

The Role of Educational Systems in International Crises: A Reappraisal of Middle East Countries

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Abstract: The worldwide crises and incidents in the two recent decades have made many researchers in different fields of human knowledge describe, analyze and give out solutions for them. Comparative Education as a "science" has been no exception and its latest developments indicate the point that comparativists have conceived a new mission for themselves. The very political nature of these international crises which mainly have educational foundations has caused daily- increasing interest towards the discipline. Today, politicians in particular and many people in general are so eager to know what kind of belief or educational system can give rise to certain political behavior. This political behaviour reveals itself in a way that is unjustifiable as far as rational criteria are concerned. Suicide bombings, attacks on public centres, firing bullets at children and the youth who have just a piece of stone in their hands and blind aimless bombings have made people totally confused. This bewilderment is a global affair and not limited to the developed countries. So the question which is now raised is to ask, firstly, why the youth incline to join into fundamentalist organizations, and secondly, what roles the educational systems play in creation and development of international crises. The response to these two questions can be a new mission of the researchers in the field of comparative education. Awareness and emphasis on the importance of this mission can be found in papers published in famous journals of the discipline, but there is an obvious lack of a tangible and theoretical analysis. This paper is an attempt to give a theoretical framework to answer the two raised questions in a particular geographical area, namely, the Middle East.

[Dr. Mohammad Soltanifar. **The Role of Educational Systems in International Crises: A Reappraisal of Middle East Countries.** Life Science Journal, 2011; 8(2):893-901] (ISSN: 1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>.

Keywords: International Crises, Educational Systems, Middle East

Introduction:

During the Cold War period, disputes between the involved governments were considered a political affair which did not have direct impacts on people's daily life. The fall of Communism promised a peaceful period which unfortunately passed by so quickly. The fact that how "the threat of terrorism" could substitute "the fear from communism" is a question that many have not answered yet. Although new crises have, to a large extent, been affected by the politics factor, on the contrary to the past, they have got a new valued nature. The whys of the youth's inclinations to fundamentalist organizations might be found in the conflicts between different types of values. (Sridhar and Arani, 2003) These conflicts have penetrated into families, schools and public gatherings and through social gap have caused people confront others' thoughts. (cf Davies, 2005) These intellectual confrontations have made cultural, religious, political and educational systems to oppose their goals. Educational systems are in the centre of these conflicts. (cf Smith, 2005) This is true because all of the social systems seek to affect children, teenagers, and finally the whole society through educational system – as a vital tool.

It is obvious that conflicts of values in all societies do not possess the same degree of severity. This is

something more tangible in those countries that in spite of their glorious civilization in the past are enclosed with a high thick wall of traditions. (Al Zeera, 2001) Here, The Middle East is involved in a special condition. In recent years, this region has been the heart of many regional and global crises which are deeply rooted in the internal crises of the countries in the region. In this paper, attempts have been made to describe the relationships between different types of values, and to describe their effects on educational systems in the Middle East.

Conflict in spheres of Value

Values can be classified into four major categories: personal, national, religious, and global. The four supporter systems of these categories are families, governments, religious centres, and mass media such as television and the internet respectively. These supporter systems can be called "Pressure groups". (Arani and Sridhar, 2003) Coexistence of these spheres of value at first sight seems to be simple and reasonable while a deeper outlook into the issue indicates that different communicative instances might be present between them. In the positive instance, all four spheres, without any interference, may be aimed at a unique goal which can be called "Human Growth" (Figure 1). In a neutral instance, each sphere assigns a particular behaviour to the

individuals and enforces them to do that (Figure 2). In the negative instance, we witness some kind of conflict between the spheres in which individuals are required to show simultaneous conflicting behaviour. (Figure 3)

