

VIOLENCE IN EDUCATION: IMPACT ON FORMATION OF FUTURE LEBANESE LEADERS

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Abstract

History of empires and nations in a particular civilization is remembered by the scientific and academic discoveries. Greeks, Roman, Persian or other empires are mostly their military conquests and glories which faded away with time, while the taught ideologies, thoughts and inventions remain basic pillars in the development of human history, civilization and scientific discoveries.

In the modern world man undertook many leaps into uncovering what previously were viewed as national mysteries and secrets. Science and technology have transported man to outer space, reaching other planets, travelling deeply in the fields of medicine, communication, transportation, electronics and continual creativity; yet that same man, remains enslaved to its own weaknesses and shortfalls. The scientific superhuman, in spite of the discoveries, focused also on self- destruction. Weapons of mass destruction are endlessly invented, poverty and misery offers over forty percent of the world population (2.6 billion humans), while over one thousand billions U.S. dollars are spent yearly on wars, destruction of humans and the environment.

The authors chose to focus on (a) providing general but clear definition of educational objectives in Lebanon; (b) identifying the Lebanese educational socio-political system; (c) highlighting some deficiencies of the curricula offered at educational institutions, beginning with the first grades till the graduate studies at universities; (d) examining the family influence; (e) stressing the socio-religious, political ideological indoctrination. The study also highlights the negative effects caused by unqualified, untrained and unethical teaching staff in most institutions which resemble business bazaars where profit and money are the driving engines.

Keywords: Violence , education, teaching, educational institutions, indoctrination

Introduction

Illiteracy or partial literacy still dominate three fourth of the planet earth. What is evident is that man, through violence and wars, is not only depriving others from enjoying global resources, but depleting and wastefully mismanaging those resources. The culture of violence and death, generally glorified, prevails over that of peace and life.

This research paper focuses on the attempt to form a different breed of human beings through an ambitious and highly responsible educational system. The research selected the country of Lebanon which is somewhat international, multicultural and representative of most countries in the MENA region as well as the developing countries. Several questions have been raised in search of answers.

- What are the objectives of education at both highschoools and universities besides collecting fees and awarding degrees?
- What are the realities of the Lebanese educational system? Strengths and weaknesses?

- What is the relation between what students learn, and the socially creative requirements?
- Does the system encourages violence or promote peace and cooperation?

Literature review- definition of education

For simple clarification, this research does not intend to engage into philosophical, theoretical and euphoric theories and debates. It merely appeals to the sound common sense and simplified outlook for the role and contribution by education to positive human development. Many philosophers, statesmen, scientists and others devoted their lives and energy to discover the unknown mysteries of the universe. Through these discoveries man begun to search for knowledge and key answers to endless list of questions that flood the human limited mind. The choice is then (a) to search for knowledge and radiate in life or to drown in the dragon of ignorance and die. Knowledge offers the mean to understand the creature while moving closer to the creator. The main issue is then that knowledge transfigures the ethical sides of the human being. Let's imagine us humans going back in time to the dark ages where ignorance, violence, misery, death and slavery dominated the world, and compare to todays technological, medical, and scientific advances where humans profess equality, freedom and peace.

Education is by no means a simple business transaction to acquire a useless paper diploma while promoting narrow mindedness, intolerance, slavery under different forms, fundamentalism, violence terror and hunger...

Knowledge is the key to open wide the human treasures of the heart and mind, whereby the educated, dressed in humility reaches the ultimate skies in partnership with a harmonious environment. In other words, education is to develop the diverse talents humans process in the service of society. It is the human investment in self-development and the preservation of the ecosystem balance, through the culture of cooperation and peace not violence. There are many quotes by men and women of fame about education. The authors opted to highlight dew. Robert Frost stated: "I am not a teacher, but an awakener". John Dewey declared: "Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself". The same thought was confirmed by Plutarch: "the mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled". Edward Everest thinks of education as a protector of freedoms. "Education is a better safeguard of Liberty than a standing army". Euripides stated: "who neglects learning in his youth, loses the past and is dead for the future".

In reality educating requires many qualifications on the part of the teacher far away from violence, sarcasm, physical and psychological abuses. Great teachers are masters of their fields, humble about the little they know, as they nourish in their pupils the seeds they plant.

Mark Twain stated to this effect: "keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions, small people always do that, but the really great ones make you feel that you too, can become great." Plato, thousands of years ago, dealt with the problem of violence in education, as he wrote: "Do not train children to learning by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each".

