen Pasha talked at length about this model in *Akwam Al-Massalek*, focusing in particular on the French educational organizational patterns, and he called on Muslims to emulate its successful hierarchical segmentation of education into stages (Al-Tunisi, 1869).

Ibn Ashour knew French well and was seemingly influenced by the writings of the minister Khair Al-Deen Pasha who favoured the European educational model. In fact Ibn Ashour's organizational, administrative and legal reforms of Al-Zaitouneh Mosque were inspired by the French model. This was manifest in his subdividing the Zaitounah educational process into stages, specifying the textbooks and number of classes for every stage; introducing student guidance (to advise in educational issues) and systems of attendance (for both students and teachers); granting privileges for student such as tax and military service exemptions; and building Al-Sadikiah Library and students' dorms to mention only a few (Harun, 1987).

He was aided in this by his ability to balance things, avoid a direct confrontation with the French occupation forces on the one hand, and with the Zaitounah conventional theologians on the other. Meanwhile he insisted on the need for order and for abiding by the law, and on the significance of due proportions in all aspects of life (Bin Ashour, 2006).

Ibn Ashour's most prominent educational reforms can be seen within both theoretical and practical frameworks:

- **Theoretical Reform.** Ibn Ashour noted down his ideas about theoretical reforms of the education system in his book *Alais Al-Subhu Bikareeb*, and they can be summed up as follows:

A. Diagnosis of Education Problems

1. Teacher Problems

Ibn Ashour listed this as the first problem and further subdivided it into:

- a. Distracting students and sidetracking the educational content. Some widely read teachers, Ibn Ashour noted, love to show off and boast about their erudition to their students. They tend to use every opportunity to bring up what they know well and actively tell it to their students in class time, although it is not related to the lesson at hand and although it takes up valuable teaching time (Bin Ashour, 2006).

2. Student Problems

These predominantly pertain to students' rush to obtain a degree and their single-minded focus on that objective from the start, regardless of the quality of education and amount of knowledge achieved. Ibn Ashour attributed this to three factors. The first is the eagerness to find a government job, encouraged by short-sighted and inexperienced parents and peers. The second is the deficient educational system itself, which often fails to underscore the value of knowledge per se. The third is the longing of students to finish with the studying stage of their lives as quickly as possible. Together, these three factors contribute to the shallowness of education, the lack of specialists, and the scarcity of renowned and world-class scholars (Bin Ashour, 2006).

3. Teaching Method Problems

These are largely related to the scarcity or the weakness of exercises and practical class activities, especially in preliminary education. Many subjects, like mathematics or the Arabic language, need plenty of exercises to master and make practical use of. The lack of such exercises the students do in class is one reason for the noticeable educational deficiency among students, manifest in memorizing and parroting materials without thoroughly understanding them (Bin Ashour, 2006).

4. Problems in the Education System

Ibn Ashour believed that the most important problems with the educational system are the following:

- a. Lack of educational supervision, by which he meant government and not individual supervision and control. To Ibn Ashour, education can be both beneficial and harmful, and Islamic education in particular has not been subjected to this kind of official supervision throughout its history (Bin Ashour, 2006). Ibn Ashour however finds excuses for the Abbasid Caliphate in not having imposed strict educational supervision, as it saw the early spreading of knowledge more in need of freedom than control or educational supervision (Ibn Ashour, 1991).
- b. Lack of regulation, by which he meant not segmenting the educational process into stages, or specifying the subjects and textbooks studied in each stage. Traditional Islamic education to Ibn Ashour was not systematic or uniform but completely random. The student chooses what he wants to learn; the teacher teaches whatever he likes; and the writer of textbooks uses whatever educational content and scientific terminology he chooses (Ibn Ashour, 1991).
- c. Ignoring the health aspect of education. Ibn Ashour noted that the conventional attitude is to “keep students busy at all times and everywhere, in school and at home... It is also common among the learned groups that slow walking and lack of exercise or movement are prerequisites to learned scholars... so much so that when they reach higher educational ranks they completely lock themselves up in their homes.” The outcome is the systematic deterioration of the students’ physical and mental abilities and the failure to continue studying and achieving at the needed level and rising pitch (Ibn Ashour, 1991).
- d. Huge disparities among students in the same educational stage of learning (Ibn Ashour, 1991). This is due to the different levels of education Al-Zaitounah incumbent students had. The learning they received was in turn necessarily imbalanced, with lots of advanced students missing high-quality education.

