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## **Islamic Education in Commonwealth Independent States: Genesis, Development and Future Directions**

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**Abstract:** Islam has been widely practiced in the Common wealth of Independent States (CIS) since the beginning of Islamic history and it was a center of excellence for Islamic education from as early as the eighth century, as part of the Muslim conquest territory from Samarkand to Bukhara. The aim of this paper is to explore the obscure history of Islamic education and civilization in the CIS countries with special focus on Central Asia. The inductive method was applied to examine data from secondary sources for this qualitative study which focused on how the CIS countries could make remarkable progress in the future to develop Islamic educational institutions and produce Islamic intellectuals which will have a positive impact on the development of future Muslim generations in this region. The explorative results showed that Islamic education is among the major factors of social stability in the CIS region and it takes into account the expectations of people in order to build peaceful, knowledge-based and prosperous societies. Moreover, it is recommended to authorities in the CIS region to pay special attention to developing Islamic education institutions that will lead to improvements in educational relations between the CIS region and the different OIC nations which will eliminate the disputes among the CIS nations regarding enhancing harmony and hegemony.

**Keywords:** CIS Countries, Islamic education, Civilization, Central Asia, Hadith and Philosophy, OIC Countries, Development, Institutions.

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## Introduction

Islamic education is a very important terminology in the Muslim world nowadays. An institutionalized Islamic education plays a vital role to develop a new Muslim generation according to moderate Islamic norms and values. Islamic Education seeks to understand the worth of Islamic civilization and to mold Muslim's life according to Islamic knowledge and the teaching of Islam in moderate ways (Niyozov & Memon 2011; Rayan 2012). Furthermore, an Islamic Education involves developing a society with the value of Islamic culture, teaching and shaping the character of Muslim youths which in fact it can be achieved by systemizing and institutionalizing education in society (Nor & Malim 2014). Truly, Islamic civilization has contributed tremendously to the development of the education system that is not limited to the Muslim community, but is for non-Muslim communities as well (Saliba, George, 2007; Chaney 2016).

There are some issues to be taken into consideration to discuss Muslim educational system before the colonization of Muslim countries. Firstly, the golden era of Islam from the seventh century to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and secondly, the occupation of vast areas by Muslim rulers which is referred to as the Muslim world today. The Muslim world, within the vastness of space and time has witnessed numerous political and social changes, which means it is challenging to make convincing generalizations. For some time now and until today, Islamic tradition has accepted the central position of education both as a mode of worship and as an avenue to achieving moral, ethical, and cultural socialization of the *ummah* (Muslim community). In particular, during the early years of the Islamic community, education was viewed a prestigious and Nobel ambition. (Noor Sulaiman, 2016)

This research explores the philosophy of education in Islam and its genesis, development and future directions in CIS countries. In addition, the prospects of Islamic education and educational institutions will be discussed as well. Meantime, the establishment of modern Islamic education and educational institutions will be highlighted as well as some recommendations, suggestions and finally the conclusion will be drawn.

## Literature Review

According to western historians such as George Sabine (1987), establishing of universities and other centers of learning in the West started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the completion of translations of Islamic philosophy, sciences, art and literature. The translators are including several of the most creative being mostly Arabic scholars who had completed their studies in Spanish universities which were under the Islamic

empire at that time (Adnan Abd Rashid, ND). Based on the testimonies of some historians as discussed by Fortna, (2001), it is obvious that Western education development was highly influenced by Islamic education system that was unique and inclusive and productive in society when Cordova was the center of European civilization and one of the most highly regarded places of learning in the world as described by Rosenthal, (2006). However, Jackson, (2007) mentioned that upon the collapse of the Islamic empire, the Islamic education system began to be negatively perceived. Religious studies were separated from science studies that led Muslim youths to avoid Islamic education and consequently the productivity of Islamic education institutions were gradually destroyed which is also stated by Silova, Johnson, & Heyneman, (2007). In this regard, the CIS region is among the majority of Muslim countries that have a vast Islamic education history with many scholars contributing a lot in science, geography, chemistry, medicine and other fields of study as cited by Zhemukov & Rattelle, (2013). It is mentioned by Frank, (2001) that besides the CIS region is still considered a region of Muslim majority countries, alive with a glory of Islamic culture and heritage through the presence of large Muslim populations and important places of Islamic faith. Moreover Mariya, (2011), stated that the different governments of these Central Asian nations supported the construction of mosques to facilitate religious restoration, while at the same time kept religious activity under state jurisdiction. This approach was replicated in the southern parts of Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as quoted by Riyaz Ahamd, (2015). This concurred with the findings of researchers Dilshod and Renat (2011), who mentioned that with the collapse of the USSR, there was a steady increase in Islamic awareness year by year and as new Central Asian states commenced to re-establishing their historical linkages with the Islamic world to reconnect and revive the Islamic identity, which in the past had defined Central Asian culture, traditions and way of life, (Epkenhans 2011; Mostowlansky2012).

