

# Philosophy of education as a framework for enhancing critical thinking and reducing intellectual alienation: perceptions of faculty members in selected Arab universities

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Received 4 March 2025  
Revised 6 April 2025  
17 July 2025  
Accepted 24 September 2025

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aimed to examine the role of educational philosophy in enhancing critical thinking and mitigating intellectual alienation in Arab universities.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches, involving a sample of 10 experts in the field of educational philosophy from the Democratic Arab Center for Strategic, Political, and Economic Studies, headquartered in Germany. Data were collected through a 10-item questionnaire addressing the relationship between intellectual alienation and critical thinking, along with an open-ended question: “Where are Arab universities headed?”

**Findings** – The study found that limitations on academic freedom in some Arab universities reinforce rote learning practices and hinder the development of critical thinking, exacerbating intellectual alienation. It also highlighted that many academics experience intellectual alienation, avoid philosophical and critical dialogue, and lack a clear philosophical vision that guides their discussions and intellectual trajectory. This absence of intellectual vision weakens the educational and intellectual system, making Arab universities susceptible to a decline in education quality. Additionally, intellectual rigidity and the lack of a coherent educational philosophy stifle the growth of critical and creative thinking.

**Practical implications** – The study recommends fostering a clearer educational philosophy that promotes critical thinking and intellectual freedom. It also suggests creating academic environments that encourage philosophical dialogue and debate, which will enhance the overall quality of higher education.

**Originality/value** – This study contributes to understanding the role of educational philosophy in Arab universities, offering insights into how intellectual alienation and a lack of critical thinking can be addressed by a well-defined philosophical framework in education.

**Keywords** Philosophy of education, Intellectual alienation, Critical thinking, Higher education, Arab universities

**Paper type** Research article

## Introduction

The philosophy of education is one of the most fundamental pillars that define the features, goals, and means of the educational system. It is considered the starting point for any educational reform and development movement. The raising of philosophical and educational questions, such as: What are the general goals and objectives of education? How can they be

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**Funding:** This research received no external funding.



achieved? What is the purpose of university institutions? What should they teach? How should learning take place? and other similar inquiries form the foundation upon which critical educational thought is built in any educational system.

Answering these questions forms the practical framework for educational philosophy. As Bredmeier emphasized, the alignment of educational philosophical theory with the reality of educational practice is essential for any development or improvement within the educational system (In Phillips, 2014). In the same context, Alexander (2019) pointed out that educational philosophy should guide and direct educational practice, as it provides the educational system with a comprehensive understanding of human life. This understanding is closely linked to the theory of knowledge, which involves questions, such as: What should we learn? Why should we learn? How? What we teach, whether consciously or unconsciously, reflects our adopted educational philosophy (Ead, 2019). Educational philosophers, including Dewey and Kilpatrick, stress the necessity for every educational system to be grounded in a critical educational philosophy that guides its progress. Any educational action, whether inside or outside universities, becomes aimless unless it is governed by a philosophical perspective (Alsalem, 2018). This is reinforced by Gaston Bachelard's assertion that science, in its experimental form, will be misunderstood and its results distorted if it is not grounded in a philosophical perspective that clarifies its objectives and goals (McGinn, 2015).

On the other hand, Faek (2021) defines intellectual alienation as a state of isolation or disconnection experienced by individuals in relation to the knowledge or intellectual environment surrounding them. This condition may arise when individuals feel incapable of influencing their intellectual or educational context, or when a gap exists between their personal beliefs and the prevailing cultural values in their society or educational environment. In university settings, Fahim and Masouleh (2012) indicate that intellectual alienation may emerge as a result of traditional teaching methods that primarily rely on rote memorization, without fostering critical thinking skills. It can also occur when academics feel unable to influence knowledge production or make independent decisions within their fields of specialization.

In a related context, social constructivism is considered one of the most prominent philosophical theories in education. It emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and collaborative activities. According to this theory, learning occurs within a social context rather than in individual isolation. Social constructivism advocates for the creation of interactive learning environments that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving. It is particularly relevant for universities aiming to promote critical thinking and active engagement with societal issues, as it contributes to fostering intellectual involvement and reducing intellectual alienation (Hassler, 1992).