5. Curricula Problems

For Ibn Ashour, the most important curricular problems are the following:

- a. The total absence of any literature or ethics units, with the resultant general deterioration in the ethical standards of the students (Ibn Ashour, 1991).
- b. The lack of proportion between the syllabi and the various stages of education. Ibn Ashour explained this as “the failure to give each learning stage the adequate method of teaching and way of thinking useful for it.” And he exemplified this by teaching the Introduction (Isagoge) to Aristotle’s logic in the preliminary stage at Al-Zaitounah because, as traditionalist scholars claimed, it is “as short a book as Al-Ajroumiah (the easiest book) in Arabic grammar, totally unaware of the vast difference in the comprehensibility of the two disciplines ” (Ibn Ashour, 1991).
- c. The curricular absence of useful subjects that inform students about ancient and/or modern history, Islamic history, biographies of prominent Islamic figures, the history of civilization, etc. The student thus graduates short sighted, narrow minded, totally ignorant of the surrounding world (Ibn Ashour, 1991).

6. Social Problems

Reforming education has often faced objections of various kinds and different degrees of severity. In the case of Ibn Ashour and his assistants, the severest opposition manifested itself in accusing them of ill-intentions and bad conscience. Traditionalists frequently based their rejection of development and their clinging to their outdated ways by claiming that the traditional “approach had taken our ancestors to the apex of success, and given birth to the world greatest and most famous and revered scholars and scientists.” Ibn Ashour noted that “by such rhetoric and artful sophistry they have convinced themselves and the ignoramuses around them, all oblivious of the different ages and different generations which necessarily breed different styles and ways of thinking and doing things” (Ibn Ashour, 1991).

B. Theoretical Remediation

Sheikh Al-Taher bin Ashour posited a number of reformist ideas (also included in his book *Alais Al-Subhu Bikareeb*). These were not limited to

solving the specific educational problems he had diagnosed and outlined, but included some developmental proposals necessitated by the public interest and the facts of modern life at that time. They are:

1. The need for student guidance at all stages of public education, and for academic counselling throughout university education. Both must clarify the upshot and ramifications of the fields of specialization the students choose so as to know from the start how suited they are to their personal abilities and future ambitions (Ibn Ashour, 1991).
2. As the educational framework is much wider than the laws regulating it, administrators and teachers in charge must give top educational priority to social and ethical evolution, either through regular classes or various accompanying activities and educational public gatherings (Ibn Ashour, 1991).
3. In addition to the time and effort sincere teachers put to convey it, and the time and effort sincere students put to receive it, scientific education and progress need “educational programmes set to ensure that it meet both the personal objectives of the students in their daily modern lives, and the objectives and expectations of the nation from graduates of this education” (Ibn Ashour, 1991). Modernizing and developing educational methods, and overcoming the formal and psychological barriers that put off modern students, could help in this respect.
4. To address the lack of educational supervision, Al-Taher bin Ashour called for “delegating the wise, sensible and reliable people in the community to set the education agenda and teaching methods by making all the necessary arrangements to develop learning and learners and reach the required end in the shortest time possible.” He stressed the need for these methods to be new, modern and perfectly in line with the ongoing civil development. Although he commended the European progress in this field, Ibn Ashour pointed out the successful, albeit limited, supervisory measures taken by the rightly-guided caliphs Othman bin Affan and Ali bin Abi Taleb and, later, by the Abbasid caliph Al-Mamoun (Ibn Ashour, 1991).

5. Lack of regulation can be addressed, Ibn Ashour stated, by the following four measures (Ibn Ashour, 1991):

- Compulsory education, which falls within the category of good counsel the government gives to its people, forcing them to achieve a previously agreed on public interest.
- Regulating education timelines, which is geared to prevent lesson overlapping, organize student distribution, regulate teacher and student attendance, allocate the right time to lessons and lectures, and train teachers and students alike to respect time and appreciate its value.

Ibn Ashour drew attention to the chronic failure of many teachers to understand the objective of specifying class time, which is to make students understand wide ranging issues in the shortest time possible. As things stand, the sheik critically said, “the teachers single-mindedly attack big issues the students hear about but barely understand, which leads them either to despair of understanding or to get used to believing what they do not understand” (Ibn Ashour, 1991).