The evident objectives of teaching are then to awaken student's curiosity and ambition, a key is to put a spark in their genius by awakening it. Teachers ought to avoid dictating to and dominating their students rather guiding and inviting them to participate in the learning process.

Violence and Education: A general overview

Concluding from the literature review, educational main aims are presumed to revolve around four major fundamental areas relating to human development in a health socio-economic and political environment.

Knowledge dissemination

Academic institutions of all levels and fields of study are designed to complement the family role by communicating and disseminating knowledge to inquisitive minds. As humans grow physically, they need to grow mentally and develop their inquiries about themselves and shed light on their role in this life. It also offered the tool they would employ to climb and walk through the many obstacles they might encounter in their journey on this planet.

Development of skills and abilities

Academic curricula ought also to be designed to procreate skillful and able persons who would meet the constant challenges they face and provide solutions. Knowledge gives the humans into a different space from the one they instinctively know. It draws them to respect their socio- economic environment and promote it healthy and balanced.

Education shapes attitude and generates action and commitment

A basic role of educational institution is to guide students by coaching them to acquire and permanently develop positive attitude toward sustaining their national and socio-economic environment. The positive attitudes could not consequently develop into violence, and destruction. Learning focuses on igniting creativity and communal responsibility to achieve a civilized world based on mutual respect and cooperation. Education searches train and forge leaders of the future, ethical citizens, men and women of culture and peace.

Commitment, action and evaluation

Once educational institutions succeed in forming the citizen of the present and future by introducing him/her to knowledge of mature's secrets, the abilities and skills to coexist, through positive attitudes, commitment and responsibilities to be creative and effectively constructive would follow. Commitment and action are the fruits offered by a responsible, modern, humane and ethical educational system. With the acquired knowledge, man faces two main choices or paths to adopt: he positively creative or negatively destructive. It is this part that people of law and economics, historians and academicians ought to examine and evaluate.

The case of Lebanon

Historical overview

The Lebanese history entails a series of armed conflicts, specifically the civil war of 1973 till 2005, which destroyed the physical infrastructure and crippled corrupted governmental institutions. In turn, sectarian conflicts and fundamentalist behavior, showed down socio-economic and political reforms, for poverty persists reaching a level of 36%. Due to the presence of about 500,000 Palestinian refugees and lately about 1,700,000 Syrians refugees, Lebanon further suffers from high rate of unemployment reaching 35 to 40 percent. These abysmal conditions compel thousands of Lebanese to emigrate to Africa, the GCC countries, the U.S., Canada, and others in search of a decent living.

The authors chose the country of Lebanon as a case study because it is full of paradigms within a multipolar social combination of humans, cultures and religions. It is the country that keeps borrowing from other societies cultural elements to build its own identity.

A study, conducted by St. Joseph University, reported that 45.6% of children in the primary and secondary schools have been subjected to corporal violence. (UNICEF, 2010)

The people of Lebanon are divided into contradicting groups such as:

- a. 18 religious factions, each wanting Lebanon to be modeled according to its teachings and beliefs, whether wrong or right, ethical or not, peaceful or violent. (UNICEF, 2011)
- b. Over 36 active political parties of all sizes, ideologies and work agendas operate in the country and blindly brainwash their followers.
- c. Everyone of these groups educates its followers and their children, in the family and in the streets, to adopt its own values it claims to be absolutely divine.
- d. In the families children are raised upon the principles of violence, whether corporal, psychological and sometimes sexual repression and fear. Tolerance and love are considered shameful weaknesses.
- e. Children are raised to outsmart and violate the laws. When they do that at officials, they are publicly praised as national heroes.
- f. Discrimination, even control of citizen's lives, especially women, is a commendable and courageous manly behavior.
- g. Owning and operating guns of all kinds is viewed as sign of maturity and self-accomplishment. It conforms with the primitive slogans "weapons are man's ornaments". Consequently, on most occasions, whether joy or sorrow. The so-called elite of heroes pull out their arms and begin indiscriminately shooting in the streets to express their emotion. Often they cause death to others or damage public and private property. They are the followers, pride and glory of the "zaim" (leader) to whom they belong. The law in such cases is buried and unattended for.

This research intends to uncover the dominant violent side in the Lebanese society whereby the majority of citizens are violently raised in families and educational institution, with no legal nor moral protection. Although, there is a fairly large group of Lebanese who reject violence and its tools, a great majority compete in expressing its primitive and violent emotional, possibly schizophrenic behavior.