Based on the above considerations, it is essential to root critical thinking in Arab universities and move away from the intellectual alienation experienced by academics. This requires revisiting the adopted educational philosophy and steering it toward enhancing critical thinking and active participation in societal issues (Costandi, Hamdan, Alareeni, & Hassan, 2019). Such grounding is necessary for the development of an academic environment capable of providing education based on deep understanding and independent analysis, rather than rote learning and repetition (Entwistle, 2017). Thus, the importance of this study lies in charting the path towards the formulation of critical intellectual strategies that contribute to transforming Arab universities from centers of rote learning, subjugation, indifference, and passivity into incubators for innovation and critical thinking, thereby enhancing the ability of academics to develop their intellectual skills and providing an educational environment that stimulates independent thinking.

### **Problem statement**

Educational philosophy is considered one of the fundamental elements that influence the design and direction of the educational system within Arab universities (Kunjumammed,

Tabash, & Pandurugan, 2024). Hillman and Baydoun (2018) argue that educational philosophy shapes critical intellectual trends by focusing on creativity, constructive dialogue, and the use of scientific thinking methods. However, ElAmine (2018) emphasizes that many Arab universities still suffer from significant gaps in the application of a clear and critical educational philosophy, contributing to the increasing phenomenon of intellectual alienation among academics. According to Abouchedid (2006), this intellectual alienation is reflected in the reliance on traditional teaching methods, which mostly depend on rote memorization, leading to a rigid culture that lacks critical thinking.

Thus, the researchers argue that the research gap lies in studying the impact of this type of intellectual alienation on the quality of education in Arab universities, and how rote learning methods affect the weakness of critical thinking among academics, which consequently affects students and the university community, reinforcing intellectual stagnation and cognitive closure. This stagnation negatively impacts the ability of Arab universities to equip students with the necessary knowledge to keep pace with rapid developments in various fields of knowledge and limits their ability to develop critical thinking skills needed to engage with societal and intellectual issues (Kunjumammed *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, the problem of the study lies in exploring the role of educational philosophy as a framework for enhancing critical thinking and reducing intellectual alienation, along with the open-ended question: “Where are Arab universities headed?”

### Theoretical framework

In light of the current situation in Arab universities, the issue of intellectual alienation among academics arises, as many of them rely on traditional teaching methods that are far removed from critical thinking and engagement with societal issues and intellectual developments (UNESCO, 2019). In this regard, Mazawi (2003) pointed out that academics in Arab universities often adhere to a rote-learning methodology and fail to encourage creativity and innovation, which limits independent thinking and promotes ignorance. Nasser and Abouchedid (2007) further noted that upon examining university life, one can observe that a significant portion of its educational methods relies on rote learning and cultural arbitrariness. Additionally, university professors impose their intellectual alienation on students, preventing them from expressing their opinions or deviating from absolute obedience.

As a result of this intellectual alienation, academics fail to adhere to the principles of modern educational philosophy, which emphasizes the establishment of critical thinking and the avoidance of superficial or closed intellectual practices (Skaik & Othman, 2015). Consequently, the absence of a clear educational philosophy leads to the entrenchment and reinforcement of a culture of memorization, which relies primarily on misguided concepts of intelligence and cognitive abilities, reducing education to processes of recall and memorization (Waterbury, 2018).

Educational practices that lack a clear educational philosophy operate aimlessly, as they do not foster critical thought (Bredo, 2012). In contrast, educational practices grounded in a clear and defined educational philosophy are able to achieve their goals and contribute to the preparation of academics who can embrace critical thinking and reject intellectual alienation (Mazawi, 2003). Abouchedid and Abdelnour (2015) argued that many university professors in Arab universities graduated from outdated, fragmented institutions that rely on rote learning, authority, and intellectual rigidity. Their education was grounded in traditional curricula and pedagogical approaches that may not fully reflect the advancements in contemporary educational theory. In this context, Almansour (2016) noted that some university professors in Arab universities may face challenges in developing their intellectual formation, which could impact their ability to meet the requirements of contemporary scientific research.