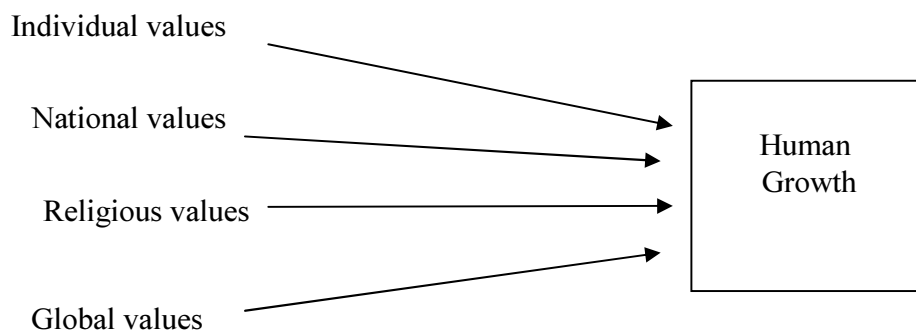


Fig.1: Relations among Values (Positive)

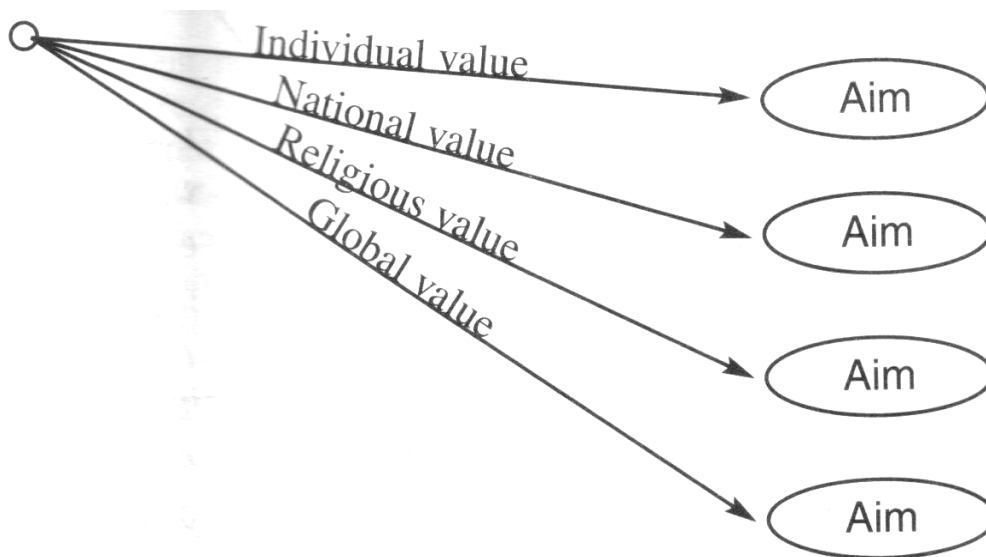


Fig.2: Relations Among Values (Neutral)

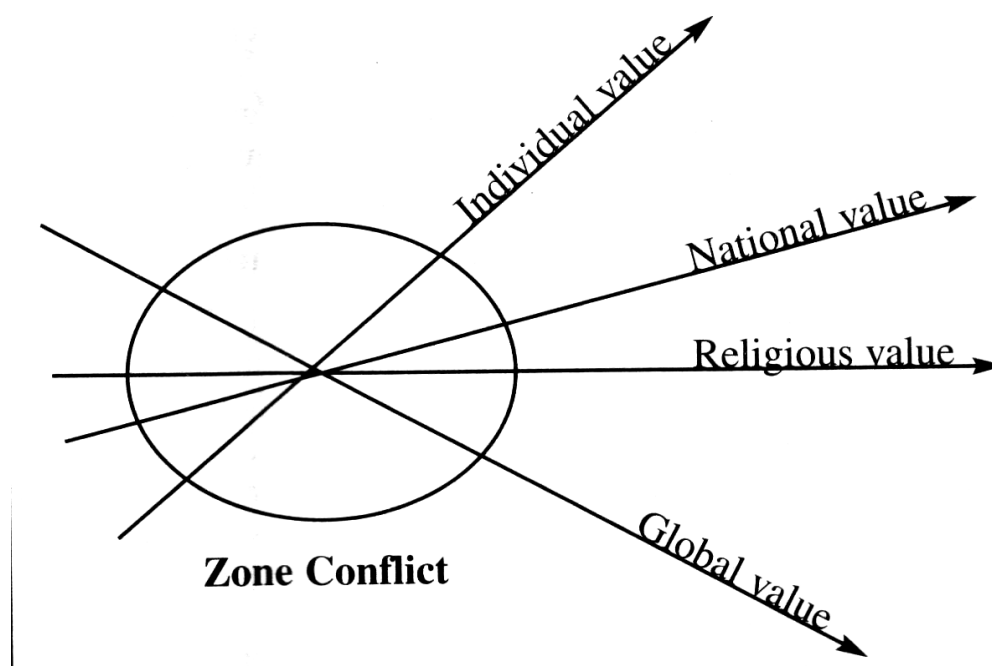


Fig.3: Relations among Values (Negative)

In the real instance, personal values are more directed to the instantaneous and individual interests and may result in egocentrism. National values are also threatened by the growth and development of extreme nationalistic morale and patriotism. Religious values in an extremistic fashion move to the darkness of thought and dogmatism and finally, global values may remain unaware of local and social values. On the other hand, personal and national values are by nature inward looking while religious and global values should be regarded as outward looking. (Jacob, 2001) The basic point in this case is to collate this inward looking and outward looking in order to get to a common field out of the four mentioned spheres of values. Each sphere propagates and supports certain kinds of values and tries to transfer them to the society in order to establish its authority over the society. This might be fulfilled through training the young generation. In such a situation the youth find themselves surrounded by the

family, government, religious centres and mass media which are enforcing them. In a superficial analysis each one of the spheres of values should affect the youth separately and equally. But, in reality, there are considerable differences between societies in this respect. We can compare the two geographical areas i.e. the Middle East and the Far East countries to illustrate the matter in detail. This example can help us to find an answer to the first question.

In the past fifty years, the two mentioned areas have been affected deeply by these types of values and experienced a lot of transitions which have ended in different results. These transitions indicate that the kinds of reactions - made by the young generation in these two areas - to the pressures from the fields of values are not the same. In order to find out the reasons of these differences, the role and degree of impressiveness of each of the four spheres of values on these two societies should be surveyed (figures 4 and 5).

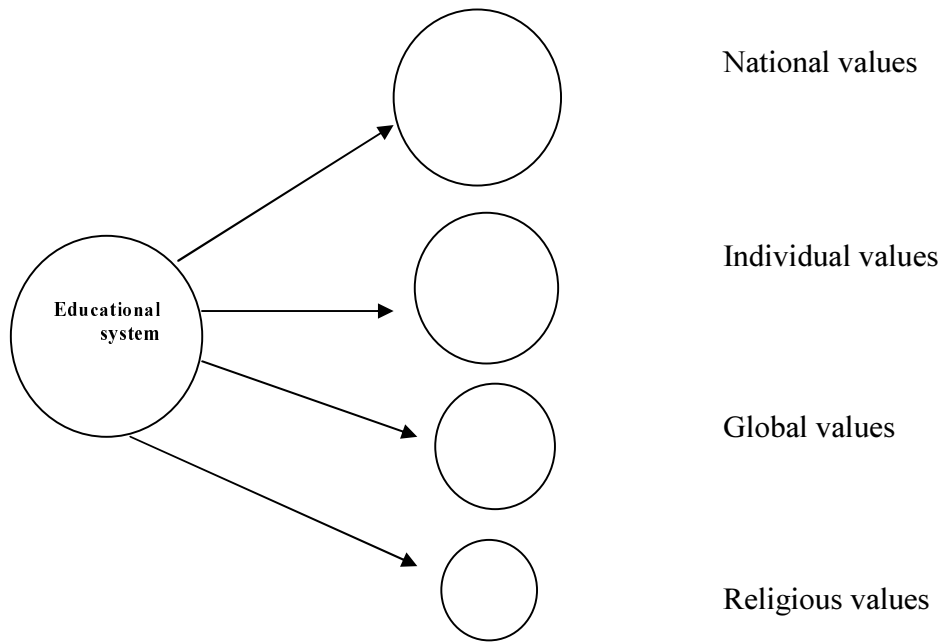


Fig.4: Relationship between educational system and values in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia

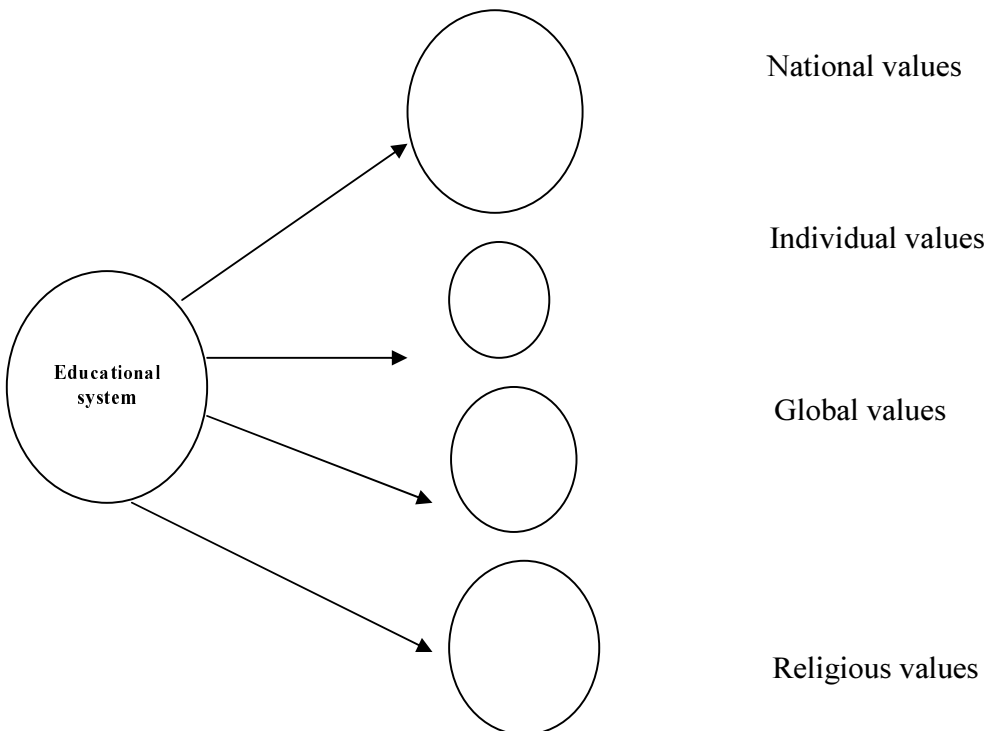


Fig.5: Relationship between educational system and values in Middle East countries

Considering figure 4, we meet a model which shows the superiority of national values in the countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and even Malaysia during the past fifty years. In these countries national values through the political system (State) tried to affect people's life status. Having encouraged the nationality morale and encouraging the economic competitions and generalizing it to all social activities, the government could make the personal values encourage educational and economical competitions through the institution of family (*cf* Bray and Yamato 2003, Numata, 2003). Moreover, the family system in cooperation with the political system has welcome and peacefully accepted global values. It all happened at a time when religion and religious values played their minor and traditional role. These values, wherever necessary, were put to use in the service of personal and national values as progressive teachings by the men of politics. Now we witness that these countries, abstaining from many crises, could pave their way into development and comfort and avoid extremist bias of their society and specially their youth in favor of one of the values or another.

In the Middle East, on the contrary to the first group of countries, the situation of political system is not so promising. In the majority of these countries there is a kind of gap between politicians and people. (Velloso, 1998) Political and social freedom is limited and there is no sign of real democracy. During the past fifty years, this region has never experienced a sustained peace at both national and regional levels. The lack of political stability has not allowed the real national values to institutionalize themselves for the betterment of people (Kumaraswamy, 2006). Yet, unfortunately, it does not mean that political affairs have not influenced the people's destiny in this region or people have been totally unaware of them. One should live in the Middle East if he wishes to know the most politically-oriented people in the world.

On the other hand, the cultural system of family is in conflict with the global values although affected by daily increasing manifestations of western civilization and specially the globalization movement which encourages personal values. In this situation, the adult generation constantly feels unable to understand the language of the children and therefore put them under pressure with the result of appearing "gap between generations". This is the phenomenon proposed by parents, educationists and family sociologists in the mass media in these countries. The weakness of national values, attacks of personal

values on social relations and the development of personal profiteering on the one hand and the daily increasing pressures of global values which are in conflict with national and religious values on the other hand have caused all people in these countries to encounter critical conditions.

Having all these in mind, now, we can, to some extent, answer the first raised question which asks for the reasons of the youth inclination to fundamentalism in the regions like the Middle East. We witness that the family, government (schools and universities), commercial companies and even religious centres have put children, teenagers and the youth under pressure and engaged them in certain conflicts (Mazawi, 2004). On the one hand, families expect children to respect their cultural and religious beliefs behave the way their models did. Children are also asked to overlook the models imported by the media like the television and internet. On the other hand, as far as economics is concerned, both families and the elitist system of economics expect them to get higher educational degrees and find themselves suitable positions in the competitive world of jobs as soon as possible. In spite of their attempts in getting their higher degrees, the youth's unemployment is attributed to their own weaknesses by their families. Here, the youth are found guilty in stead of the economic system which lacks the job-creating power. The political system, in cooperation with families, trade companies and religious centres and sometimes in contrast with their preferences, seeks its goals, making the youth tools in its hands. In such a situation, the youth react differently based on any one of four types of values. Escape from home, the youth's inclination to violence in educational environments, alcoholism and drug addiction as well as the growth of different crimes and non humane behaviour are just a part of the youth reactions against the pressure of cultural system and personal-global values (Davies, 2005). The increase of false jobs and attempts to gain utmost profits in a short time through disobeying the economic rules and migration to the large cities or the European and American countries are some of the youth's reactions against the pressures of the economic system and personal-global values. (Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, 2003) Blind obedience to political authority, joining into opposing political parties and inclination to violence and armed struggles against the government and the party in power can all be taken as some manifestations of the youth's reactions against the political system and national values. The elimination of religious values of the society, extremism in religious beliefs and the lack of tolerance for meeting different religious

ceremonies and making new religious heresies can be regarded as a number of reactions used by the youth in the Middle East countries to fight against the pressures of religious system. (Stover, 2005) Each one of these reactions causes new social crises at both national and international levels.

Educational systems and International crises

In order to understand the relationships between the educational systems and international crises, it seems necessary to express what is meant by “educational system”. This term has been used in many published papers in the journals related to the field of comparative education in a very broad sense. (cf Crossley 2000, Dangor 2005, Davies 2005) It may cause readers to misunderstand the realities of the issue and form a false concept of the relationships between educational systems and international crises in the regions such as the Middle East. The application of the term "educational system" in a general sense prevents us from distinguishing between **Formal Education** and **Informal Education**. While many existing problems in regions like the Middle East are the results of the performance of the Informal Education, the Formal Education is to be accused of them. Therefore, we must distinguish between these two systems of education if we are to explain the role of educational system in the youth's inclinations to fundamentalist organizations. Another mistake that should be avoided is that we consider the political system (the government) as a superior institution over both the formal and informal educational systems in all of the countries in the region. (Arani, 2003) It should be pointed out that true understanding of the role and position of the political and educational systems in international incidents would require the true understanding of the different connections of these systems in different countries of the region (figures 6, 7, and 8).

Fig 6: Relationship between State, Formal and Informal Education Systems in Turkey and Pakistan