The subject of violence has been treated by many world famous personalities. It is important that educators know that in each one of their students, as Sam Peckinpah wrote, "there is a great streak of violence... if it is not channeled and misunderstood, it will break out in war or in madness". This requires also that the teachers themselves reject and abhor all forms of violence. Gerard Vanderhaar wrote "we challenge the culture of violence when we, ourselves, act in the certainty that violence is no longer acceptable". Human history is filled with brutal and violent episodes to justify "myths that lend it moral legitimacy". People who blow themselves killing hundreds, despots who feed on shedding blood or disseminating pain do not consider their acts as immoral, rather on of 11 divinely mandates righteousness" (Gil Bailie)

Violence breeds violence, sex and violence blur together in people's minds, what happens to Amine Rihani's declaration "I hate no one, I envy no one but I love everyone". Martin Luther King Jr. confirmed the same thought by stating "nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit". It is not enough to refuse killing a human, you need to love him.

Causes of school violence

Violence in schools may be described as an extension of family violence, media violence and street violence. The material that is revealed in this research does not indiscriminately apply to all Lebanese. For those who feel innocent join then in the fight to change others and create a better society.

Family violence

It is unfortunate to shamefully asserts that a number of Lebanese children are being exposed to criminal violence since they are entered their mothers' wombs. (Modig, 2010)

Most Lebanese parents, often out of ignorance, criminally act by adopting violent behavior on their children.

- Physically, beating the child to stop him/her crying or as punished for not obeying their parents' wishes.
- Corporally abusing the child, sexually or by severe punishments to plant fear and insecurity in his/her heart, through verbal filthy insults, hunger, or locking in rooms, bathrooms or dark rooms. Sometimes they use vicious animals such as the wolf, the devil, an evil sorcery etc. the parent(s) do not really want children but "dogs" who blindly obey them. (CRC, 2011)
- Worse children are compelled to witness violent family quarrels whereby the father would harshly beat the mother causing death sometimes. (CRC)
- Forcing the child, in a family prison to develop dual personality: a violent one that seeks freedom and revenge, the other full obedience and slavery.
- Lost children are ignored and left unattended for the mother has friends to entertain and gossip with. Often the child is handed to a foreign illiterate maid who in her country was also violently treated, or he/she is given an unsupervised toy to play with including television, laptop, cellular...

The conclusion seems that having a baby is a social mode of coexisting. The fruit of an act of true love. What really matters is both parents' well-being and pleasure.

The Child in school

In Lebanon the number school children is estimated a 1,303,000 representing approximately 1/3 of the population. (World Bank, 2011, UNICEF, 2011)

The child goes to school to acquire knowledge and develop his/her talents. In schools like at home, there are no effective and clear laws to provide protection. Worse teachers do not hesitate to apply similar violent methods as those used at home. Before exposing violence in education institutions it would be useful to identify and outline the causes of school violence. (UNICEF, 2011)

- Rough conduct among juveniles and teenagers in high school, at all levels. (ALEF, 2012)
- Vendettas against unqualified teachers or students ending with the use of deadly weapons. (Adib, 2011)
- Violent video games are through technological tools, including unchecked pressure by the peers. That includes also violent music of heavy metal and rap.
- Lack of attention by the teachers who often are encouraged to apply physical punishment upon students. (Al-Khater, 2011)
- Mistreatment at home being transplanted to educational institutions often leading to severe mental and physical trauma for both the victims and perpetrators. (Rapport du Forum, 2009)
- Lack of trained staff and teachers to guide the young people. Lack of proper educational programs from early age highlighting the consequences of violent actions.
- Weak community relations causing inter-cultural, religious and political conflicts. (Adib, 2011)
- The academic curricula in high-schools and universities are based on over feeding the youngsters' minds with memorization of boring theories leading to failure and search for substitute easy ways out. Following is an intense analysis of the curricula

programs. The authors reached a shocking conclusion. (Palestinians Human Rights Organization, 2011)

1. Few institutions offer in their curricula a course on human rights and freedoms.
2. Complete absence of any general education course dealing with anti-violence and the culture of peace.
3. Absence of any required course to create awareness about the importance of respecting and sustaining a healthy ecosystem.
4. Lack of any activities to involve students into being more active in community services.
5. Lack of any course that would teach students that art of ethically managing public issues.