However Tazmini, (2001), stated that the freedom of learning of Islamic education and practices that were gained following the collapse of the USSR was short-lived. Soon the secular regimes of the Central Asian region including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, began imposing restrictions on Islamic education and practices, driven by a wish to maintain the political agenda as mentioned by Wolters, (2014); Riyaz, (2015). In addition, the rising of political Islamic phenomenon in the CIS region was another challenge experienced by the regional countries that led to a redefinition of the public sphere, social relations, and, conceivably over time, the political boundaries in Kazakh-

stan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan which have been discussed by Tazmini, (2001); Omelicheva, (2010) & Zhussipbek, (2013).

Constantly, the political competition and geopolitics in CIS countries resulted in the backwardness of the Muslims to focus on Islamic educations and traditions as well as the building of educational institutions in the Central Asian countries. This is in line with what discussed by Wolters (2014), that so far, the establishing of Islamic educational centers and the formulation of policies to guide the Muslim communities in Central Asia were missing and misinterpreted in such a way that it promotes extremism and terrorism which is in fact not the reality which are proven by Omelicheva, (2010), Ahamd, (2015) & Olcott, (2016).

Therefore, it is necessary to state that Islamic education has a long history in the Central Asian region that educated generations of Muslims in this region, and its Islamic educational institutions were among the most famous in the world. When the region was under Tsarist Russia, these Islamic institutions were abolished and Muslims could not continue learning their religion and practice it as before which stated by Atkin, (1989), Shahrani, (2005) & Zainiddinov, (2017). Despite the fact that the USSR collapsed decades ago, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which comprises secular governments, prevented Islamic education studies and caused weaknesses of moderate Islamic institutions in the region. Ultimately, the prevention of Islamic education and abolishing Islamic institutions have led to the decline of moderate Islamic values, cultures and understanding and resulted in some Muslim youths being influenced by extremist ideologies<sup>1</sup> as mentioned by Abramson, (2010), Kamali, (2015) & Sahin, (2018). Hence, this paper endeavors to explore the future prospective of Islamic education and institutions in CIS through a historical view of Islamic education and educational institutions in the region.

### **Concept of Education in Islam**

We begin by defining education in Islam and highlighting what we mean when we talk about Islamic education in this paper. From the Islamic perspective, Islamic studies are defined as “which involve researching or learning any topic in a way that is in agreement with Islamic sciences” (Ulūm al- Dīn). Muslims consider that all sciences are the creation of Allah and they reflect HIS greatness. Secular perspective in Islamic studies means the historical study of Islam, Islamic civilization, society, culture,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/central-asia-and-islamic-state-the-russian-connection/> retrieved on 16/09/2019.

history, historiography, law, theology, philosophy and sciences, which in fact is considering just a small portion of the entirety of Islamic studies (Goitein 2010; Shaw 2012a). Multiple definitions have proposed for education in Islam, such as “Iqbal states,” it implies “the creation of a living experience on which religious faith ultimately rests”. Rahman (1982) stated that “education means Islamic intellectualism, while Nasr (1987) believes that “the Islamic theory of education can be reconstructed within Qur’ānic philosophy,” and Iqbal stresses that the birth of Islam is the birth of inductive intellect, wherein “to achieve full self-consciousness, Man must finally be thrown back on his own resources.” For Barazangi (2007), it means “autonomous identification with and internalization of the Qur’ān without intermediary interpretation” (Douglass & Shaikh 2004; Kadi, et, al. 2006).