A study by Almansour and Kempner (2017) demonstrated that having a clear educational philosophy based on critical thought and rejecting intellectual alienation is a positive indicator

of intellectual and cultural awareness among academics and is a fundamental condition for their success in their work. In the absence of such a philosophy, academics will drift aimlessly, stumbling in their educational practices and thinking methods. [Faek \(2021\)](#) emphasized the necessity for academics to have a clear educational philosophy that enables them to motivate their students to think critically, face intellectual challenges, and analyze educational issues while proposing appropriate solutions based on sound philosophical foundations. [Jabali, Hamamra, and Ayyoub \(2024\)](#) noted the existence of rigid and inflexible intellectual trends among academics in Arab universities, based on studies showing their reliance on traditional methods that depend on rote learning and memorization rather than creativity and critical thinking. [Waterbury \(2018\)](#) asserted that an academic in Arab universities should critically examine intellectual alienation and intellectual destruction, using critical thinking as a guide and beacon to shape their ideas and direct their students, enabling them to understand why they teach, whom they teach, what they teach, and how they teach. As indicated by [Hofer, Nistor, and Scheibenzuber \(2021\)](#), teaching strategies and the use of technology in online education play a significant role in reducing intellectual alienation, thereby contributing to the enhancement of digital learning effectiveness in the future.

Drawing on Barthes' notions of boredom and lethargy alongside Sartre's concept of "bad faith," [Hamamra and Qabaha \(2023\)](#) explored the psychological distress faced by students during online education. Their findings indicated that many students turned to social media as a means of escaping the pressures associated with virtual learning, culminating in what they described as the emergence of an "exhausted and melancholic academic body." Similarly, [Hamamra, Qabaha, and Daragmeharagmeh](#) applied Foucauldian frameworks—incorporating ideas such as "docile bodies," the "panopticon," and "surveillance"—to analyze power dynamics and mechanisms of control within Palestinian universities' online education systems. This research revealed that online instruction often perpetuates traditional authoritarian teaching methods, which constrain creativity and reinforce rote memorization. These observations highlight a broader issue within numerous Arab universities, where the rapid shift to online education—largely driven by the COVID-19 pandemic—has inadvertently intensified intellectual alienation. Many institutions primarily converted conventional lectures into live or recorded digital sessions without reconfiguring pedagogical approaches to encourage active learning and meaningful engagement. Consequently, students frequently experienced isolation and a lack of opportunities for substantive interaction and critical dialogue. The studies by Hamamra and colleagues emphasize that without a foundational, well-articulated educational philosophy guiding online learning design and delivery, these methods risk deepening intellectual disengagement rather than alleviating it.

Given these challenges, there is a pressing need to revisit and reform digital teaching strategies in Arab higher education. Aligning these strategies with pedagogical principles that foster critical thinking, promote active participation, and support reflective learning is essential for mitigating intellectual alienation and enhancing the overall educational experience.

The persistence of rote learning methods in Arab higher education is attributed to several fundamental factors related to the cultural and organizational structures of educational institutions. [Qablan, Al-Ruz, Khasawneh, and Al-Omari \(2009\)](#) argue that deeply rooted educational traditions, which emphasize teacher authority and hierarchical respect, contribute to the entrenchment of rote teaching practices among both faculty members and students. The educational system in many Arab universities suffers from a lack of incentives to adopt more interactive teaching methods, focusing instead on memorization and conventional examinations, thereby reinforcing the continuation of rote learning. Furthermore, [Al-Jarf \(2005\)](#) noted that the inadequate pedagogical training of faculty members in curriculum design and modern teaching methods represents a significant obstacle to reforming traditional educational practices. The majority of faculty members in Arab universities have not received sufficient training in contemporary teaching skills, leading them to rely on conventional

approaches based on memorization and rote instruction, which hinders their ability to foster critical and creative thinking among students.

Thus, the importance of this study arises from the urgent need to reconsider the educational philosophy adopted within Arab universities, given the challenges these institutions face due to the widespread intellectual alienation and the weakening of critical thinking among academics (Al Hila, Al Shobaki, & Abu Naser, 2017). The study emphasizes the importance of building a clear and defined educational philosophy that is based on scientific research and engagement with societal and intellectual issues, which will contribute to overcoming traditional educational practices reliant on rote learning and memorization (Almansour, 2016). Therefore, the researchers argue that these combined factors lend special significance to this study, which is concerned with the necessity of developing a clear strategy for a well-defined educational philosophy, especially as we live at the dawn of the third millennium, amidst social, economic, political, and cultural changes. This requires Arab academics and universities to address these changes in a rational, conscious manner, with critical thinking underpinned by a clear educational philosophy.