The educational system in Lebanon

The educational system in Lebanon contains outrageous and flagrant deficiencies that indirectly contribute to actual illiteracy, violence and corruption.

- a. It is centralized whereby all educational institutions are regulated by the Ministry of Education, seen by unqualified bureaucrats, often narrow-minded and corrupt.
- b. The national laws concentrate an approving educational programs that are (a) copied from foreign systems, far from relating to local culture, needs and values. The present system creates academic “robots” stuffed with often useless and inapplicable theories.
- c. The goals seem not to form civilized, educated and ethically creative citizens, rather narrow and one-sided degrees holders, e.g. a student who intends to study Banking and Finance, has to acquire a B.S. in Banking and Finance; a M.A in the same field, and the same applies to Ph.D, otherwise, his/her degree is not legally approved by the authorities, and does not allow its holder to join the Union for that same area. As another example, a young Lebanese who travelled to France or the U.S., graduated from top universities becomes a famous medical surgeon is not allowed to join the Union of MDs in Lebanon if he/she does not hold a Lebanese high school degree. Many such rules and parties are so archaic and primitive and do not help in the formation of future leaders.
- d. The Lebanese laws do not forbid teachers from physically punish children and students causing the latters to live in fear and insecurity. (Article 21 of Laws No 210, 1953) In theory schools should be free of violence rather reflect respect for the student’s dignity through a civilized and positive discipline. (UNICEF, 2007)

Although sexual violence and abuse, psychological and even physical violence are common in educational institutions, they are underreported and understudied due to religious and social taboos related to this problem. Some parents consider corporal abuse of their children as an example form of discipline. (Dar Al. Fatwa) The physical punishments range from hitting, slapping, degrading, and sexual brutality. (Ministry of Education, 2005)

The beating often is done by tying the feet of the child, pulling his/her hair or ears, pinching, slapping at the hand, face or neck, electrocution burning and others. (Newell, 2010; Naba’a, 2009; Adib, 2011)

National legal and political action

Several national and international organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Ministry of Education and Higher Education MEHE UNRWA, the Convention on the Right of the Child, and others confirmed that the maltreatment of students is a “serious problem”. (UNICEF, 2011)

It is all evident that there is no official public policy to protect children against school violence. Furthermore, there is a lack of consistent data from government and private sources

regarding violence incidents in educational institutions. The continual use of violence, whether physical, psychological or sexual heavily reflects upon the poor quality of education mainly the memorization process. That explains the phenomenon of high numbers of school dropouts.

The tragedy lies with the fact that children and their parents show little awareness of their rights to education and protection. Lebanese officials, as usual, resort to inventing trivial justifications for their failure pointing out to “mild” and “serious” active punishment without defining the limits for each as well as the legal redress. Abusive punishment is viewed as the best tool to raise children and form super men and women for the future. Corporal punishment is a reflection of the national culture. (Sihar. et. al, 2011)

Children often describe their school as a violent environment by the officials. The teachers and their schoolmates (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006), administrators, teachers and peers do not hesitate to use various methods of psychological violence including insults, intimidation, segregation, deprivation, humiliation even from denials to attend classes. (Central Administration for Statistics, 2007, 2008)

Unfortunately, this form of violence is socially acceptable. It is natural to call a child “donkey, stupid, animal, prostitute etc...” (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2010). Due to the unstable political situation in Lebanon, many parties seek the vengeful youth to enlist in their armed militias, brainwashing them with primitive and inhuman training based on divine rewards if they would die for “jihad”. They are convinced to blow themselves up killing innocent peoples and damaging properties. These abused school children, have been turned into terrorizing war machines. Consequently the local culture of Lebanon has been since 1975 mixed with blood, terror and wars. The rates of violent behavior among youngsters in Lebanon are relatively higher in comparison with other countries. (American University of Beirut, 2011) The study also noted that over 10% of adolescents carry weapons in their respective educational institution. (AUB, 2011)

Research obstacles

The research aims to highlight the current violence trends in the Lebanese educational institutions, their present and future negative implications, as well as offering immediate remedial steps for implementation. The focus is on

- Physical violence and abuse
- Psychological and sexual brutality
- Violence between peers
- Violence in the schools curricula.

Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education has no accurate and recent statistics on these matters, rather generalities and expressed wishes. Consequently, this research, besides personal experience through observation, semi- structured interviews, NGOs and U.N. published material, relied on the analysis of the national and social stand on violence in the Lebanese socially diversified texture.