On the other hand, education in Islam is defined as “a process through which human beings are trained and prepared in a concerted way to do their Creator’s bidding in this life (dunyā) and to be rewarded in the life after death” (ākhirah) (Gulam Sarwar, 1996, p.9). Besides, it is also defined as “a recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled in Man of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence” (Al-Attas, 1999, p.21). The committee on the Definition and aims of education, from the First World Conference on Muslim Education, which was organized by King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, held in Makkah 1977, agreed that in Islam “the meaning of education in its totality is inherent in the implications of the terms *tarbiyah*, *ta’līm* and *ta’dīb* taken together.” The committee members further maintained that “what each of the three terms conveys concerning Man, his society and environment in relation to God is related to the others, and together they represent the scope of education” (Al-Attas, 1979, p.157; Doumato et, al. 2006; Barazangi, 2007). Therefore, according to the definitions that have given by scholars mentioned above about education in Islam, it is necessary to be adopted by contemporary Islamic education institutions for achieving their goals and structures.

### **Genesis of Islamic Education in CIS**

Islam has arrived central Asia in mid seventh century, in three specific phases: via the Arab armies led by Qutayba Ibn Muslim, the Scholastic phase, and traders’ phase. The Islamic culture and values of the region was achieved over a short period. Within half a century, political, cultural and economic occupation was accomplished, incorporated into the Islamic Caliphate (Khalid, 2014a). The essentials of Islamic faith were established and reinforced at the time of the Karakhanid and Seljuk empires. Islam

established deeper historical roots among the non-nomadic Tajik and Uzbek people compared to the nomadic Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Kazakh tribes<sup>2</sup>. In a mere 50 years since arriving in Central Asia, Islam grew to be the leading religion in the region by the eighth century (d'Encausse&d'Encausse1988 ;Bosworth& Asimov 2002; Achilov, 2012). From then until the presence of the USSR in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Islam maintained its place as the dominant force in molding the culture and identity of Central Asian people. (Riyaz Ahamd Sheikh, 2015).

From the historical perspective, from then on Islam's role as a socio-cultural force was rather superficial and varied particularly in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, formally populated by nomads, compared to the Uzbek and Tajik Muslims according to Omelicheva (2010). However, during the time of the tsarist administration, there was a significant distinction made between the nomadic (non-original resident) and sedentary (original resident) populations on the basis of the role of Islam (Khalid, 2007). For the once nomadic populations for whom Islam was not a significant socio-cultural influence, the Russians promoted Russification and that mainly maintained the practices of indigenous law or *adat*. Though, in the case of the non-nomadic populations for whom Islam was a major force, Islam was to be the governing force based on shari'ah principles (Pilkington & Yemelianova 2003; Hiro2011; Ahmad et, al. 2017). Consequently, most Islamic establishments and educational and cultural institutions were untouched in both Turkistan and Transoxiana. In the non-nomadic areas, local judicial systems in accordance with Islamic law offered a opportunities for the increasing influence of the scholars (*ulema*), who were the most educated Muslim scholars, and who were responsible for perpetuating the evolution of Islamic teachings (Khalid, 2007; Omelicheva, 2010; Khalid, 2014).

Islamic Education and the practice of Islamic traditions have been a basic requirement in the life of the Muslims in Central Asia for more than thousand years, playing a very significant role in the history of Islam. A large number of Muslim scholars, spiritual leaders, and dynasties were from this region and contributed substantially in developing the Islamic sciences, culture, and civilization (Poliakov& Olcott2016; Galym Zhus-sipbek, 2017).

In the earliest days of Islam, the teaching system was different from that of the present time. Muslims used to teach their children inclusively -at home, school, mosque and in

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/islam-islam-central-asia> retrieved on 13/09/2019.

the community. Islamic history is littered with abundant stories of self-sacrifice, courage, solidarity, love and compassion, justice and equality. Muslims in the past could identify with this heritage and in a sense could claim ownership of it. This heritage is unaffected by the multiplicity of confusing scholarly expositions or the abusive institutions that have clouded the history of Islam socially and politically. Rather, it offers to Muslims the history of their religion (Shaw 2012b; Khalid, 2014b; Hakim Zainiddinov, 2017).

### **Development of Islamic Education in CIS**

Islamic education was introduced in the beginning of Islam and it was taught by the Prophet Mohammad s.a.w.s and it was carried on by the *sahaba* of the Prophet s.a.w.s. The Muslims in the earliest era of Islam focused on the teachings and learning of the Qur'an and Hadith with the explanation of it by the Ulama of the golden period of Islam. The Arab Muslims later traversed the world to preach Islam and Islamic Education (El-Aswad2012). The successors of this Islamic educational mission were the Muslim scholars of Tafsir al Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet s.a.w.s. The renowned scholar of the Hadith was Imam Bukhari, who carried the flagship of this Islamic education from Bukhara to Samarkhand and other parts of the Muslim World. His collection of Hadith book is considered the most authentic book in the field of Hadith, namely sahih al Bukhari. He mentored many scholars who served the Muslim children later on by providing Islamic education and promoted it to the Muslim World (Graham2010; Kamrava 2011). In this regard, the famous scholar is Imam al Ghazali who contributed substantially to Islamic education in the CIS countries. He wrote many books and helped to nurture many outstanding scholars in the fields of Islamic theology and philosophy (Samii2001; Bobrovnikovet, al., 2009; Ariffin2011).

It was not an easy task to develop Islamic education in the CIS region but the Muslims started to spread Islamic Education by following a system of teaching in the CIS countries accompanied by the establishment of a large number of *maktab* (primary schools) and *madrasahs* in this region. The Muslims were able to carry on with the Islamic Education by following the family ties of teaching when the Soviet period closed all *maktab*. To a certain degree; independence offered an opportunity to revive the Islamic education activities. In 2010, Tajikistan had 19 registered madrasah and a solitary Islamic University. The population of Tajikistan is approximately nine million, with 97% being Muslims (Bobrovnikovet, al., 2009; Akyildiz & Carlson 2013; Nourzhanov & Bleuer2013).

The establishment of Islamic education of Central Asia commenced in the second half of seventh century when Islam came to this region with the multiplicity of Islamic traditions, sedentary and nomadic cultures, and geopolitical situation in the region. It came with diverse patterns and practices of Islam to Central Asia. It was through the early farming and trading settlers that the Arab armies brought a new religion, Islam, in seventh and eighth centuries (Aurelie 2016). The settlement of the families of modern Tajiks and Uzbeks was a significant factor in the initial acceptance of Islam and compliance with Islamic laws and restrictions in Transoxiana. Islam is a religion of stable and settled communities, since it needs an established urban infrastructure for institutionalized Muslim way of life<sup>3</sup>. The natives of Mawarannahr established mosques and madrasa in their villages. The urban centers of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva grew and became important cultural and religious centers of the Islam (Rakowska-Harmstone 1983; Bosworth & Asimov 2002; Roy 2007; Omelicheva, Mariya 2010).

The mission of Islamic Education was to develop the educational curriculum to mold the thinking of future Muslim generations and to groom them as practicing Muslims. The basis of Islamic Education reform is to meet the needs of Muslim communities in the current era. Many Islamic reformists have been working to develop and reform the Muslim educational system in the Muslim world. The early reformist initiatives in Islamic educational institutions was motivated by the Egyptian scholar, Muhammad Abdo's transformation to the new approaches to scientific research at the University of al-Azhar in Cairo by introducing educational system to modern sciences and rational inquiry as established in the al-Azhar curriculum. The Islamic scholars including Abduh focused on reforming modern science with the exclusion of other subjects in the Muslim education system with a proposal for some wide-ranging measures to reform al-Azhar, and the introduction of a number of modern subjects in the Al-Azhar curriculum (Afsaruddin 2005; Gesink 2006; Amir et, al., 2012). Nowadays, the issue of reforming the Islamic educational system has become a debatable issue among the modern Muslim scholars and intellectuals among them Ismail Raj al-Faruqi, Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Syed Hossein Nasr and Fazlur Rahman (Nourzhanov & Bleuer 2013; Ibrahim & Misnan, 2017).

### **Future Directions of Islamic Education in CIS**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://centralasiaprogram.org/archives/9721> retrieved on 10/09/2019.



Islamic Education plays an important role in determining the true Islamic culture and values. Implications of Islamic Education in the CIS countries remain a high priority for both scholars and policy-makers. Their support so far has of Islamic educational institutions has enabled the Islamic revival to be integrated into Kazakh society and in the process deterred the expansion of radicalism. On the other hand, The Tajikistan authorities have adopted a policy to repress and marginalize Islam (Dilshod Achilov & Renat Shay khutdinov, 2011).

There is a huge potential for the development of Islamic Education in the CIS countries due to the region's huge Muslim population for the benefit of future generations of Muslims in this region. There is an urgent need to establish Islamic institutions to cater for the education for the Muslim children and to produce future scholars of the Muslim Ummah. According to the report of the Malaysian International Financial Centre (MIFC), the CIS region, established in 1991 following the collapse of the USSR, comprises the countries that once were part of the Russian Federation, then made up primarily of the Central Asian countries and Russia as the dominating nation. The Federation comprised 12 states - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Together, the countries have a population of 281 million with a strong Muslim presence in certain parts of the region. Uzbekistan has the largest number of Muslims (nearly 23.8 million or 89%) followed by Russia with 25million or 15%). In terms of the percentage of Muslim, Tajikistan leads with 95% or 6.8million followed by Azerbaijan at 93.4% or 7.58 million<sup>4</sup>(Laruelle2013; The World Factbook 2018)<sup>5</sup>. This is in line with what stated that the Muslim community in Russia continues to grow, having reached 25 million, according to the grand mufti of Russia, Sheikh Rawil Gaynetdin<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, according to Gaynetdinthat 25 million people attributed strong, however, the growth in Muslim population due to two main factors: the high birth rate among Muslim families and through the arrival of people from Central Asia<sup>7</sup> (Turaeva 2019).

The CIS countries over the past 20 years or so have progressed impressively in the development of their educational system and made significant advances in technological integration through a global network with various countries. This will

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<sup>4</sup> [www.mifc.com](http://www.mifc.com)

<sup>5</sup> [World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision". ESA.UN.org](#) (custom data acquired via website). United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Retrieved 10 September 2017.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/islam-russia-180307094248743.html>, retrieved on 16/09/2019.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14631369.2018.1525529>. Retrieved on 16/-9/2019.

positively affect the further progress of Islamic Education in light of the advancing position of Islamic education as a vital component in the global educational network.

### **Recommendations For Development of Islamic Education in CIS**

There must be a concrete plan and blueprint for the CIS countries to establish Islamic institutions in order to provide Islamic Education for the Muslims of this area. There should be different policies for the Muslims to uphold the creed and culture of Islamic values as mentioned by Alexander (2014) after two decades of independence for the CIS countries. There are issues of security, developing economic reform, and the supervision and control of religious communities which remain as separate issues requiring separate state policies. (Alexander Wolters, 2014).

### **Developing of Education System**

There are many Muslim individuals initiating the establishment of Islamic institutions in line with Islamic culture. Some of them do it for the sake of religion and some of them for commercial purposes. This privatization and commercially-motivated reforms, especially in primary and secondary education will make no significant contribution toward improving the achievements of the education system in CIS countries as mentioned by (Hakim 2017). On the other hand, several of the CIS countries have been through decades of educational centralism with little concern for socio-cultural outcomes of school education. A great number of educational systems in CIS countries suffer from bureaucratic approaches that emphasize a top down system of learning. Through the publishing and distribution of textbooks, Ministries of Education enforce an inflexible curriculum centered on memorization and dictation as daily activities (Deyoung2006; Osipian 2012;Hakim 2017)

