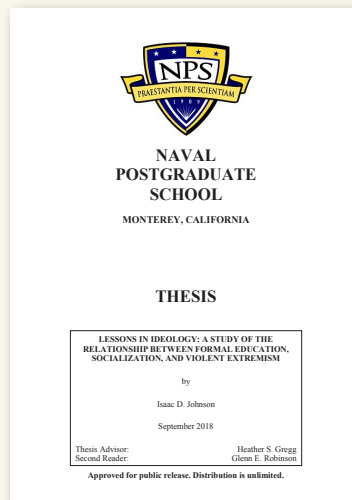




التحالف الإسلامي العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب

ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION

General Directorate of Planning and Coordination



Education is a Protective Shield Against Violent Extremism

Isaac D. Johnson

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Book Review

Education is a Protective Shield Against Violent Extremism

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the ability of digital machines and computers to carry out specific tasks similar to what smart organisms do, such as thinking and planning, learning and creating, adapting and interacting, improving procedures, extracting knowledge and forecasting large and varied digital data along with other operations that require precise mental processes.

Counterterrorism experts explain that there are two methods to prevent terrorist attacks: the first method is to protect infrastructure and individuals and implement security controls; the other method is to deprive terrorists of the ability to launch attacks, by arresting them before carrying out their plans, and combating extremism and terrorist recruitment.

The governments of the world have practically invested a lot of resources in combating violent extremism to curb the spread of terrorism locally and internationally. Given the increasingly growing spread of terrorist organizations of different faiths and ideologies, with their recruiting capabilities on the increase to attract more supporters and followers prompted by the communications revolution, we need today more than ever effective preventive measures and procedures to prevent the spread of violent extremism; formal education per se as a long-term plan is the most important need to prevent violent extremist ideologies from taking control of communities.

The research study is a master's dissertation submitted to the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. The study aims to investigate the potential of formal education to be adopted as a preventive measure in the form of a viable long-term plan to reduce violent extremism, especially in countries with a majority Muslim population. The study also seeks to investigate aspects of formal education that may help prevent students from adopting extremist and violent ideologies, identify potential challenges and obstacles that may occur when foreign countries promote specific types of formal education in Muslim countries.

The study applies Socialization Theory, as an analytical framework for three case studies of educational programs in Indonesia and Australia. As such, the study analyzes how these programs instill values and positive behavior among students. It provides a useful framework for analyzing the capabilities of educational institutions to generate large-scale social changes such as countering violent extremism.

A positive learning environment fosters dialogue among students, increases tolerance for different perspectives, promotes acceptance and appreciation of cultural, religious and social practices and reduces the likelihood of adopting extremist and violent ideologies.

Significance of the Study

The association between formal education and the possibility of reducing the adoption of extremist ideologies and actions is closely observed by many researchers. For example, Ratna Ghosh, professor

of education, argues that formal education can help remove students' vulnerabilities. This is what counter-extremism organizations are trying to invest in and to nip radicalization in the bud.

Claire Lorentzen, education manager at Generation Global, a project of The Tony Blair Faith Foundation UK, emphasizes that formal education provides a proactive approach to equipping youth with the knowledge and skills they need to reject violent extremism.

Ömer Taşpınar, professor of political science, explains that education offers opportunities for growth and prosperity, which undermine the efforts of violent extremist organizations that seek to recruit uneducated and poor young people. In 2015, UNESCO developed an educational program to combat violent extremism aimed at promoting appropriate, equitable and inclusive education to address conditions conducive and favorable to violent extremism. As a number of counter-extremism experts agree on the importance of education as an efficient tool to prevent extremism, identifying the most remarkable skills, knowledge and theories against violent extremism remains a mooted subject of debate.

Research Questions and Methodology

The research study aims to address the following research questions:

- ▶ What is the relationship between formal education and violent extremism? More specifically: under what circumstances does formal education prevent or incite violent extremism?

- ▶ How can various aspects of formal education, such as curricula, subjects and teaching methods, influence ad hoc plans designed to prevent violent extremism?
- ▶ To what extent do cultural factors facilitate or hinder preventive education programs?
- ▶ What is the best use of formal education programs in the United States to prevent violent extremism outside the country?

Given the conviction that poverty and scarcity of economic resources create an injustice and marginalization of individuals, many fall victims to violent extremism, while vocational skills training provides young people with economic opportunities and prevents them from resorting to extremist organizations.