Initiatives toward Prevention

Handling violence against children in Lebanese educational institutions has not been a national priority for it lacks both the laws and their effective application, but mostly an intelligently educated social environment.

An absolute majority of youth in Lebanon are taught and indoctrinated to be slaves to their parents or religious and civil leaders based on the common pretexts of respecting the elderly and that authority is divine, no matter how it is used. They (a) blindly serve and till death the self-imposed messenger of God’s affairs and most righteous representative of God; (b) serve the romantic principle “homeland” lead also by divine “leader”. He/she is enlisted to

fight a “Don Quichotte” imaginary enemy, while the reality aims at controlling and indoctrinating the youth so that the “war lords”, (zuamas) would retain their socio-economic and political despotism powers. A further tragic reality is that the youth is not really raised with the principles of constructive patriotism; instead they worship the “leader” at the cost of destroying the homeland. Children are fed from early childhood the seeds of violence and train for combats and warfare. Violence, consequently, becomes the axis around which national culture is revalued instead of tolerance, cooperation, positively creative attitude and behavior, respect for human rights, compliance with the laws and honoring peace.

As usual national and private committees and organizations were formed to seek remedies and solutions. MOSA started s planning powers through HCC in 2006 outlying certain observations on children rights. Yet the committee, so far, failed to come up with specific activated recommendations to be translated into effective laws.

It inconceivable to ignore that these criminal activities against the Lebanese society and state for they are affecting the future leaders of Lebanon. If education aims at developing and preparing, future leaders in the country, what kinds of “leaders” are being formed through corporal, mental, sexual and emotional violence?

Do parents, current administrators, religious and civil “masters” understand the catastrophic consequences resulting from these crimes against the children, society and the nation?

Where are the lawmakers, religious representatives of God and the mothers who publicly support such violence and even demeanor that their children be taught lessons of obedience?

Is it the evil age dressed in shadowy virtues where the minimal human right of the innocent child is violated? Where is the law with its equity and justice? Where are the justice defenders who swore to protect the rights of the victims? Does violence through insults, rapes, verbal, corporal and psychological abuses truly form the great Lebanese future leaders? Does humanity’s plan lies in producing children to feed the war achiness?

The authors propose the following steps and policies to urgently considered and implemented.

Include the part on leadership behavior

Recommendations

It is not difficult to set up a long list of recommendations aiming at creating a more civilized environment for children to grow and be trained to assume future socio- economic and political activities.

- Review, and revoke all ancient laws while enacting new national ones that would fully regulate the problems of violence in educational institutions in accordance with international declarations and laws.
- Develop a comprehensive protection policy for the youth beginning with the family, to schools and universities.
- Strictly implement the policies inflicting upon violators heavy penalties to be publicly declared and executed. The rule of law should not tolerate exception of any kinds.
- Establish unified instruments and indicators to detect through monitoring violation and reporting them.
- Reactivate the judicial system justice should prevail and all holders of Lebanese nationality or residents of Lebanon or visitors are equally subject to the source laws beginning with the President of the republic to the working men and women. No privileges, no exceptions and no favors.
- Train the youth about their rights and help them develop their talents and culturally civilized personality of anti-violence.

- Hold administrators responsible and accountable be for the law as much as the teachers and staff in their institution. (Heavy penalties including closure of the institution will be applicable).
- Warn under heavy penalty all religious leaders who support violence, reach it and do not abide by the laws. This rule would apply to all, even to those who claim to be divine.
- Cooperate with the policies offered by international organization; UNICEF, UNRWA and others.
- Require a committee of expertise, review, reexamine, reevaluate all curricula offer in education at all levels undergraduate and graduate, whereby courses such as human rights, culture of peace, legal awareness of one's rights would be mandatory.
- Disseminate basic information about handling children rights by establishing hotlines, complaints boxes, case reporting and others.
- Encourage and involve the media to shed light on violating and unattended cases. Forge a partnership between the media, public officials and families to protect the children and provide them with adequate education.
- Create a national committee composed of national and local governments with authority to supervise and observe services provided by educational institutions.
- Hold regular training sessions and programs to sustain the positive developments referring violence and peace.
- Initiate, support and fund research proposals and initiatives to improve standards of life.

These are few of the basic recommendations for policy change and removal of the crimes committed against the innocent youth who are being prepared to lead the country on the future, away from corruption and violence.

It is unforgivable for responsible in a country like Lebanon the future implications upon a society indoctrinated with violence, wars and death.

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