- Regulating education space or classroom inside the educational institution (whether school, college, etc.).
 - Proper student gradation or what is commonly known today as “grades” in general education and “levels” in university education.
1. The need to develop learners’ critical faculties, for one objective of teaching is to uplift minds to the creative stage, whereby students introduce new issues, methods and techniques. Criticising Sharia sciences and venturing jurisprudential opinions however are strictly limited to learned scholars who are well-versed in Islamic Sharia’ laws, their objectives, evidence and the founding sciences of hadith and jurisprudence (Ibn Ashour, 1991).
 2. In relation to the absence of subjects pertaining to ethics and literature, sheikh Ibn Ashour saw the need to instill virtue in the minds of students by training them to be spirited, understanding and just in all they do. They equally need to rid themselves of malice, envy, oppression, antagonism, illusions, greed and shallow ambitions (Ibn Ashour, 1991).

3. Students' rush to obtain a degree can be administratively and procedurally dealt with by staging education over specific years and by being strict in exams. But the long term remediation lies in convincing students that the ultimate aim of education is to reach a level of complete self-satisfaction and personal perfection vis-a-vis the knowledge and learning acquired (Ibn Ashour, 1991).
4. The educational public interest necessitates that textbooks in all fields, especially mathematics, are carefully prepared by able writers well-known for their knowledge and their ability to convey it to learners easily (Ibn Ashour, 1991). This is why the late sheikh stressed the need for two things:
 - Close supervision of textbooks, which should not be left to individual teachers but to specialised committees to select and write.
 - Continued renewal and development of these textbook.

As for the value and validity of higher education, Ibn Ashour noted that they are relative to the level of education in society and the level of public conviction of the need for them. The problem is exacerbated in the absence of a proper understanding of knowledge among a group of people who, Ibn Ashour said, "study sciences they do not need but do so only to boast of and show off their phony erudition. They limit their studies to memorizing certain terms and facts they tell to stun their ignoramus listeners, thus increasing the irrelevant issues and sciences while neglecting the important ones" (Bin Ashour, 2006).

- **Practical Reform.** Ibn Ashour instantly embarked on reforming the educational system when he occupied the position of the Grand Sheikh of Al-Zaitounah Mosque. The most important reforms he had introduced included the following (Balkassem, 1996):

1. Establishing an attendance and absence control system for both students and teachers at Al-Zaitounah Mosque.
2. Expanding Al-Zaitounah Mosque branches within and outside Tunisia. Two branches were built in the capital Tunisia, Jame' Al-Muradi and Al-Jame' Al-Hasani, in addition to other branches in the cities of Al-Mahdia, Al-Mustaneer, Bajah, Benzert and Madneen. Two further branches were built in Kustantinah, Algeria, and two women

branches in the capital Tunisia and Safakes. Al in all, the number of branches increased from eight to twenty schools and institutes. The number of students rose accordingly from three thousand before the reform to over twenty-five thousand students after it.

3. Regulating exams and allocating to specialised committees the tasks of supervising their timing, administration, and regulation.
4. Subdividing teaching in Al-Zaitounah Mosque into two major sections: the mainstream traditional section, teaching Sharia' subjects like jurisprudence, Qur'anic interpretation and Hadith, with some basic sciences like arithmetic, philosophy, history and geography; and the modern section, teaching the basic Sharia' subjects but with more emphasis of the sciences of mathematics, philosophy, history and foreign languages like English.
5. Replacing old with more modern curricular subjects in line with civil development. The new subjects were characterized by their easy teaching methods and plenty of exercises, geared to enhance creative thinking skills and develop aptitudes and self-competence. In turn, this raised the levels of student achievement and facilitated the teaching of complex modern sciences.
6. Forming specialized committees to revise textbooks and select better and more modern reference material appropriate for the level of study and age groups of the pupils. This excluded a large number of old books, which was probably one reason for the traditional sheikhs' resentment at, and opposition to, Ibn Ashour's educational reforms.
7. Paying more attention to neglected subjects in old curricula, although they were part of the former Al-Sadiki study plan. Ibn Ashour revived the teaching of composition, history, literature, biology and arithmetic.
8. Consolidating the science departments in Al-Zaitounah higher stages of education by increasing the specialized subjects in each department.
9. Using modern teaching aides and methodologies. Ibn Ashour for instance ordered the use of blackboards in classes, which was a new teaching aide, and encouraged Al-Zaitounah sheikhs to vary their teaching methods and use helpful tools and teaching aides.

10. Directing Al-Zaitouneh teachers to rely less on rhetoric and sermonizing and more on exercises and application so as to develop students' ability to comprehend and rely on their own thinking skills in academic achievement and general knowledge.
11. Adjusting the system of branch administration by affiliating all Al-Zaitounah educational institutions and branches to a central administration in the capital Tunis, thereby severing their links with local municipalities.