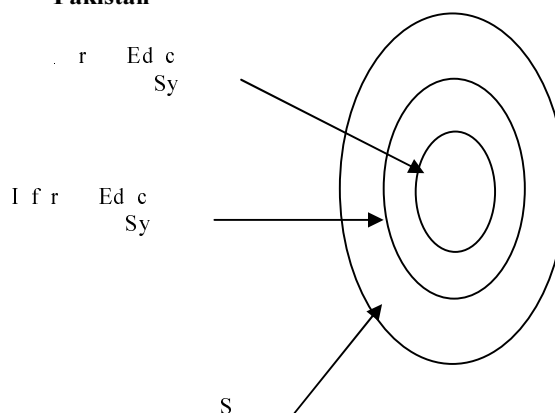
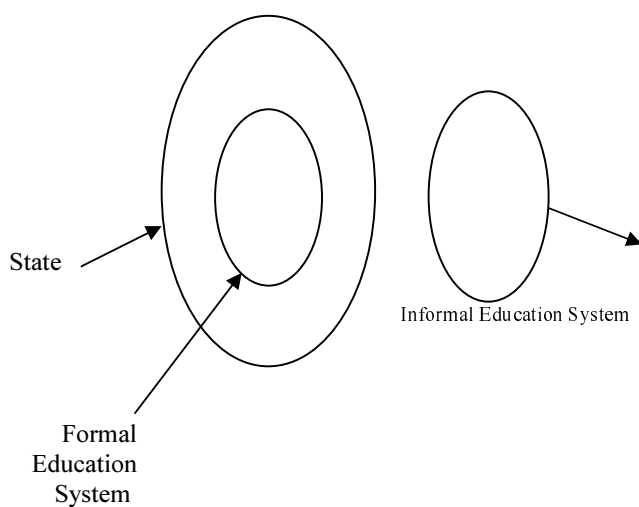


Fig. 7: Relationship between State, Formal and Informal Education Systems in Israel



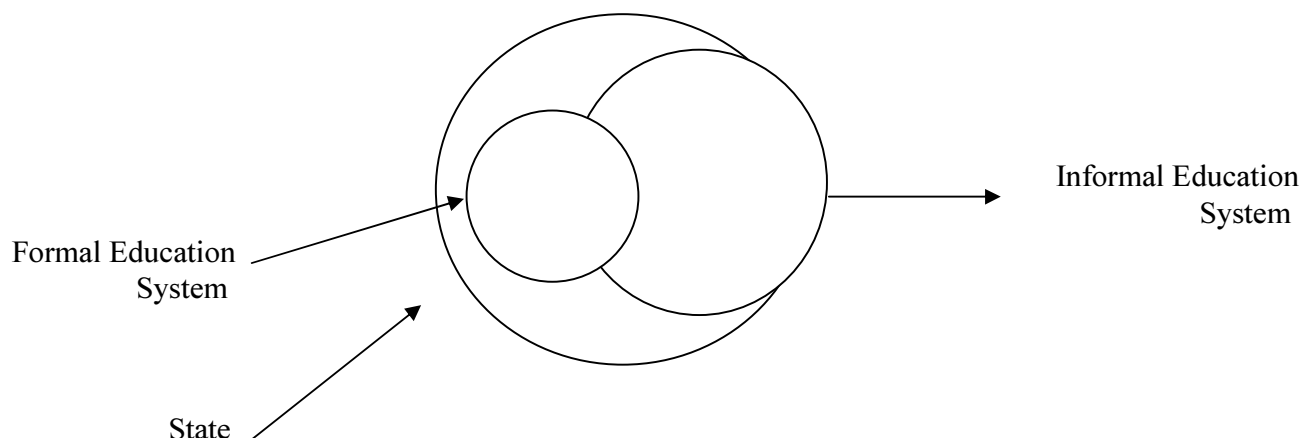


Fig. 8: Relationship between State, Formal and Informal Education Systems in Arab countries

Figure 6 shows that in countries such as Turkey and Pakistan the formal education is in total control of the political system, whereas the informal education has no relations with formal education. For example, in Pakistan the regime in power poses some ideas and beliefs which are not accepted by the religious and cultural system. (Kfir, 2006) In such cases, the religious system tries to, through informal education, establish special schools and family-based religious associations in order to neutralize political teachings. This is the case that we witness instructing controversial teachings of informal education which are in conflict with that of formal education, and it causes a kind of bewilderment and uncertainty in the youth which reveals itself as the "*conflict of values*". In fact, children and the youth acquire the teachings which are not taught at schools and because these instructions are usually against the goals of national and international values, violent reactions may appear from the side of political system. This violence makes the differences deeper and more severe (for example, we can mention the clashes and political insecurities in Pakistan when the government closed down the religious schools). The second example can be what has been called the problem of veil in Turkey. Here, we see the conflict between the political system and formal education on one side and the informal education on the other side in this country. The formal education supported by the government propagates secularism at school and university environments, and separation of religious

and cultural beliefs from the realm of children's education while the informal education with the support of religious system and institution of family tries to quarrel in this battle. (Arjmand, 2006)