### Research methodology

This study aimed to explore the role of educational philosophy as a framework to enhance critical thinking and reduce intellectual alienation in Arab higher education. To achieve this, a quantitative approach was employed, relying on the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data (Goertzen, 2017). This method was used to describe phenomena related to intellectual alienation and weak critical thinking within the Arab educational context and to analyze their causes and effects through a survey consisting of 10 Likert-scale closed-ended statements. Additionally, the survey included a single open-ended question: “Where are Arab universities headed?”, which was designed as part of the instrument to capture participants’ deeper perspectives. To address this open-ended question, a qualitative approach was adopted, focusing on the analysis of participants’ written and verbal responses (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). The interpretive perspective was also utilized to understand faculty members’ perceptions regarding the role of educational philosophy in reducing intellectual alienation and to explore the future direction of Arab universities (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

The researchers selected a purposive sample of 10 experts specialized in educational foundations working in Arab universities, all of whom are members of the Democratic Arab Center for Strategic, Political, and Economic Studies – Germany. This critical sample was chosen based on their expertise concerning barriers to the implementation of critical thinking (In Silverman, 2016). The sample included professors from five universities: Kuwait University, Cairo University, Tunisian University, Qatar University, and Damascus University. Interviews were conducted via Zoom following a semi-structured interview protocol originally developed in Arabic. The protocol comprised questions aimed at exploring participants’ experiences and perceptions related to education, educational philosophy, and intellectual alienation. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, allowing for an in-depth discussion. Participants were nominated by the Democratic Arab Center for their extensive and long-standing expertise in educational foundations, ensuring diverse and informed viewpoints. The researchers translated the interviews into English, rigorously reviewing the content to ensure semantic accuracy and clarity of the translated concepts.

The qualitative data underwent a systematic analysis process that included several stages: transcription of recorded interviews into written text, thorough review to extract main ideas and themes, followed by initial coding to identify significant text segments assigned with codes reflecting their meanings. These codes were then grouped into major categories based on semantic similarity, and recurring patterns among participants were analyzed. Finally, the results were linked to existing literature to provide a precise and coherent interpretation of the data. This integrative approach facilitated the combination of qualitative insights with quantitative survey findings, thereby enhancing the coherence of the study’s conclusions and

providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing Arab universities in promoting critical thinking and mitigating intellectual alienation (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

It is important to note that the inclusion of Kuwait and Qatar universities reflects a segment of the educational reality in the Gulf region. These two universities were selected due to the clear similarities between the educational and social contexts of Kuwait and Qatar and those of other Gulf countries. These institutions serve as representative models illustrating prevailing educational trends and practices in the region, characterized by comparable features in their educational systems and cultural orientations. Therefore, a study involving these universities can be considered a foundational step toward understanding the challenges and opportunities confronting higher education across other Gulf countries.

*Validity and reliability in the quantitative methodology*

The researchers ensured the fulfillment of validity and reliability standards to guarantee the trustworthiness and accuracy of the results.

*Validity*

In the quantitative methodology, the validity of the instrument was verified. Table 1 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients and their significance levels.

Table 1 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients between each questionnaire item and the total score. All values are statistically significant at the 0.000 level, indicating a strong correlation between the items and the total score. These findings demonstrate the internal consistency validity of the instrument, confirming its appropriateness for measuring the perceived role of educational philosophy in promoting critical thinking and reducing intellectual alienation.

*Reliability*

The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2 presents the reliability coefficients using Cronbach’s Alpha for the questionnaire employed in the study. The overall reliability coefficient was 0.943, indicating an exceptionally high level of internal consistency among the items. Furthermore, the Alpha coefficient for the specific dimension concerning the role of educational philosophy as a framework for enhancing critical thinking and reducing intellectual alienation was 0.755, which is statistically acceptable and reflects a good level of reliability.

**Table 1.** Pearson correlation coefficients and significance values for the questionnaire items

Questionnaire on the role of educational philosophy as a framework for enhancing critical thinking and reducing intellectual alienation		
Item	Correlation Coefficient	Sig
1	0.697**	0.000
2	0.585**	0.000
3	0.720**	0.000
4	0.640**	0.000
5	0.432**	0.000
6	0.641**	0.000
7	0.497**	0.000
8	0.622**	0.000
9	0.420**	0.000
10	0.422**	0.000

Source(s): Authors’ own work

**Table 2.** Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the overall questionnaire

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha
Questionnaire on the Role of Educational Philosophy as a Framework for Enhancing Critical Thinking and Reducing Intellectual Alienation	0.755
Overall Reliability	0.943

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

### *Validity and reliability in the qualitative methodology*

In the qualitative methodology, *credibility* (internal validity) was strengthened through *methodological triangulation*, which involved collecting data via interviews and applying coding, classification, and identification of recurring patterns. Additionally, *member checking* was used by presenting preliminary results to some participants to verify the alignment of interpretations with their perspectives, thereby enhancing the accuracy and authenticity of the interpretations.

To ensure *dependability* (reliability), all the steps of data collection and analysis were meticulously documented, allowing for external auditing by other researchers. Moreover, *peer debriefing* was applied by having an independent research colleague review the analytical procedures to verify their consistency and to eliminate potential interpretive bias.

### **Ethical considerations**

This study received ethical approval from the Democratic Arab Center for Strategic, Political, and Economic Studies - Germany and obtained official permission to conduct the research (2025/01/01/No: 4216). The researchers clarified the nature of the study to the participating faculty members, emphasizing their right to confidentiality and privacy. Participants signed consent forms before the interviews and were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to the participants, and no personal information that could identify them would be shared. All data will be stored in a secure location and will only be used for research purposes.

### **Discussion of findings**

#### *The role of educational philosophy as a framework for promoting critical thinking and reducing intellectual alienation*

Expert responses to the questionnaire regarding the role of educational philosophy as a framework for promoting critical thinking and reducing intellectual alienation in Arab universities were analyzed. Appropriate statistical methods were used to analyze the data. [Table 1](#) presents the results derived from this analysis.

[Table 3](#) shows that the weighted average of the experts' responses was 3.62, which falls within the "high" range. This indicates a general consensus among the experts regarding the clear problematic relationship between intellectual alienation and critical thinking in Arab universities. This suggests the lack of a clear and well-defined educational philosophy.

The researchers interpret this result by stating that the absence of open academic dialogues weakens the intellectual environment, contributing to the reinforcement of intellectual alienation and reducing the opportunities to foster critical thinking. Therefore, encouraging open dialogue is seen as an effective means to address this issue ([Costandi et al., 2019](#)). Furthermore, the researchers believe that the reliance on rote learning in higher education in the Arab world, rather than implementing modern teaching methods, promotes passive thinking and hinders the development of critical thinking skills. This results in the continued

**Table 3.** Analysis of expert responses

<i>Statement</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Level</i>
Fostering dialogue to promote critical thinking (Al-Deek & Al-Soud, 2024)	4.11	0.84	High
Universities prioritize repetition over creativity, restricting critical thinking (Jabali <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	3.95	0.93	High
Open discussion platforms promote uncensored critical expression (Rombout, Schuitema, & Volman, 2024)	3.84	1.11	High
Encouraging independent research fosters intellectual autonomy (Al-Deek & Al-Soud, 2024)	3.77	1.09	High
Diverse educational programs expand students' cultural and social horizons (Fahim & Masouleh, 2012)	3.62	0.36	High
Academic freedom is restricted due to rote learning, which hampers critical thinking (Al Hila <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	3.53	1.08	High
Higher education is limited to memorization rather than deep understanding (Hillman & Baydoun, 2018)	3.44	1.06	High
Professors' identities are shaped by an environment lacking in critical thinking (Jabali <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	3.31	0.18	High
Universities must be free spaces that support critical thinking and expression (Jabali <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	3.36	0.28	High
Policy reviews are essential to avoid practices that hinder critical thinking (Hillman & Baydoun, 2018)	3.28	0.31	High
<i>Weighted Average</i>	3.62	1.91	High

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

high levels of intellectual alienation due to the lack of motivation for critical thinking (Hillman & Baydoun, 2018).

The researchers also point out that the lack of support for independent scientific research reinforces traditional intellectual frameworks and weakens independent thinking, which acts as a barrier to the development of critical thinking. Additionally, the restrictions on academic freedom in some Arab universities institutionalize rote learning and hinder the growth of critical thinking, further exacerbating intellectual alienation (Al-Deek & Al-Soud, 2024).

Thus, the prevailing negative educational policies in Arab universities contribute to fostering a culture of intellectual dependency and weakening environments conducive to critical thinking (Al Hila *et al.*, 2017). This is attributed to the absence of a comprehensive educational philosophy guiding the teaching process and the heavy reliance of academics on rote memorization and copying, rather than promoting free discussions and supporting independent research. Moreover, the lack of open dialogue platforms and limited academic freedom significantly contribute to entrenching intellectual alienation and undermining critical thinking among both academics and students.

#### *Open question: where are Arab universities heading?*

The results of the interviews showed a consensus among the participants regarding the challenges faced by Arab universities, particularly in relation to rote learning, intellectual alienation, the absence of critical thinking, and the lack of a clear and well-defined educational philosophy. The participants provided various insights into these issues, emphasizing the necessity of implementing substantial reforms to ensure the progress of universities in the Arab world.

In this context, the researchers present a Table 4 outlining the sub-themes derived from the responses to the following open-ended question:

The extracted data highlight the focus on the future of Arab universities and their challenges, especially in areas such as rote learning, intellectual alienation, and the departure

**Table 4.** Main themes extracted from the open-ended question “where are Arab universities heading?”

Open-ended question	Where Are Arab Universities Heading?
Sub-themes	Intellectual Alienation Rote Learning and Memorization Absence of Critical Thinking Lack of a Clear Educational Philosophy Challenges

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work

from critical thinking (Rombout *et al.*, 2024). In this context, participant (Ahmad) stated, “I see that education in Arab universities relies heavily on rote learning, which reduces the ability of academics to engage in critical thinking.” Regarding the issue of the absence of critical thinking in universities, participant (Youssef) noted, “I believe that critical thinking is largely absent in Arab universities. Most students and academics prefer to avoid deep intellectual discussions due to fear of disagreement or cultural constraints, resulting in a stagnant academic environment.”

It is worth noting that the transmission of knowledge from academics to students without engaging them in processes of thinking and discussion is one of the most prominent issues facing Arab universities, as this approach reinforces a culture of passive reception instead of promoting critical thinking (Al-Deek & Al-Soud, 2024). In this regard, participant (Khaled) expressed, “Honestly, we need to rebuild an Arab academic identity that interacts with global contexts without losing its authenticity.” On the other hand, academics in Arab universities suffer from intellectual rigidity, as they continue to follow traditional teaching methodologies that are not suitable for the challenges of the modern age, limiting their ability to encourage critical thinking (Fahim & Masouleh, 2012). Participant (Mona) shared, “I see that teaching methods are often limited to traditional lecture formats, where academics are not encouraged to use innovative methods that stimulate thinking and analysis. Frankly, this limits our opportunities to develop our critical and creative skills.”

The absence of a clear and well-defined educational philosophy leads to intellectual rigidity (Al Hila *et al.*, 2017). In this context, participant (Mashal) remarked, “I think this intellectual rigidity results from the lack of a clear educational vision, and Arab universities lack teaching strategies that align with rapid social, cultural, and educational transformations.” Participant (Ibtihal) added, “I believe that academics are unable to adapt to the demands of the modern age and contemporary educational challenges, which enhance the state of intellectual alienation in the educational environment.” In the same vein, participant (Mohamed) affirmed, “Arab universities will reach a state of ignorance, as university curricula will remain detached from contemporary reality, weakening the ability of academics to motivate students to actively contribute to solving societal problems, thereby increasing the intellectual alienation gap.” Participant (Fatoun) emphasized, “This requires an intellectual and educational revolution, starting with curriculum reform and the development of teaching methods that encourage critical thinking, ultimately linking academic education to the needs of the local and global community.”

On the other hand, the educational system in most Arab universities focuses on memorization and repetition, hindering the development of critical thinking skills (Jabali *et al.*, 2024). In this context, participant (Saber) noted, “I think that academics in Arab universities may be experiencing intellectual alienation, as they avoid engaging in philosophical and critical dialogue, leading them to adopt traditional methods that focus on receiving information without questioning or exploring its validity and practical applications.” It is noteworthy that some academics lack a clear philosophical vision guiding their discussions and defining the course of thinking in scientific and educational fields (Hillman & Baydoun, 2018). Participant (Abdullah) observed, “I notice a lack of intellectual vision, which leads to the creation of a

fragile educational intellectual system, making Arab universities prone to declining educational quality.” Participant (Ahmad) also expressed, “I believe that if this trend continues, universities may reach a state of intellectual ignorance, further exacerbating the weakness of the educational system and strengthening intellectual alienation among individuals within these educational institutions.”

Based on the above considerations, the researchers believe that Arab universities, if they continue to follow traditional and rote teaching methods without developing critical and philosophical thinking, will face significant challenges in the future. Intellectual rigidity and the absence of an educational vision may lead to a state of intellectual ignorance, deepening intellectual alienation between academics and students. To avoid this crisis, critical thinking and philosophical interaction must be encouraged, along with the adoption of a clear educational philosophy that aligns with societal needs and keeps pace with global transformations.