It is important to state here that there should be a broader educational system in the CIS countries is an inherent element of economic and political reforms. The curriculum must be designed and the teaching methods must be enhanced with the technical skills required to perform effectively and efficiently in tomorrow's world. Students should learn the process of problem solving, cooperation and critical thinking skills that are required to acquire the skillful resources. Many CIS countries have failed to grant inclusive educational access to all their social groups (Dimitrova &Dragneva2009).The Muslim communities of Central Asia must be in touch with progressive and reform-oriented Muslim discourses (such as those developed by El-Fadl, Amina Wadud, A. an-Na'im, and others). Such discourses can lessen the suspicions of the secular elites and facilitate Muslim activists in focusing on their respective countries' real problems,

which are, the absence of meritocracy, access to global knowledge and technology, and a need for the systemic protection of human rights and the environment among others (Weller2014; Galym Zhussipbek, 2017).

### **Establishing of Islamic Institutions**

There is an urgent need to establish institutions in the CIS countries based on models from some OIC countries such as Malaysia's government plans and policies. Malaysia is a modern postcolonial state with a Constitution which clearly states that "Islamic religion of the Federation". Malaysia was established on Sept 16, 1963 and initially the founding members were the Federation of Malaya (which gained independence from Britain on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1957), Singapore, and the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak. Singapore left the federation two years later (Mortimore & Blick 2018). From the early the beginning of the 1980s, the government launched an Islamization program which focused on upgrading the Islamic institutions as well. Infact, much effort has been made by the government to implement moderate Islam in Malaysia. Consequently, many institutions were established to promote the agenda and to prove that religion does not have to be an issue for a progressive country. This is a secret key for the country's economic and administrative success of the institutions with its political stability. (Roslan, Tarmizi, 2012).

There should be a lot of Islamic institutions to keep the Islamic heritage and to unite Muslims in the CIS countries and by then to produce scholars to reinterpret the Islamic doctrines. The need for radical and fundamentalist interpretations of Islam is legitimate, as there is a strong regional inclination toward Islam. On the other hand, the common assumption that Islam could be a potent force in shaping the future of the Central Asian republics is not quite true and there some factors that could prevent the Islamic political ideologies from being realized. (Ghoncheh Tazmini, 2001)

The new Islamic educational institutions can fulfill functions that can potentially deter the spread of religious views by providing original sources of teaching Islam; offering opportunities to study all aspects of Islam such as Shari'ah (Islamic law), Ibadah (worship, prayers and technical rituals) and Mu'amalat (social relations); and affording an effective antidote to radicalized Islamic teachings and interpretations. Educational opportunities for teaching and learning the moderate messages of Islam must emanate from institutions perceived as legitimate and reliable, that employ qualified and locally trained educators (e.g., Islamic scholars). In this regard, educational institutions can

play an important role in meeting the popular demands for re-discovering Islam in the post-Soviet space (Noor Sulaiman, 2016)

Therefore, newly-established Islamic educational institutions can play a central role in providing opportunities for learning about contemporary applications in respect of personal matters and social relations in Islam. Islamic educational institutions can be among the most effective tools for impeding the spread of radicalism. The new generations Muslims who do not have much prior knowledge of Islam are more susceptible to accepting radical teachings as genuine Islamic teachings as they often hear them for the very first time from radical preachers (Dilshod Achilov & Renat Shay khutdinov, 2011).

### **Institutions for Lower Education**

Lower education or primary school education is very important to shape the career of Muslim children. There is a need to establish a lot of primary schools based on the Islamic Education system to propagate the values of Islam and inculcate them in the life of Muslim children in CIS countries. The reason is that the governments of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan have taken action to limit what is perceived as the negative effects of religious education at home. They have made efforts to address the issue of declining tolerance by formulating plans to standardize religious curricula (David Abramson, 2010).

When we talk about the current higher education system in the CIS region, it seems that the design of higher education growth, indicated by some countries can be explored from two simple perspectives. First, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic are increasing their student intakes to become ‘mass’ systems, while, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan with slower growth seem to be prepared to continue as elite systems. These latter countries - Uzbekistan and Tajikistan - persist in supporting technical vocational education which reminds one of the centralized planning strategies as a key building block for skills. Second, the move to develop and expand the higher education system is dependent on links to secondary school education. Hence, there is no Islamic education so far adopted by the CIS region to exist along with the conventional education system even as Muslim majority countries (Brunner & Tillett 2007).

