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# Isma'il Al-Qabbani

(1898-1963)  
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Isma'il al-Qabbani was born in a village in Asyut, Upper Egypt, in 1898. He was born twenty-five years after the death of al-Tahtawi (d. 1873), who had been a pioneer in the renaissance of Arab culture and who was the first Egyptian to advocate modernization of Arab thought and education.<sup>2</sup> Al-Qabbani also was born five years after the death of 'Ali Mubarak (d. 1893), the Minister of Education who had reformed the education system, giving it a sound modern foundation.<sup>3</sup> During his childhood and as a young man, al-Qabbani was in contact with such renowned figures in the educational world as Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) and Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935).<sup>4</sup> He examined the programs of political parties whose opposing ideologies varied between the far right and the far left, including a range of tendencies including conservative Islamic fundamentalism, conciliatory or innovative Islam, moderate liberalism, Arab nationalism, radical secularism, and revolutionary socialism. All of these parties had viewed education as a primary concern in their national programs,<sup>5</sup> especially since the British colonial authorities in Egypt had in 1882 decreed the policy of withholding funds from education, fearing that its spread would raise aspirations among the Egyptians and encourage them to launch a campaign for liberation.<sup>6</sup>

These political parties had their own means of publicity that served to increase press circulation: in 1948, 353 newspapers and magazines, official and private, were published in Arabic. There were also 102 newspapers and magazines published in foreign languages.<sup>7</sup> Most of them gave regular space to articles and sections dealing with educational thought, philosophy, organisation, planning and practice.<sup>8</sup>

In his student days, al-Qabbani came into contact with contemporaries studying in foreign schools and came to know about the varied educational goals and functions of these systems. While located in Egypt, they represented their own Western milieu, spreading new cultural values, lifestyles and ways of thinking—the subject of considerable debate among local politicians and intellectuals.<sup>9</sup>

Al-Qabbani was also acquainted with the work and ideas of the great foreign educators living and working in Egypt. There was the Swiss Dor Bey, who established the system of educational inspection, and the Armenian Jacob Artin who, as under-secretary at the Ministry of Education, had developed the education system shortly before the British occupation of Egypt.

Al-Qabbani worked with a number of foreign professors who visited Egypt to study educational problems and who suggested ways of modernizing the system. These included the Professor E. Claparède<sup>10</sup> of the Rousseau Institute in Geneva, and the British inspector of education F.O. Mann. They spent a whole year (1929) in Egypt, and presented two separate reports. Also included in this group was the British specialist in elementary education, Marvin, who came to Egypt in 1931.

Al-Qabbani learned a great deal from these specialists and from others, but he had ideas of his own that made him a unique educational pioneer.

## The 'John Dewey' of Egypt

Egyptian thinkers and innovators at the time of the national renaissance were aware of the crisis in education; they shared in the spirit of reform and the will to modernize. However, they were influenced by a variety of philosophies: Rousseau's romantic naturalism, Kant's idealism, Conte's positivism, Locke's empiricism, Spencer's rationalism and Darwin's evolutionism. The most important books dealing with these philosophies and their educational consequences were translated into Arabic.<sup>10</sup>

Reformers writing on educational theories criticized education systems or suggested that they should be modernized. For the most part, they were not themselves specialists in education, but rather were moved by a variety of political, secular and religious motives.<sup>11</sup> However, some of them did work as teachers for a while, or supervised charitable organisations concerned with setting up schools and propagating education.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Qabbani was the first educational pioneer who could be described as a professional, and whose academic formation in the field of education included both theory and practice. He was a competent teacher and had experience in psychology.<sup>13</sup> In the Higher School for Teachers, he taught courses in both education and psychology, and trained the students there in teaching techniques. Previous to that, he had shown considerable professional skill working for some years as a secondary education teacher. He became well known as an educational innovator, both in his ideas and in his practice, especially after his return from a year's study on a scholarship to London (1917/18). During his time there he met the Pragmatics, British professors who were spreading the theories and principles of John Dewey and applying them in their new schools. He was also able to study Dewey's works himself, which were enjoying great popularity at that time, and he was encouraged by everything he read in them.

Al-Qabbani showed unusual brilliance throughout his career as a student and practitioner.<sup>14</sup> He possessed a breadth of culture, combining both the ancient and modern, with an extraordinary ability to present his ideas and to convince people. He was capable of untiring and persistent effort and great determination. Due to these abilities, other educators recognized him as the leader of the progressive education movement in Egypt.

Without underestimating al-Qabbani's contribution, it should be admitted that he was neither an innovative philosopher nor a modern theoretician of pragmatism. He did not come up with a totally new or fundamental idea. Pragmatism was already a mature and well-established philosophy. What does make him important and ensures his immortality as a great educational pioneer is that he was a skilful and inspired strategist who was able to adapt pragmatism to the Egyptian and Arab milieu, and who applied it with great success. The high official posts that he held assisted him in his efforts, giving him academic and executive authority.<sup>15</sup> This made it easier for him to carry out his reform projects, which he made the focal point of his professional, political and personal life.

## Principles of pragmatism

Al-Qabbani, together with other educators, concentrated on 'policy and methods of education' before there was any scientific concept of educational objectives or a technique for formulating them through methodological decisions on planning, program design, application of teaching methods or evaluation of the outcomes.<sup>16</sup> Up to that time, education in Egypt performed traditional functions, such as:

- The teaching of knowledge, skills and values to form the pupil's personality and social skills;
- Passing on the cultural heritage, thus linking the present generation to the past;

- Preparation of the work force to meet the development needs of society and ensure its progress.