In the second state (figure 7), the political system (State) has a full authority over both formal and informal education. Israel which is in complete political opposition is interesting case. In this country the informal education is a real supporter of the political system and formal education. In this case, it is better to say that politicians are religious theologians or religious theologians are politicians. (Abootalebi, 2001) Therefore, both groups believe that cultural and religious teachings must be executed through the formal and informal educations.

In the third state (figure 8) we observe a situation which is true in the Arab countries of the region. In Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, the political system has a complete control over formal education, and the schools are, mostly, dependent on the government. Although the interventions of non-educational institutes (mosques, religious schools, and families) are considered illegal, the informal education system tries to apply its teachings through contacts with political system. In this condition there is a kind of peaceful coexistence between these two systems which support each other whenever necessary. (Wiktorowicz, 1996) In fact, in these countries the informal education via some

centres (such as religious schools, parties, and families) tries to take the responsibility of those affairs that the political system is not able or willing to instruct openly in formal education. (Bayat, 2002) As an obvious example for this cooperation, the role of religious schools in training, equipping and sending Arab forces to Afghanistan to fight against The USSR should be sought out.

The existence of different types of values on the one hand and different methods of communications between the political system and formal and informal educations on the other hand makes it clear that there will be some difficulties in finding appropriate quick answers to our questions. According to the diagrams 6, 7 and 8 there are three groups of countries. In the first group, the countries do not allow the educational system to involve in social crises believing the separation of education from politics. Although these countries are suffering from internal problems which result in “gap between generations” or intensifies conflicts between religious system of family and political system, the political system is so strong that it does not allow people to play any role in creating international crises. This is the reason why one can hardly ever find a citizen from Pakistan or Turkey committing a bombing suicide outside of the boundaries of his home country. In the second group of countries, politicians, religious and cultural leaders like Plato consider the education and politics as the two sides of a coin. Although the leaders of the societies which are influenced by the globalization movement observe the youth cultural transformation day by day, they do not allow their citizens to play any role in creating international crises and may do it themselves if necessary. Therefore, you can not find any trace of involvement of Israeli citizens in international crises, in spite of the large number of these crises in the recent decades. In the third group, the political and educational systems deny their roles in the political crises but it is obvious that they have had some kind of involvement in these crises. In this situation, administrative organizations, parties, religious schools and families are strongly engaged in cultural, religious and political disputes at all three levels of national, regional and international.

In addition, the role of the citizens of these countries in conflicts of values at an international level should not be overlooked. It is natural that conflicts in the spheres of values are not limited to the ethnic society. When we consider the phenomenon of immigration from the Middle East to Europe which is affected by the role of global values, we come to the idea that the way that immigrants of these countries accept the culture and the values of

the host society is different from each other. (Kepel, 2004) Events such as the riots of Paris - disregarding the economic factors which caused them to happen – indicate different roles of immigrants from the Middle East. Why did the immigrants from Turkey, Iran and Pakistan play the least role in these riots?

The role of Comparative Education

From the whole discussions above it can be concluded that answering the two raised questions in this paper requires more studies and surveys. These surveys must be done by those who, in addition to the knowledge of comparative education, should be well aware of the cultural, social and religious aspects of the society being studied. The researchers must recognize the differences and similarities between countries. It can be a new mission for the researchers in comparative education. They should – through their scientific activities – develop a new insight that others realizing the existing religious social and cultural differences avoid the overgeneralization and too general judgments. Nothing is more boring than the time when you see some researchers of comparative education pay attention to just one common factor of religion or culture-e.g. belief in Islam- at the expense of other aspects of people in the Middle East. In a situation like this, we may find it necessary to develop a new interdisciplinary course such as “*Regional Comparative Education*”. The present paper has tried to illustrate that there is a large variations in the relationships between political system and educational systems in the Middle East.

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