One of the issues is the meaning of “elites” and how the elites relate with higher education and educators themselves. The current system is a throwback to the Soviet elite’s mentality that controlled the education system where the leading is in one way or another had the Communist mentality which was normally against Islamic education (Keller, 2001; Silova, 2011; Khalid, 2014). Therefore, it is well understood that one of

the challenges facing the CIS region with regard to higher education and institutions is to reform themselves and adopt Islamic education as well as undertake research and teaching in universities, however, it is still unclear if these initiatives will be introduced for the new national elites and the Islamic education and the promotion of Islamic institutions will be permitted.

### **Institutions for Higher Education**

Higher education is a massive challenge in the CIS countries. Institutions of higher education need to be established in CIS countries and equipped with full facilities and financial assistance available to support the poor students in CIS countries because of the high number of dropouts after the secondary school stage due to financial problems. There are vast numbers of young scholars in the CIS countries who would benefit from research and opportunities to develop their talents and put them to good use.

Furthermore, access to quality education specifically Islamic education is very crucial for every country in the CIS region. It is the basic foundation to address a wide range of other critical issues in education and the economy such as reducing unemployment, which in turn alleviate poverty. However, not every country can easily obtain access to education, particularly in developing countries. There are numerous challenges which are the cause of this problem: shortage of trained teachers, not enough classrooms, especially in rural areas. It should also be noted that the quality of the training itself could be improved (Heyneman & De Young .2006; Scott & McGuire 2017). Developing countries also usually suffer from remote locations, lack of infrastructure like telecommunications facilities, shortage of trained personnel, and high cost and shortage of computers and access to electricity. These are all major problems that result in poor quality in education and Islamic education also well (Silver, Bourke & Strehorn 1998; Chimombo 1999).

In light of the above, the problem has been defined as “the lack of access to Islamic education and education in a general that affects a large group of people in developing nations.” Given the fact that the developing world in general is in greater need of quality and accessible educational systems we have chosen to study this issue in this particular region. Furthermore, due to the varying contexts related to education it is rather unfair to place the responsibility on only one specific societal sphere. Therefore, we believe that this issue should be addressed by society in general as a joint responsibility.

Finally, as stated previously, innovation can create many opportunities for the education system in poor nations, while at the same time some challenges need to be overcome in order to ensure a smooth and successful implementation process.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this paper was to investigate the obscure historical background of Islamic education and civilization in the CIS countries with special focus on Central Asia. Furthermore, this paper has stressed the importance of knowing and appreciating the challenges that confronted Islamic education by taking into account the many social, cultural, and political-historical factors in the CIS countries. Islamic education is designed for the purpose of bringing benefits to society and contribute to cultural CIS countries to cater to the Muslim population in this area. There is hope that Islamic education institutions can bring a positive change and modernization in the CIS countries guided by the noble tenets of Islam. Moreover, focusing on the challenges and overcoming them will require the good will, conviction, commitment and courage of all those tasked with this massive responsibility. However, the ultimate success will also hinge on the management and policy making bodies to ensure that the desired transformation is achievable so long as its significance and necessity are given due recognition. This is because historically it has been proved that the CIS region was once one of the established centers of education that gave the world scholars in different disciplines of knowledge including science, chemistry, and geography among other fields of expertise. On the other hand, studies have shown that due to repression of Islamic education and the demolition of Islamic institutions, generations of Muslim youth were influenced by extreme ideologies that ultimately resulted in social instability and geopolitical conflicts.

Therefore, this study proposes that Islamic education and institutions of higher learning should be revived and with the help of modernized systems and technology, help to provide moderate understanding of Islam and reshape the minds and lives of this generation of Muslim youths to better understand the true meaning of Islam in order to resist the influence of external ideologies. Moreover, it is recommended to the authorities in the CIS region to pay special attention to developing Islamic education institutions that will improve the educational relationships within the CIS region as well as OIC countries and in the process address the disputes among the CIS nations by creating an environment of harmony and hegemony.

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