Improving the living standards of students. In some Al-Zaitounah branches and schools, for instance, new kitchens provided cheap meals for students. In others, textbooks and references were given to students free of charge. Ibn Ashour also encouraged Islamic Awkaf (Endowment) to invest in education and help further knowledge by minimizing the financial burdens on students.

Conclusion

Having looked at Ibn Ashour's character and personal life within the larger socio-political ambience, then studied his reformist thinking, in both theory and application, this paper claims that Ibn Ashour had pioneering reformist views in education relative to the era he had inhabited. His family connections made the political environment conducive to his reforms, and he made use of the varied and multifarious knowledge he had accumulated, which made him more than a mere individual and more of a powerful force in the Tunisian and Arab-Islamic reformist process.

Although many of his educational reforms have become redundant in the present time and age, the content of some reforms is still problematic in many Middle Eastern countries, especially in relation to the systematic supervisory control and the various teaching methodologies.

His reforms had comprehensive objectives, seeking progressive administrative development and overriding concern for the national interest. His ultimate aim had always been to prepare and empower active and learned youthful generations that "glorify our past and grace our future" (Bin Ashour, 2006). This is a reasonable and useful perspective, still valid in its methodology and overarching significations in our present day and age.

This generic and long term objective enabled Ibn Ashour to accept the civil, cognitive and

educational products of other cultures and civilizations, with particular emphasis on blending human experience and adopting the right education for developing the Arab and Islamic nation.

Ibn Ashour dedicated his whole life and career to educational reforms. It could well be said that, like all great reformers, he died "empty," having given us all the knowledge and experience he had garnered in his life. Generations of those Arab and Islamic scholars who "glorify our past and grace our future" will thank him for not having let this valuable experience and erudite knowledge die with him.

Authors' Contributions

Both the authors have equal contribution in carrying out this research.

Reference

- Abu Hassan, J. (2009). Imam Al-Taher bin Ashour. *Al-Majalah Al-Urduniah fi Al-Dirasat Al-Islamiah* vol. V, no. 3 A: 57-86.
- Al-Akfani, M. B. I. (1990) *Asna Al-Maqasid*. Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi.
- Al-Tunisi, K. A. P. (1869). *Akwam Al-Massalek fi Marifat Ahwal Al-Mamalek*. 1st edn., Tunis: Matba'at Al-Dawlah Al-Tunisiah.
- Al-Zamarli, A. S. (1981). *A'lam Tunisun*. Hamadi Al-Sahili, trans. & int. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar Al-Gharb.
- Balkhojah, M. H. (2004). *Mohamad Taher bin Ashour and his Maqased Al-Sharia'*. Doha: wazarat Al-Awkaf and Al-Shoun Al-Islamiah.
- Balkassem A. G.. (1996). *Min A'lam Al-Zaitounah Sheikh Al-Taher bin Ashour: A'maluhu wa A'tharuhu*. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm.
- Bek, M. F.. (1981). *Tareekh Al-Dawlah Al-A'liyah*. Ihsan Hakki, ed. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar Al-Nafaies.
- Bin Ashour, A. T. (2006). *Alaisa Al-Subhu Bikareeb: The Arab-Islamic Education*. 1st ed. Tunis: Dar Sahnoun & Cairo: Dar Al-Salam lilnashr wa Al-Tawzee'.
- Al-Tahreer, A. T. (1984). Tunis: Al-Dar Al-Tunisia lilnashr.
- Al-Misawi, M. T. (Ed). (2000). *Maqased Al-Sharia' Al-Islamiah*. 2nd ed. Amman: Dar Al-Nafaies.
- Usual Al-Nitham Al-Ijtima'i fi Al-Islam. (1990). Abdul-Munim Omar, ed. 1st ed. Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi.
- Ibn Ashour, M. A. A. (1991). *Jamei' Al-Zaitounah wa Rijaluhu*. 1st ed. Tunis: Dar Saras.

Ibn Manthour, M. B. M. (1993). *Lissan Al-Arab*. 3rd ed. Beirut: Dar Sader.
Harun, A. A. (1987). *Mawakef Islahia fi Tunis*. 1st ed. Tunis: Al-Sharikah Al-Tunisiah liltawzi'.

Mahfouth, M. (1984). *Tarajem Al-Mu'alifeen Al-Tunisieen*. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami.