
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Education: A Personal Perspective and Reflections

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ABSTRACT

As Charlotte Brontë wrote about her studying life in Brussels in a novel called *The Professor*, much of what she wrote there happens to many students, and the reasons vary and may be multiple. The origin of these reasons may be social, behavioral, religious, political, ideological, etc., and these factors are undeniable. Here, I will review some of the things that happened to me based on the reality that I lived as a student in various educational stages.

KEYWORDS

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1. Introduction

1.1 Discussion

Charlotte Brontë wrote *The Professor* (published in 1857), where she tries to immortalize her experience there at a girls' school. Regarding unjustified bias, a teacher is a human being who makes mistakes in judgment, but the issue is if the bias is deliberate, this may have a negative impact on the student and may even affect the student in a way that reduces his enthusiasm and keenness to study. I personally encountered such teachers, and the bias was not justified for me in elementary school. At an early age, I remember a teacher who used to give priority to a student who followed his ethnicity. Moreover, he bragged about that student whenever he passed a wrong answer or a student made a mistake. This behavior created a barrier between that teacher and many students, and some of them no longer cared about his subject because they knew that the teacher would not give them the praise and appreciation they deserved even if they answered his questions correctly, just as it happened in the novel and the author portrayed it professionally.

Also, at that early stage of my studies, the largest number of teachers did not belong to the country of the students, which may cause confusion in understanding some matters, as well as the connotation of some words due to cultural differences. Some teachers used to call a neglected student "billy-goat"; is there a need for such a comparison? I am talking about education in the far past in some areas, especially remote areas. In my region, there were very few people who could read in the village where I lived, and those who could write were rare as well; their old relatives had taught them how to read and write. Back to my education, perhaps the most important issue at that time was the beating with a stick, the use of the hand to hit students, and the fear of students from their teachers to the point where it was difficult for a student to pay attention and focus without looking and thinking about these harsh treatments; some teachers were thuggish. Schools did not have electricity at that time, and students used to sit on rugs on the ground. Despite this old, gloomy educational environment, I do not doubt that there are children in our current world who do not find a school that they can join, regardless of the reason, and those children are victims of wars and disputes that no one pays any attention to. A journalist or reporter may refer to them in order to cover the space he needs in his report, simply no more than this reality. Don't be fooled, dear reader, by the so-called global media organizations and bodies.

As for the middle school, the suffering continued for me in the same way, as some teachers brought some of their children from their countries, and they used to brag about them and praise them as if we, citizens of the country, did not understand like them; this tendency had a negative impact. I do not forget the science subject, and the teacher was from a neighboring Arab country, so he praised his compatriots; such behavior prompted me not to pay attention to the subject, and I was keen to succeed in it only, and the material was presented in a way that was no longer attractive for me to learn, unlike the math teacher, who was keen to teach the students diligently and try to understand them. He was also from the same neighboring country; he was fair in treating his students.

In any case, at the end of middle school, the English teacher was a native of the country. He was severe and assigned students a lot of activities compared to previous teachers of the subject. He resorted to beating and severe punishment, which prompted students to try everything they could to avoid physical punishment and beating in the classroom. Such things were not written about, but they existed and should be studied and addressed. When you go to a school in our present time, it is enough for you to hear teachers shouting, so passers-by can recognize the school building by hearing the shouting from inside the building. All of this has a severe impact on many students, and the way students are treated is no secret to anyone.

It is necessary to comment on subjects that existed but without a clear goal and competent teachers, including social studies and art. Some teachers were asked to teach those subjects; they used to ask students to read from the book and force them to memorize a lot of information without understanding. You can imagine a geography teacher who used to hang up a map in front of the students and start talking about the borders of a country and asking students to answer, relying on what was on the map that was put in front of them. Then, he used to add something about the country he taught. On the other hand, students should memorize and differentiate among countries; they must memorize the information written about those countries in the assigned book. I remember another geography teacher who scolded me because I forgot a secondary port in an African country; I think I will not need that country at all, let alone its ports. I also remember another teacher who was known for his narcissism when I mixed up two capitals, and he commented disparagingly on my answer because he knew the impact of what he said on my performance. He knew that his subjects were not valued like math and English.

As for the PE and art subjects, even if the goal was to develop some individual abilities, what was the benefit of them if the teachers of these subjects were brought in to fill the void and nothing more? If you didn't bring a T-shirt of a certain color, you were deprived of playing with your colleagues despite the teacher's knowledge of the poverty of families and the lack of such clothes in remote areas. The teacher used to give his students the ball and ask them to go to the field, and as usual, big students would control everything, and weak ones could not do anything, and the teacher did not bother himself to attend with his students in most cases. As for the art class, it is another strange subject. The required drawing tools occupied the students' and their families' time. In the art class, the student was required to spend time drawing something determined by the teacher, who occupied his time with something of his choice. This was, of course, before the existence of cell phones, as I have noticed nowadays, which took most of the teachers' time.

I then moved to a religious high school and witnessed the exaggeration of many things in an unjustified way and the demand for literal memorization more than it was in elementary and middle schools. Of course, I cannot fail to emphasize here that memorization was the main goal of teaching at all stages. There was no space for analysis and criticism. In the religious school, teachers tried to indoctrinate students in a way that had a kind of coercion. Of course, I was forced to go to that school because it provided students with financial support. My family was poor, so my father enrolled me there in order to get the support. As a result of all this hectic, I had to enroll at a university with the same religious orientation and the same approach. It was the only choice to pursue my studies. Students were treated as if they didn't know anything. Whoever made a mistake would be punished with verbal and maybe physical cruelty; a student may not be allowed to sit down for a long period of time. As for raising the voice and shouting, it was noticeable at all schools.

At the university, I enrolled in the English language program, and the main goal of that department was to transfer religious sciences to the English language through people who studied religion in a specific way and to provide middle and high schools with teachers of a "disciplined" ideological orientation. I studied at the university, and in addition to English, I studied various religious subjects. It is known that religious subjects are generally based on memorization, even if there was no understanding, so I spent a lot of time reviewing and memorizing these materials. I lived in a strange situation, as some teachers of religion and university requirements were disdainful of English specialists and underestimated their specialization. Usually, those teachers who belonged to other colleges in the university boasted about the status of their colleges and the inferiority of the English language department. Strangely enough, the English language department was affiliated with the Faculty of Arabic. Other colleges often sent teachers with specific orientations and rigid opinions, which caused many obstacles for English students, and sometimes, the matter reached a challenge between the teacher and his student, as happened to me personally. The student had no choice but to acquiesce because he would not find anyone to do him justice.

One of the obstacles I faced was learning a new language and its culture, the English language, which requires great effort and focus. One of the unforgettable things was the multicultural teachers who graduated from multiple universities; some of them graduated from American universities, others from Britain, and a good number studied English in Egypt. One of the most memorable things was that I was doing two different opposite activities for two teachers who taught me at the same level because I knew what each of them wanted as for the teachers of religion and Arabic. They were stricter than it was expected, which negatively affected the understanding and mastery of these subjects. Students were keen to succeed in the end. As for the treatment in general, it was like that done by William in the novel *The Professor* by the writer Charlotte Brontë; the arrogance of teachers, their mockery, and belittlement of students were unmistakable. Some teachers were evaluating students based on their appearance in the class, not their performance. Race and region had a major role in the treatment; students might be classified according to the region they came from. No teacher was opposed or criticized; sometimes, it came to a challenge between the teacher and the student, as happened to me personally when I checked with my Arabic teacher on one of the syllabus questions, and he had no choice but to call me out by saying: 'It's too early for you to address such points and ideas.'