In al-Qabbani's view, the most important principles defining the scope of educational policy were:

- Making elementary education universal, compulsory, free and unified. It was not reasonable that there were eight types of institution, differing in the type of pupils, the qualifications of the teachers, the number of years of study, and programs, methods and objectives. This sort of education system would in the end destroy the nation's character and cultural homogeneity, while confirming class differences and social discrimination.<sup>17</sup>
- Extending the period of compulsory schooling to form a general cultural foundation and to ensure functional skills for all pupils. This was necessary to avoid a large number of the children of ordinary citizens leaving school semi-literate, particularly those enrolled in compulsory and elementary schools not connected with, or not open to, higher stages of education. Such children would then either follow their fathers' occupations or become unemployed or underemployed. This would be a national disaster, a dissipation of the nation's human resources.
- Diversification of secondary education, whereby the majority of students, after completing the two compulsory steps of education—primary and secondary—would be directed into technical schools (agricultural, industrial or commercial); only a minority with outstanding ability would be enrolled in academic secondary schools. In this way, children would be directed to where their aptitudes and interests could be developed, so as to meet the demands of development and the labour market.
- Raising the standards of teacher training in order to produce sufficient numbers of qualified teachers in every sphere: academic, artistic and athletic; organizing in-service training programs to improve and update teachers' qualifications. It was believed that the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching was inseparable from the effectiveness of the teacher.
- Preparation of new curricula and linking them to practical everyday life and the environment; maintaining their integration in the overall scholastic plan, in all its aspects: science, language, practical and artistic skills, religion, health, athletics and social studies;
- Suitable architectural designs for schools, making sure that they had everything necessary to make them a proper environment for the practice of all educational activities: sports, manual work, fine arts, theatrical presentations, gardening, and scientific and literary activities.
- The instruction methods were borrowed unchanged from Dewey's pragmatism, in particular:
- Making the school an active human environment in which nature and society interacted rather than being remote from each other;
- Treating the child as a person and the centre of the educational process, concentrating on his/her development, responding to his/her needs and interests, keeping in step with his/her abilities;
- Learning through educational experiences which placed the child in the empirical situations of having to face real-life problems, and motivating him/her to understand and solve them in a positive and appropriate way;
- Using the project method, which supports the principle of 'learning by doing' and transforms the whole environment into a learning area, strengthening the faculties of observation, comprehension, analysis and evaluation. This is the complete opposite of the traditional method, based upon predetermined organisation of subject matter unrelated to the learner's experiences and interests, and using only the method of 'read, write, listen and learn'.

- Developing the spirit of freedom, and encouraging participation in democracy, self-direction and mutual respect between young people; training would be designed to foster initiative and carry out responsibilities;
- Establishing a new role for the teacher as a counsellor of the young people, one who plans the learning situations, directs pupils to where they can acquire knowledge and, when mistakes occur, corrects them. In this way, the teacher becomes an educational innovator in the school and in the local community.

Al-Qabbani was already over 50 when he was appointed Minister of Education. This followed the military revolution of 23 July 1952. He played an important part in winning support for its principles and in the effort to attain its stated aims: unity, freedom and socialism. He drew up basic objectives for Arab education, the most important of which were:

- Education to strengthen personal and social development, in conformity with each child's individual characteristics;
- Education to strengthen each one's mental abilities, especially in critical thinking, deductive reasoning and creative imagination;
- Education to reinforce work skills and production experience adapted to the needs of the economy, and not limited to the sphere of government employment;
- Education to reinforce the spirit of enlightened citizenship and genuine Arab nationalism.<sup>18</sup>

## **Establishing the reform**

For these aims and principles to be transformed from the realm of theory to organized application, al-Qabbani and his assistants strove to embody the concepts of progressive education into institutional structures, educational programs, technical organization, and legislative and executive policies. In this field, al-Qabbani was particularly successful, although he faced opposition and conflict and, in many cases, found himself in material and technical difficulties. This compelled him to tackle reform with a combative spirit, accepting neither fatigue nor defeat; he was never daunted by criticism or open attack.

## **An institute of education for teachers**

There were numerous schools for training teachers for the various stages of education, but they were without any fixed organisation or basis for evaluating their level of academic and educational performance.<sup>19</sup> This led to criticisms from experts and officials, both Egyptian and foreign. Al-Qabbani was moved to action, and he succeeded in convincing officials of the need to create a higher institute specializing in high-quality professional preparation for all teachers in Egyptian schools. The first institute of this kind was in fact established in 1929 in Cairo, with two sections: one for primary school teachers; the other for secondary school teachers. The institute enjoyed a good academic and educational reputation, which made it the school of pragmatism both in theory and in practice, and a centre for educational research and professional training.<sup>20</sup> Along these same lines, the Institute of Education for girls was established in 1933. The parent institute was subject to several re-organisations that eventually resulted in the suppression of the section for primary teachers and the creation of a division for higher studies in 1941. It was authorized to grant academic degrees: special diplomas, masters' degrees and doctorates.

In 1945, the institute added a branch in Alexandria that, in 1947, became an independent Institute of Education under the Ministry of Education. In 1950 the parent institute became attached to the University of Ayn Shams, and then developed into a College of Education in 1956. In 1970 it expanded into a much larger college which granted the baccalaureate diploma, as well as higher academic degrees. It formed the foundation and model on the pattern of which about thirty

different colleges of education were founded. They were concerned with the training of general education teachers in all subjects, including art and sport.<sup>21</sup>

## **Experimental classes and model schools**

Al-Qabbani followed the example of John Dewey, who had established a school for applying his theories attached to the University of Chicago (January 1896); it was a workshop for educational research and experiment outside the range of professional teacher training.

Al-Qabbani did the same in Egypt. He began by opening experimental classes in 1932 attached to the Institute of Education, in which teacher trainees would apply what they had learned in theory and carry out pioneering experiments to produce a type of education not previously known. These classes were attended by slow learners and by the mentally and physically handicapped. Al-Qabbani also prepared experiments on a wider scale and with normal samples of children in two secondary schools in 1937 and 1938. In each school he appointed a director to take charge.<sup>22</sup>

His departure from the administrative post in the ministry in order to become a deputy director of the institute meant that there was no one to promote experimentation, which then became neglected and increasingly subject to criticism. This forced al-Qabbani to look for some other secure and permanent vehicle for experimentation, and in 1939 he established, in the al-Qubba district of Cairo, the al-Noqrashi model primary school, adding in 1942 the al-Noqrashi model secondary school. He appointed al-Qousy, one of his chief assistants, as superintendent of both schools. Following the success of this experiment, al-Qabbani extended it by establishing the al-Orman model school in Giza with primary and secondary divisions, and appointed another of his assistants, Muhammed Fu'ad Galal, as its superintendent.