The analysis indicates that higher education institutions in the Arab world encounter persistent structural and pedagogical barriers, most notably the prevailing reliance on rote memorization and the absence of a coherent educational philosophy. This mode of instruction hinders students’ capacity to develop higher-order thinking skills and reinforce patterns of intellectual disengagement. Evidence suggests that many university curricula emphasize information recall and mechanical repetition rather than promoting critical inquiry or independent reasoning. Consequently, students often demonstrate limited competence in analysis and evaluation. In addition, the academic culture in these institutions tends to marginalize open discussion and philosophical reflection, which further isolates both students and faculty from meaningful intellectual engagement. Interviews conducted as part of this study revealed that many academic staff members lack a guiding pedagogical framework, often defaulting to conventional, content-delivery models of instruction that fail to activate student participation or stimulate creativity.

### **Limitations**

This study encountered several methodological limitations that warrant acknowledgment. First, the sample size was limited, relying on only 10 specialized experts, which may affect the generalizability of the findings across a broader range of Arab universities. Second, the study utilized restricted data collection tools, including a questionnaire with 10 statements and a single open-ended question, potentially limiting the depth of analysis. Furthermore, these constraints might have influenced the diversity of perspectives gathered, especially considering the significant variation in educational and cultural environments among Arab universities. Despite these limitations, the study endeavored to provide a clear and well-defined perspective on the role of educational philosophy in enhancing critical thinking and reducing intellectual alienation in Arab higher education. The findings open extensive avenues for future research aimed at expanding sample sizes, employing multiple research instruments, and exploring additional dimensions of these issues across different educational contexts, thereby deepening our understanding of the educational philosophy’s role in advancing higher education in the region.

### **Conclusion**

In light of the previously discussed findings, it becomes evident that overcoming current educational obstacles in Arab universities necessitates more than procedural reforms; it calls for a fundamental philosophical shift. Institutions of higher learning must articulate a well-defined and cohesive educational framework that encourages critical inquiry, reflective practice, and open scholarly dialogue. Translating these insights into actionable steps involves the implementation of several key strategies aimed at fostering intellectual engagement and mitigating academic alienation:

- (1) Empower faculty members with greater autonomy over curriculum design and teaching methodologies to foster pedagogical innovation.
- (2) Cultivate a research culture that values academic freedom and minimizes administrative limitations to inspire original thinking.
- (3) Promote the use of dynamic teaching approaches, including Socratic questioning and problem-based learning (PBL), to enhance students' critical reasoning skills.
- (4) Incorporate philosophical and analytical subjects within academic programs to deepen intellectual engagement and self-directed learning.
- (5) Facilitate the exchange of scholarly ideas through departmental seminars, interfaculty conferences, and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- (6) Encourage cross-departmental partnerships that embrace cognitive diversity and foster integrative academic dialogue.
- (7) Establish institutional mechanisms that recognize and reward teaching practices proven to enhance critical thinking and diminish intellectual marginalization.

Moreover, future research is encouraged to assess the relative impact of virtual and face-to-face learning environments on the cultivation of critical thinking, particularly within the Arab educational context. Such investigations would offer valuable insights into designing adaptive and forward-looking pedagogical frameworks.

#### About the authors

Professor, Ali Watfa holds a PhD in Inclusive Education from the University of Caen, France, and is a Senior Lecturer at the College of Education, Kuwait University, where he teaches various undergraduate and postgraduate courses while supervising PhD, masters and honors students. His research interests encompass the sociology of education, educational sociology, philosophy of education, equal opportunities in education, e-learning, moral education, humanitarian asylum, human rights, and social challenges in education in the Arab world. In addition to his academic role, he serves as the Director of the Center for Critique and Enlightenment for Human Studies, which publishes research in Arabic in Kuwait. He has received several prestigious awards, including the Distinguished Researcher Award in the field of Arts and Humanities from Kuwait University, a Certificate of Appreciation from His Highness Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi in the United Arab Emirates, the Scientific Poster Award in Humanities from Kuwait University, and the Hamad Bin Rashid Award for Social Sciences in the UAE. Ali Watfa is the first author of this study.

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#### Acknowledgments

The authors thank all those who contributed to the completion of this study and extend their sincere appreciation to the participants for their valuable cooperation.

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