I lived in a dorm where treatment was harsh and cruel, treating the student as if he were a fool who did not know anything so he shouldn't make a mistake. The rooms were raided and searched. And magazines and recorders were not allowed inside the dorm. I remember a case of a student who was expelled from the housing for they found a magazine in his room, even though the student was studying in the Faculty of Media, and he needed magazines for his studies. What unforgettable days!

After graduating from university, I taught in the high school where I had attended as a student. There was no room for creativity, and one could not do anything, so I was like an outsider in an environment that did not pay any attention to English or those who taught it. Teachers, including those who taught me in the past, belittled my efforts to teach this language. As for the general mentor who used to visit the school on an annual basis, he was passive and listened more than he watched; what was noticed was his keenness to go along with what the school principal wanted.

After some time at that school, I decided to pursue my postgraduate studies, so I moved to the university where I graduated and was assigned to teach non-specialists. The halls were full of students, as they were almost amphitheatres; once, I was asked to teach a hall with 120 students; this fact led students to disregard the subject after they noticed the lack of interest in the subject by the department and its officials; otherwise, it would be necessary to limit the numbers in every class and direct a sufficient number of teachers to teach those students.

As for postgraduate studies, it was another matter. I studied in America, and some teachers felt and, in some situations, expressed racial superiority, and the truth to be said is that they were not the same. Well, some were constantly guiding me, and others did not want to. I tried to meet with one of them in his office several times in order to ensure guidance and ask about problems I was facing while taking his course. That literature teacher literally told me that literature is for the elite; apparently, he did not see me among them. Anyhow, my awareness of the existence of ideological, educational, and social differences led me to look for a way to bridge the gap between the culture to which I belonged and the culture and social life of people with whom I dealt and studied. Another professor used to criticize me all the time in a negative way and focused on the negative aspects. As for the doctoral stage, I got into some arguments with some of the teachers due to the nature of the subject I studied. I studied with a professor who was keen to ask me before the end of the time, enabling her to interrupt me if I continued my answer, and she focused on cultural differences because my culture is different from hers. Some professors even went so far as to pretend not to understand the points I used to raise. Some students did not get a chance to go. When I did not use the correct expression or term, a student may intervene and reformulate my idea and meet acceptance and praise, causing me to be disadvantaged.

Once, I was assigned to write a report about a class I was sent to, so I went to the hall in question, sat at the back of the class, observed what was happening carefully, and wrote down the minute details of what happened in the hall. Male and female students at the back of the hall were smiling, holding hands, exchanging glances, and not paying any attention to the teacher; all this behavior had an impact on students who sat at the back of the class and wanted to benefit from the lecture. The teacher continued her lecture without the slightest attempt to curb those annoying students. So, I wrote down what was happening in the hall with great care and accurate characterization. The result was very frustrating, and my evaluating teacher thought that I did not understand what was going on. I asked her to give me a second chance, and after criticism, guidance, and a warning that she would not allow me another chance, she agreed to give me one last chance to write a proper report. I knew what she wanted, and I no longer cared about what was going on in the hall as much as I cared about pleasing my teacher and getting a high grade. I wrote a report that had nothing to do with reality. The result was impressive, and my teacher praised the new 'false' report.

Finally, when I thought I could choose whoever I wanted to guide me while writing my thesis, I was wrong. After an unsuccessful experience, a colleague advised me to leave it up to the supervisor to choose whoever he wanted. I let the supervisor choose, and he chose a committee I didn't know about, but it went smoothly, and I didn't have any real issues. In fact, we should be clear about

the historical and social environment in which all these negative things happen so that others can learn from us and recognize and reject our mistakes and negative habits.

2. Conclusion

The behavior of William in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* is realistic and accurate and may happen to any student. The student must endure and try his best to coexist with his teachers in order to benefit and not be exposed to what brings him trouble in his studies. The novel had a great impact on me in writing about my educational career and recalling a lot of what happened to me, as it brought me back to classrooms and memories of the past in all its forms.

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