These schools became so well-known for their organisation, programs and teaching methods that they attracted the best pupils, recruited from the sons of the enlightened bourgeoisie, the parents preferring this education to that provided in private, government and foreign schools. The very best students graduating from the institute were chosen to teach in these schools.

The innovations introduced in the model schools were highly esteemed by educators and officials and adopted by many other Egyptian schools. Perhaps one of the best educational innovations was the setting up of a 'parents' council', a new development including both parents and teachers. This council studied the affairs of the whole school community and strengthened ties between the school and the home. This led the ministry to issue a regulation that such councils should be set up in all Egyptian schools.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the model schools became a force for educational modernisation, radically different from the form and content of traditional education. Al-Qabbani became the symbol of an epoch, one rightly known as the era of 'progressive education'.

## **Educational associations**

In Egypt there were societies and associations for different groups of teachers, according to their levels of teaching and the special subjects they taught. Most of these took the form of associations working for social and economic objectives. Al-Qabbani sought to unite them and direct them towards a technical and educational objective, to improve education according to modern concepts and methods of organisation.

The first association established with this specific aim in view was the Association of Modern Education, set up in 1936 by Al-Qabbani as a branch of its headquarters in London. Its founding members numbered about eighty educators, both men and women. This association became a pioneer in the pragmatic movement, seen for the first time in the Arab world.

Trained teachers increased in number and, in 1943, al-Qabbani founded the Association of Graduates of the Institutes of Education. These were teachers who had been trained according to modern principles, and their high level of professional skill was recognized within society; they stood for the excellence of 'progressive education'. Al-Qabbani was elected as the first president of this association.<sup>24</sup>

On this same pattern, al-Qabbani founded the Egyptian Society for Psychological Studies so that particular attention could be paid to improving both theoretical and practical aspects of psychology in training institutes and in Egyptian schools.

## **The journal of modern education**

Educational journals already existed at that time in Egypt, the earliest being 'The Garden of Egyptian Schools', founded by al-Tahtawi and first published on 16 April 1870. By 1948 there were thirty-five educational journals in Egypt.<sup>25</sup> However, they were all concerned with matters of instruction and the conditions of schools through light informative articles. Al-Qabbani was not satisfied with this approach and he became the prime-mover behind the publication of the 'Journal of Modern Education', which was to be a research journal printing serious articles written by members of the Association of Modern Education. The first issue appeared in June 1948 and was published three times that year. From the following year, 1949, it was changed to a quarterly, which it has remained ever since. Particularly in the early years, leading Egyptian, Arab and foreign educators were invited to write for the 'Journal', which thus presented modern educational thinking to a wide readership of educators and teachers in Egypt and the Arab world.

## **Research and visiting professors**

To put an end to the somewhat disorganized educational policy followed by the authorities, which had resulted from a succession of different political parties in power implementing conflicting decisions, al-Qabbani worked to establish a permanent academic division which would be responsible for everything connected with educational policies, regulations, projects, curricula and methods. These were to be studied methodically and objectively, well away from political pressures and changes in government. In 1940, Al-Qabbani was chosen as the first counsellor to be its president. He was assisted by a large technical staff and well-qualified young people.

This division produced valuable research and publications contributing to the improvement and development of the education system. The position of technical counsellor was abolished in 1946, and the specialized work of this organisation was referred to a deputy in the Ministry of Education.<sup>26</sup>

For a variety of reasons, al-Qabbani was anxious to invite internationally renowned specialists in the field of progressive education to deliver lectures to teachers in the Institute of Education, especially on modern educational trends; they would inspect the institute and offer suggestions for its improvement; Egyptian educators would benefit from the expertise and experience of the developed countries from which they came; and they could also write articles for 'The Journal of Modern Education'.

These visiting professors included the Americans Boyd H. Bode, Professor of Education at Ohio University, and Harold Rugg, Professor at Columbia University and a pioneer in the movement of educational philosophy known as Reconstitucionalism. This adds a social dimension to Pragmatism, making the school into an effective and influential force in rebuilding society on new foundations and values appropriate to the post-Second World War world. He invited William Gray, who carried out well-known pioneering studies on the subject of reading. Others were the British professors Fred Clark, Berny, and Depson, and the French priest, Père Boulanger.<sup>27</sup>

## Modernizing education

The Association of Modern Education, the Association of Graduates of the Institute of Education, and the Egyptian Society of Psychological Studies all worked under the leadership and supervision of al-Qabbani at translating, writing and publishing books to assist the modernisation of educational thought and practice. In the year 1948 alone, educational books were published on the following topics: raising children, methods of teaching, teacher training, the teacher's profession and functions, combating illiteracy, theories of education, and educating parents (or raising educational awareness in families).

Al-Qabbani joined with Professor Jackson and others in writing textbooks for students of the Institute of Education. He himself wrote the introductions to a number of books, and in 1948 four were translated into Arabic: 'Groundwork of Education Theory'; 'Psychologie de l'éducation'; 'A Textbook on the History of Education'; and 'Freedom of Action in Education'.<sup>28</sup>

By forming educational managers, al-Qabbani ensured the steady growth of reform policies and projects. Even after his death they were pursued by successive generations of outstanding educators whom he had arranged to send on scholarships to the United States of America and the United Kingdom. When these students returned to Egypt after gaining higher academic qualifications, he appointed them to the Institute of Education and entrusted them with teaching functions, scientific research and in formulating education systems in Egypt and the Arab world.

Al-Qabbani realized the importance of organizing seminars, study circles and conferences at the local, Arab and international levels. Here were studied the most important issues included in his great project of educational reform. He wished, in particular, to invite the very best educators who, if they all accepted a particular course of action, would have great influence with decision-makers in the highest echelons of the educational authority. He also wished their discussions and studies to have an enlightening influence that would benefit future development and the effectiveness of teaching.

While al-Qabbani was not necessarily the sole or even the main person responsible for preparing these seminars, study circles and conferences, but he did in fact contribute in thought and action, playing a positive role in most of them. His voice was influential and most forceful in passing resolutions and recommendations. Between 1925 and 1958, there were national and international meetings on elementary education, science teaching, model schools, modern educational methods, compulsory education and inspection (or educational supervision). In 1949, al-Qabbani arranged a general program for teachers in which thirty-three lectures were given on various educational trends, both theoretical and practical.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Qabbani worked to pass legislation and rules, as well as organizing regulations to protect his reform projects, to ensure their stability and their continued effectiveness. Among the most important of these were:

- The establishment of model rural schools (1941) and rural teachers' schools (1948) under the supervision of the Ministry of Education;
- The abolition of the primary education certificate (1941). The reason for this was that anyone obtaining this certificate, especially working-class children, found themselves obliged to enter the labour market since they were barred from any hope of further education;
- Transforming compulsory schools, which were locked in an inferior system, into educationally effective elementary schools with a new structure (1949);
- Decreeing free primary education for all (1944);
- Reorganisation of the ladder of general education, then made up of two stages - primary and secondary (based on the French system since 1836) - and replacing it with three stages: primary, preparatory and secondary (1954);

- Organisation of secondary education, particularly its diversification and raising its standards (1949 and 1953);
- Including Arabic language and national culture in the curriculum of foreign schools located in Egypt, as well as within the basic subject matter of examinations.<sup>30</sup>

Al-Qabbani would not have found it easy to succeed in these spheres of the institutionalisation of reform had he not had a strategic methodology. He made his plans with awareness and precision, and was thus able to overcome the difficulties he faced throughout his professional life. Typical of this methodology was: scientific language; carefully graded progress; a moderate approach; and appropriate experimentation.

#### SCIENTIFIC LANGUAGE

Al-Qabbani adopted a language for reform totally different from the rhetoric of politicians, which was characterized by demagogy, exaggeration and vague promises. He spoke of: experience; interests; integration of the personality; the diversity of educational activities; the development of critical thought; positive attitudes on the part of the learner; the qualifications of teachers; and other technical matters which required empirical research or objective interpretation rather than political explanations. al-Qabbani approached from a cultural and humanistic standpoint those issues which went to the very heart of educational policy, issues which others found acceptable rather than provocative. For instance, when he spoke of unifying elementary education and making it universal, and extending the period of compulsory education, he used terms such as ‘social justice in a society which is still backward in every aspect of its life’, and ‘educating a people now illiterate who in olden times spread the light of knowledge throughout the world’. Unfortunately, his opponents were mainly educators and administrators working in the Ministry of Education who begrudged him his intellectual superiority and reformist zeal.

Because of his integrity and his freedom from political ambitions and manoeuvres, he gained the confidence of the leadership at the time of the 1952 military revolution and they appointed him the first Minister of Education in their new regime. He changed its aims from mere words into practical measures that really took shape and were expressed in specialized language.

#### A GRADUAL CALCULATED PROGRESS

As well as being an intellectual, al-Qabbani was realistic, and was thus able to face up to the perilous state of education. He would not disregard reality and embark on an enterprise that included a great risk of failure or rejection, nor would he take up any new ideas that were of doubtful validity. He had a special strategy based on three principles:

#### REFORM IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Al-Qabbani did not present his plans for reform piecemeal, with each part having its own separate entity. On the contrary, he began his great reform project to develop the Egyptian education system within a wide pragmatic framework, which integrated both his ideas and the ways of applying them. This gave him a comprehensive vision, the elements of which were logically interrelated and embodied in a functional organic structure, including objectives, structures, programs, methods, training the necessary staff to work in the administration, drawing up plans, supervision and teaching.

## REFORM STARTING FROM THE BASICS

While al-Qabbani's intellectual output included literature on all the fundamental issues in education, he adopted the issue of teacher preparation as the core of his great reform project. He took the qualification of teachers as the cornerstone of educational reform, for teacher quality was the measure of teaching. In the Institute of Education, new systems and curricula were drawn up in order to produce large numbers of qualified persons. These teachers undertook the task of speeding up the reform process and seeing that it was well implemented in a fundamentally pragmatic way.

## REFORM IN STAGES

The purpose of each stage was to lay down a broad foundation for the larger and more comprehensive reform process that followed. This would mean that reform would proceed in connected stages in an on-going national process.

The Institute of Education was subjected to phased development, and the same method was employed for the unification and development of elementary education. Al-Qabbani had decided at the beginning of his professional career on a policy of transforming the *Kuttab* (popular Qur'anic schools) into well-organized schools incorporating elementary curricula and modern culture, with teachers who had obtained an acceptable level of knowledge and experience. According to the circumstances operating at that time, nothing more ambitious would have been feasible.

He set to work on improving the standard of compulsory schools, firstly demanding that the length of obligatory attendance be increased from four to six years. Then he sought to diversify curricula to include theoretical and practical subjects. He obtained the lengthening of school attendance from a half to a full day, as well as the provision of lunch for the pupils, and adequate health care. At a third stage, he turned to the compulsory and elementary schools set aside for the children of peasants and labourers. These he wished to see transformed into high-quality elementary schools equivalent to the primary schools which led on to secondary and then higher education. Curricula were changed, and the way was open for transformation and preparation for the primary certificate examination. Finally, before the July 1952 revolution, al-Qabbani successfully incorporated all types of elementary school into a single type of primary establishment that did not recognize differences of socio-economic class, environment or religious affiliation.<sup>31</sup>

## A MODERATE AND NORMATIVE APPROACH

Al-Qabbani knew how to conduct his reform projects in the face of opposition, adopting a policy that respected the positive aspects put forward by the opposing parties. He would take up a conciliatory position to satisfy all those concerned, taking account of circumstances and possibilities, without compromising the fundamental methodology of the reform.

In the route toward reform, al-Qabbani combined the long established with the contemporary, religious values with secular ones; and while he was for strengthening Arab nationalism, he was aware of the importance of interaction with world civilisations and the cultures of other peoples. Thus, education, as he intended it, was 'neither old and traditional, nor borrowed from the west; but is genuinely Arab, linking the past with the present, and preparing for the future'.<sup>32</sup>

With this belief, al-Qabbani considered that the school must carry out a dual, though apparently contradictory, role; for him it must be:

a factor at once for preservation and renewal, so as to help the individual to acquire a cultural heritage, and at the same time prepare him to adapt and alter it. This gives him the ability to improve social systems.<sup>33</sup>

In the conflict between supporters of quantity and quality in education, al-Qabbani took up a position midway between the two. The representatives of the British colonial authority, the royal authority, the leaders of the bourgeoisie and certain intellectuals, for obvious or not-so-obvious reasons, all supported quality in education, claiming that Egypt urgently needed well-qualified cadres to take up posts in government and administration. These could be supplied only by high-quality education. While the claim for quality had won the day, the budget was directed towards founding a limited number of bourgeois schools (primary, secondary and higher education). This was at the expense of elementary education for the children of the common people.<sup>34</sup>

In the opposite camp stood most of the political parties and the intellectuals who adopted a more liberal and open attitude, valuing the place of education in development and progress, and claiming that education for all was as vital as 'bread and water' or 'water and fresh air'.<sup>35</sup> They demanded that elementary education should be universal, compulsory and free; that secondary education should be more widespread, and that universities should be open to all seeking to further their education. On this point al-Qabbani was cautious, realising the possible negative effects of a policy of 'quantity' in education. At first, however, he agreed that the trend towards quantity was justified by the humanitarian need to educate a nation of whom, in 1945, 80% were still illiterate, neglected and deprived of the opportunity for education.<sup>36</sup>

Al-Qabbani explained the positive outcomes of educating ordinary people in a country that was newly liberated and was progressing in the scientific, economic, social and cultural spheres. He said:

In a country in such circumstances, it is worth directing educational efforts to rescue the people from the depths of their ignorance, which spoils every aspect of their lives, and to seek to make good elementary education universal, before thinking about making secondary education universal.<sup>37</sup>

However, he did not seek quantity at any price, for then education would decline in significance and its effects would be lost. Therefore, he set out his policy, which kept quantity within reasonable standards while the real improvement was taking place in the availability of education.

Thus, al-Qabbani progressed along two parallel paths of equal importance. There was numerical expansion to the extent that, in 1954 and during his time at the ministry, two primary schools were built every three days, and half of the ministry's budget was devoted to primary education. The aim was to raise this proportion to two-thirds of the education budget to meet the expense of the ever-increasing quantity and the improvement in quality: equipping schools, preparing well-qualified teachers, drawing up programs, writing new and appropriate textbooks, etc.<sup>38</sup>

At the primary education stage, al-Qabbani did not separate quantity from quality, for this level was important and essential. He called for primary education to be made universal, compulsory, of longer duration and to be unified. This would do away with the unsatisfactory system divided into: (a) popular elementary education, which was bankrupt and meagre; and (b) an excellent bourgeois education intended for the children of the élite. He said:

The discrimination between elementary education and primary education is based on the division of the nation into two distinct classes: a class which governs as if by right, supported by rank and prestige, and a class which is condemned to submission, hard work and low status. There is no reason to prevent the first stage of education from being unified. The cornerstone of our educational policy must be for primary education to be universal, making it one of the stages of general education (and provide the financial resources required). For whenever education becomes cheaper it becomes worse.<sup>39</sup>

Contrary to his usual custom, he made a provocative call—but one which was very true: 'It is impossible for a democratic education system to exist in a society ruled by feudal attitudes'.<sup>40</sup>

While this was his position regarding primary education, he felt that quality should take precedence for academic secondary education. This, he declared, should be for those of intellectual ability, regardless of the social class of the children's origins.

To him goes the credit for passing the 1949 law in his capacity as Deputy Minister of Education. By this law he put an end to the policy of automatically accepting students for secondary education, after many complaints that the standards of secondary education were collapsing. He stressed the importance of selecting suitable candidates:

Secondary and higher education are the means of preparing men and women who in the next generation will occupy positions of leadership in the life of the nation. Any falling of educational standards will mean a failure in the level of competence and of morality in our public life for the future. If we are allowed to make some concessions - only some - in the level of elementary education, to speed up its universalization, this is not permitted under any circumstances for secondary and higher education. It is agreed among educators in all civilized nations that quality must come before quantity in these two stages of education, for the nation that sacrifices quality in seeking quantity is a nation which commits suicide.<sup>41</sup>

As soon as he became Minister of Education, therefore, he abolished the 1951 law of his predecessor, Taha Hussein,<sup>42</sup> which had opened the door wide to automatic acceptance into secondary education. In its place he issued the 1953 law, which reinforced the 1949 law passed when he was Deputy Minister of Education, thereby emphasizing the policy of improvement to the quality of this stage of education.

Private schools, which attracted the children of affluent Egyptians and foreign residents, were entirely the responsibility of the private sector, since they received no funds from the State.

#### EXPERIMENTATION

Al-Qabbani was the first Arab exponent of experimentation in the fields of both education and psychology. For Egyptian education, despite his belief in pragmatism and the associated practical methods originating in the United States of America, he subjected everything to scientific experimentation. His aim was to adapt education to the national culture and to the availability of resources; he also aimed to reassure those intellectuals, educators and politicians who had doubts to see for themselves that experimentation was sound and an innovation successful. He aimed also to provide practical field experience to those working with these projects, which would help them to expand and advance with other educational reform projects.

We have already referred to the experimental approach in curriculum design and in the modernisation of teaching methods, as practised in the experimental classes and the model schools established by al-Qabbani for this purpose. In addition, the methodology followed by al-Qabbani in rural education presents another example of his belief in the importance of experimentation. He assigned to the Association of Modern Education the task of conducting serious studies to define the aims of this kind of education, the design of school buildings, specific programs, and the qualifications of its teachers. The association brought out a book in 1940 with the collected outcomes of research on this subject.<sup>43</sup>

In 1941 the first scientific experiment in establishing a rural elementary school in the village of El-Manayel. The curricula were designed to focus on work in the fields and on the pupil's productive farming, in other words, vocational occupations. Therefore, a smallholding and a poultry yard were attached to the school, and there were also workshops for local and rural industries. Teachers and technicians were appointed who had knowledge and experience appropriate to this type of teaching. This education met the needs of young and old alike in a village which was intended to develop educationally, socially, economically, as well as in health and hygiene.

Once the school had proved successful, and government officials were convinced about it, it was decided to repeat the experiment in a number of Egyptian villages. So, on the pattern of al-Manayel, thirty-five schools were established in 1943/44, and another forty-three in 1944/45.

Since there was a great need for qualified teachers, it was decided to establish a school for rural teachers in Manshat al-Qanatir in 1948, followed by a similar school in the village of Bayy al-'Arab. In both of these, the project method was used, concentrating on study of the circumstances and needs of people living in the countryside. The study subjects included: village problems, the peasant's home, food, drinking water, pest control for the cotton crop, and other similar concerns.<sup>44</sup>

In psychology, al-Qabbani created a broad experimental movement concerned in particular with the codification of intelligence tests and tests of scholastic achievement. He said: 'If psychology is to move towards a pure scientific form, it must leave aside many of its concepts and begin to observe behaviour in a defined experimental situation'. He had begun to work in this way in his 30s when, in 1929, he helped Claparède in his study of the mental abilities of Egyptian students. Claparède had authorized him to supervise the conduct of the tests, which al-Qabbani translated, revised and administered to thousands of students. He then analysed the results, drew the main conclusions and published a book that was the first of its kind in Egypt and the Arab world. This was 'The Measurement of Intelligence in Primary Schools' (1938).

Together with his assistants, he produced tests to measure skill in thinking, mental arithmetic and mathematical skills. He prepared special training cards for carrying out various mathematical processes. He was responsible for establishing the psychological clinic at Ayn Shams University, which became a testing ground for theories and methods of psychological analysis and clinical treatment. Here people beginning their research were trained and later became specialist professors throughout Egypt and other parts of the Arab world.<sup>45</sup>

## **Pragmatism: Its rise in the Arab context**

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s pragmatism in the United States was increasingly criticized because of its negative aspects, which eventually led to a decline in educational standards. It was accused of: submitting to the inclinations of learners at the expense of the veritable educational aims; concentrating on physical education at the expense of acquiring sound knowledge; and giving prominence to democracy and individual freedom so as to create educational chaos, turning certain secondary schools into 'hell holes'. The idea was rampant that education was life, rather than preparation for life, and thus young people became imprisoned in the world of childhood, without being prepared to assume their proper roles in adult society.<sup>46</sup>

Since the supporters of pragmatism had undermined its progressive principles through their excesses and their practical shortcomings, they were not able to hold out for long against the criticism and attacks from every side, especially after the death of Dewey in 1952. They announced the disbanding of their association in 1955. In 1959, President Eisenhower officially declared the end of pragmatism and the need for a return to fundamental teaching ('back to basics'). This was especially true for the sciences that were essential to contemporary progress and could ensure success in the 'space race'. He also stressed the importance of discipline in school, as well as seriousness and responsibility in education.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time that pragmatism was declining in its American homeland, it flourished and spread in Egypt as a unique and irreplaceable form of education.<sup>48</sup> Especially after his academic visit to the United States in 1949, al-Qabbani was very well aware of both the positive and negative aspects of pragmatism in American schools. Through reflection and political measures, he tried to avoid adopting 'dualisms' such as promoting progressive education as well as education which opposes it, both at the same time. Al-Qabbani listened seriously and was convinced by Dewey's

warnings to his followers; they did not take any notice of him themselves, considering that he was senile and in mental decline.

So al-Qabbani was able, at least on the level of theory and planning, to reconcile freedom and organisation (recreation and hard work), practical activities and educational materials (vocation and culture), and individual growth and co-operation.<sup>49</sup> He and his followers were not over-sensitive; however, they were able to accept criticism, to make modifications and to comply with change. They believed that continuous renovation is the essence of pragmatism, as long as it works in the interest of the school and of society. Thus, al-Qabbani's pragmatism was imbued with advanced ideas and methods, and achieved outstanding success when compared to traditional schools and their didactic methods. Successive generations of al-Qabbani's followers carried his pragmatism beyond Egypt, and thereby changed the educational systems of the Arab countries. When Al-Qabbani died contented in 1963, his followers were able to reassure him that what he had planted would remain and flourish, and continue to produce good results in the future.

### Notes and references

1. *Mahmud Kombar (Egypt)*. Received his Ph.D. at the Sorbonne in Paris. At present professor and chairman of the Department of Foundations of Education, University of Qatar. Author of: *Studies in Islamic Education* (3 vols.), *Adult Education: Concepts, Forms, and Arab Experiments*, *Education and Enlightening Society*, *Studies in the Foundations of Education*, and numerous other studies. Taught at the al-Noqrashi Model School in 1957 and 1958.
2. Al-Tahtawi wrote extensively on education, and also reflected about and practised it. His book *al-Murshid al-amin lil-banat wa-l-banin* [The Faithful Guide for Girls and Boys], 1872, is the first educational work of its kind in the Arab world. His reform theory reflected more traditional modernizing views as well as contemporary views based on the education system in France, where he had spent four years studying.
3. In Ahmad Aman's words, 'he was intended to construct buildings and great establishments, but instead he engineered, designed and implemented with great care methods of education; so he is considered one of the greatest reformers'. Ahmad Amin, *Zu'ama' al-islah fi l-'asr al-hadith* [Leaders of Reform in the Reform Era], Cairo, Maktabat al-nahda al-misriyya, 3rd ed., 1971, p. 208-09.
4. Further information on Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh's educational thinking and efforts at reform can be found in Muhammad Rashid Rida's *Ta'rikh al-ustadh al-imam al-sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh* [History of the Sheikh, Imam Muhammad 'Abduh], 3 vols., Cairo, Matba'at al-Manar, 1931. Regarding the educational thinking of M. Rashid Rida, see the journal *al-Manar*, many issues of which contain his critical analytical essays aimed at educational reform.
5. Na'im 'Atiya, *Ma'alim al-fikr al-tarbawi fi l-bilad al-'arabiyya fi l-mi'a sana al-akhira* [Trends of Educational Thought in Arab Countries in the Past Hundred Years], Beirut, al-Jam'iya al-Amrikiyya, 1966, p. 12-107. Political parties proliferated, increasing by an average of one new party each year from 1907 to 1914. See Jacob M. Landau, *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt*, Tel Aviv, Israel Publishing House, 1953, p. 139-73.
6. Salama Musa, *The Education of Salama Musa*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1961, p. 27.
7. *Al-Sijil al-thaqafi* [Cultural Record], Cairo, Ministry of Education, 1948, p. 91-110.
8. These newspapers include: *al-Muqtataf*, *al-Mu'ayyid*, *al-Ahram*, *al-Hilal*, *al-Manar* and *al-Katib*.
9. Girgis Salama, *Ta'rikh al-ta'lim al-ajnabi fi Misr fi al-qarnayn al-tasi' 'ashr wa-l-'ishrin* [An Account of Foreign Education in Egypt in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries], Cairo, Supreme Council on Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 1963, p. 136-256. At a certain point, there were more Egyptian than foreign pupils in these schools.
10. A profile on Edouard Claparède also appears in this series.
11. These translated books include: *Emile of the Nineteenth Century*, by the French author Skero, translated by 'Abd al-'Aziz Muhammad at the direction of Muhammad 'Abduh, published in consecutive issues of *al-Manar* with an explanation and commentary; *Education*, by Immanuel Kant, translated from an English edition by Sheikh Tantawi Gohari; *Education*, by Herbert Spencer, translated first by Muhammed 'Abduh and again by Muhammad al-Saba'i; and *Evolution*, by Charles Darwin, translated and annotated by Shebli Shemayel.
12. Thinkers not mentioned here include: Shebli Shemayel, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, Salama Musa, Hafiz 'Afifi and Taha Hussein (the latter also appears in this series). Their writings expressed diverse philosophical views on education.
13. Those who taught or supervised educational associations include Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh and Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida, through *al-'Urwa al-wuthqa* and the Islamic Charitable Association.

14. In this al-Qabbani resembled John Dewey, founder of American pragmatism, who headed three departments—Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology—at the University of Chicago in 1894. See: S.A. Rippe, *Education in a Free Society: an American History*, 4th ed., New York, Longman, 1980, p. 205.
15. Al-Qabbani's talents were first discovered by the nation's leader and former Minister of Education, Sa'd Zaghlul, when visiting village schools in Asyut in southern Egypt in 1908. In recognition of the brilliance of this child from a poor background, the Minister ordered that Isma'il al-Qabbani should receive free education in the primary school, which was at that time reserved for the sons of the élite. The minister intervened a second time on his behalf when the administration of the Higher School for Teachers would not accept him as he was under age, despite having obtained the baccalaureate. He was enrolled and graduated, as usual with distinction, as the youngest among his fellow teachers. He subsequently worked in secondary education. See: Sa'id Isma'il 'Ali, 'Isma'il al-Qabbani ra'id fi al-tarbiya' [Isma'il al-Qabbani, a Pioneer in Education], in: *Dirasat fi al-tarbiya wa-l-falsafa* [Studies in Education and Philosophy], Cairo, 'Alam al-kutub, 1972, p. 315-16.
16. Al-Qabbani worked his way through educational, managerial and political positions: as a secondary school-teacher, a professor at the Institute of Education for Teachers, secondary school principal, vice-president of the Institute of Education, then its president, a technical counsellor at the Ministry of Education, a Deputy Minister of Education and then Minister. He also founded and chaired many associations.
17. The American scientist Tyler was the first to write on educational objectives, in two books: *Achievement Tests*, 1934, and *Principles of Curriculum and Public Education*, 1950. Bloom produced *Taxonomy of educational objectives* (New York, NY, Longmans, Green) in 1956. Ever since, there has been educational theory and techniques as a basis for research which has influenced the definition, formulation and evaluation of educational aims. See: Jerry Pocztar, *La définition des objectifs pédagogiques*, Paris, Les Editions ESF, 1982, p. 48-54. V. & G. De Landsheere, *Définir les objectifs de l'éducation*, Paris, PUF, 1975, p. 10. Muhammad Fu'ad Galal, one of al-Qabbani's assistants, said in 1941 of 'educational aims and objectives': 'This is something new in Egypt'. See: M.F. Galal, *Ittijahat fi al-tarbiya al-haditha* [Trends of Modern Education], 2nd ed., Cairo, Maktabat al-adab, p. 5.
18. 'Abd al-Hamid Fahmi Matar, *al-Ta'lim wa-l-muta'atitun fi Misr* [Education and the Unemployed in Egypt], Alexandria, Matba'at Muhammad 'Ali al-sina'iyya, 1939, p. 278.
19. See books and studies by al-Qabbani: *Siyasat al-ta'lim fi Misr* [Educational Policy in Egypt], Cairo, Matha'at lijnat al-ta'lif wa-l-tarjama wa-l-nashr, 1944, p. 20-24. 'Siyasat al-ta'lim al-jadida' [New Educational Policy], in: *Sahifat al-tarbiya*, Cairo, Rabitat al-tarbiya al-haditha, March-May 1954, p. 1-23. *Ahdaf al-ta'lim fi al-bilad al-'arabiyya* [Educational Objectives in the Arab Countries], first cultural season of lectures, ninth lecture, Kuwait, Matba'at hukumat al-Kuwait, 1955, p. 143-56. *Dirasat fi tanzim al-ta'lim bi-Misr* [Studies on the Organization of Education in Egypt], Cairo, Maktabat al-nahda al-Misriyya, 1958, p. 102-41. 'Muqadimma' [Introduction] in Ya'qub Fam, *Dirasat fi l-akhlaq* [Studies in Ethics], Cairo, 1931.
20. A.H.F. Matar, op. cit., p. 270-76.
21. Muhammad Munir Mursi, in: Wahib Sim'an and M.M. Mursi, *al-Madkhal fi al-tarbiya al-muqarana* [Introduction to Comparative Education], Cairo, Anglo-Misriyya, 1973, p. 385. Al-Qabbani mentioned that John Dewey's views and their social and educational applications were taught with care in the Institute of Education, where they attracted the interest of educators.
22. S.I. 'Ali, in: S. Mursi Ahmad and S.I. 'Ali, *Ta'rikh al-tarbiya wa-l-ta'lim* [History of Education], Cairo, 'Alam al-kutub, 1980, p. 306-09.
23. In 1937 al-Qabbani worked as principal of Fu'ad al-awwal Secondary School, later renamed al-Hasaniyya, and then in 1938 as principal of Faruq al-awwal Secondary School, later renamed Isma'il al-Qabbani Secondary School.
24. S.I. 'Ali, op. cit., no. 20, p. 301-02.
25. *al-Sijil al-thaqafi* [Cultural Record], Cairo, Ministry of Education, 1949, p. 214-15. See also Roderick Mathews and Matta 'Aqrawi, *Al-Tarbiya fi l-sharq al-awsat al-'arabi* [translated from *Education in the Arab Middle East*], Beirut, al-Matba'a al-'asriyya, 1949, p. 9. The association was renamed 'Association of Graduates of Institutes and Colleges of Education' due to the growing numbers of educational institutes which later became colleges of education.
26. Al-Sijil al-thaqafi, op. cit., p. 164-65.
27. Ibid., p. 57.
28. Ibid., p. 164-65.
29. M.M. Mursi, op. cit., p. 320.
30. S.I. 'Ali, op. cit., p. 298-99.
31. Radwan, *Old and New Forces in Egyptian Education: Proposals for the Reconstruction of the Program of Egyptian Education in the Light of Recent Cultural Trends*, New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951, p. 107-10.

32. See al-Qabbani's *Dirasat...*, op. cit., p. 103-09, and his *Siyasat al-ta'kim al-jadida*, op. cit., p. 7-9.
33. Al-Qabbani, *Ahdaf al-ta'lim...*, op. cit., p. 18.
34. S.I. 'Ali in: *Dirasat...*, op. cit., p. 328-9.
35. A supporter of the qualitative approach is Muhammad 'Awad, a former president of Cairo University and Minister of Education, who wrote: 'It is no policy to emphasize quantity rather than quality [...] it is better to have one mature crop than a hundred immature crops'. See: M. 'Awad, 'Misr fi azma' [Egypt in Crisis], *Majallat al-Hilal* (Cairo), No. 56, vol. 12, December 1948, p. 11-16. Lord Cromer, head of the British administration in Egypt, used to say that incomplete education would never prepare qualified Egyptians capable of self-government. However, in response to his claim, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, a liberal leader and former Minister of Education, refuted this: 'Some people say that ignorance is better than incomplete education; but, while ignorance is non-existence, partial education is a degree of educational existence, and existence is always better than non-existence'. See A.L. al-Sayyid, *Safhat matwiya min ta'rikh al-haraka al-istiqlaliyya fi Misr* [Pages from the History of the Independence Movement in Egypt] from March 1907 to March 1909, Cairo, al-Mukhtarat al-siyasiyya, 1946, p. 120.
36. Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (d. 1873) was the first to say 'Education (for all people) is like bread and water', quoting from the Imam Ibn Hanbal. Later, Taha Hussein, a former Minister of Education from 1950 to 1952, would often repeat the saying: 'Education is like air and water'.
37. Al-Qabbani, *Dirasat fi tanzim...*, op. cit., p. 103.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
40. Al-Qabbani, *Siyasat al-ta'lim...*, op. cit., p. 41-72.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
42. Al-Qabbani, *Dirasat fi tanzim...*, op. cit., p. 190.
43. A profile of Taha Hussein also appears in this series.
44. *Al-Madrasa al-awwaliyya al-rifiyya* [The Rural Elementary School], Cairo, Lijnat al-ta'lif wa-l-tarjama wa-l-nashr, 1940.
45. Ibrahim 'Ismat Mitawi' (Metawy), 'Isma'il al-Qabbani ra'id al-ta'lim al-rifi' [Isma'il al-Qabbani: Pioneer of Rural education], in: *Sahifat al-tarbiya*, March 1964, p. 13.
46. Ahmad Zaki Salih, 'al-Qabbani wa-'ilm al-nafs' [al-Qabbani and Psychology], in: *Sahifat al-tarbiya*, January 1964, p. 26-34.
47. See: Paul Woodring, *A Fourth of a Nation*, 1957, translated into Arabic as *Nahwa falsafa lil-tarbiya* [Towards a Philosophy of Education], Cairo, 'Alam al-kutub, 1966, p. 183.
48. 'Abd al-Sami Sayyid Ahmad, 'Azmat al-huwiya fi l-fikr al-tarbawi fi Misr' [Identity Crisis for Educational Thought in Egypt], in: *Dirasat tarbawiyya*, Cairo, November 1985, p. 146-47.
49. An Egyptian researcher wrote: 'The progressive theory of John Dewey has dominated the field of education in Egypt in particular, and the rest of the Arab world in general, through the periods of ideological development [...] and has blocked the Arab mind from creativity'. *al-Tarbiya al-mu'asira*, Cairo, May 1985, p. 6.
50. Al-Qabbani reflected on this kind of attractive educational awareness in a study 'Falsafa ta'limiyya jadida' [New Educational Philosophy], given in two lectures at the American University in Beirut, May 1955. See: al-Qabbani, *Dirasat fi tanzim...*, op. cit., p. 244-60. See also his fifth section, 'Usus al-tarbiya 'an tariq al-nashat fi falsafat John Dewey' [Foundations of Education Through Activity in the Philosophy of John Dewey], in: *al-tarbiya 'an tariq al-nashat* [Education Through Activity], Cairo, Lijnat al-ta'lif wa-l-tarjama wa-l-nashr, 2nd ed., 1984, p. 165-66 and 190-91.