The study seeks to address these questions through a case study approach, comparing educational programs, practices and levels of success in achieving their goals through education. The study uses a framework based on five social activities identified by sociologists Jeffrey Hadden and Theodore Long to help identify and analyze the specific social aspects of the selected educational programs:

- ▶ Showing the values of the group and its culture.
- ▶ Promoting commitment to such social values.
- ▶ Attracting new members.
- ▶ Ensuring the compliance of the group.
- ▶ Integrating members into a group.

Structure of the Study

The study falls into seven chapters, each of which is designed to discuss set goals relevant to the whole subject matter.

The first chapter sets the tone, structure and methodology of the study. **The second chapter** briefly outlines the historical context of Western and Islamic views on the objectives of education, and its associated implementation as a social factor. It defines Socialization Theory as the process by which individuals learn the social rules, ethics

and skills necessary to be productive members of society. As such a framework is suggested based on the process of socialization to help analyze each case study.

The third chapter outlines four major Western approaches to countering violent extremism through education: critical thinking skills, diversity, religious education and vocational training. It provides an analysis of the functions of these approaches in combating violent extremism, as follows:

Critical Thinking:

Countering violent extremism programs based on this approach aim to develop students' critical thinking skills to reject and refute the arguments that justify violent extremism. The critical thinking approach helps students to adopt moderation.

Diversity:

One viable method to address violent extremism is exposure to diversity. Well, acceptance of diversity is a key preventive tool against violent extremism. Ratna Ghosh, professor of education at McGill University, emphasizes that providing a positive learning environment fosters dialogue among students, increases tolerance for different perspectives, elevates them to accepting others, recognizes their cultural, religious, and social practices and reduces the likelihood of adopting extremist and violent ideologies.

The Socialization Theory provides a useful framework for analyzing the ability of educational institutions to make a widespread social change, which includes preventing the ideologies of violent extremism from controlling society.

Religious Education:

This approach is a key factor in countering and combating extremism. The dissemination of correct religious interpretations undermines extremist ideologies, the arguments of which are derived from false and flimsy religious interpretations. Religious education is enormously feasible in the fight against violent extremism and is much better than self-education.

Vocational Training:

One of the educational approaches in combating violent extremism is vocational training that provides individuals with access to employment and financial gain. Given the conviction that poverty and scarcity of economic resources create an injustice and marginalization of individuals, many fall victims to violent extremism, while vocational skills training provides young people with economic opportunities and prevents them from resorting to extremist organizations.

The chapter draws an analytic comparison between a set of curricula to identify students' commitment to social values that contribute to preventing violent extremism.

Educational programs which aim to combat violent extremism should focus on enhancing the impact of socialization rather than on abstract cognitive skills, so that students not only acquire knowledge, but commit themselves in a manner consistent with their goals.

The fourth chapter discusses educational activities in Salafi schools in Indonesia, and their associated effects on the Indonesian society, most remarkably the spread of Arabization.

The fifth chapter discusses the social characteristics of the Mohammedan schools (1912) in Indonesia and analyzes the social activities of such schools. The researcher emphasizes that the Mohammedan schools carry out all the five socialization activities to instill and impart commitment to tolerance among students.

The sixth chapter presents a case study of an educational program known as Beyond Bali, carried out in Australia as a model for Western educational initiatives to combat violent extremism. The researcher reveals that the program carries out many social activities; however, it avoids the socialization approach and instead cares for critical thinking to fight violent extremist ideologies.

The seventh chapter compares the three case studies: Salafi schools, Mohammedan schools, and the post-Bali educational program. The researcher concludes that the Salafi and Mohammedan schools implement all the five social activities; while the post-Bali education program actively displays

values and promotes commitment to such values at the expense of the other three activities: attracting new members, ensuring the commitment to the group and integrating members.

Findings

The study presents four main findings for the evaluation and development of education programs in combating violent extremism:

First: The programs designed to combat violent extremism need to be well assessed.

This study reveals that the Socialization Theory provides a useful framework for analyzing the ability of educational institutions to make a widespread social change, which includes preventing the ideologies of violent extremism from controlling society. The success of both Salafi and Mohammedan schools in Indonesia is, for example, associated with the strength of their social activities. It should be noted that although the two systems share religious beliefs, each one works on different goals and hence instills different social values among students. Both groups of schools provided all five socialization activities, and both of which are able to communicate socially and adhere to their values among students and influence the Indonesian society. Thus, the socialization framework may help experts expand their analytical research on the effectiveness of education programs in combating violent extremism.

Second: Socialization takes a long time, and time per se is an important factor affecting the social ability of the educational program. Likewise, the case studies adopted by the study show that socialization of a wide change through education takes a longer time. For example, Salafi schools have taken twenty-four years to reach their current level of influence across the Indonesian social and religious structures. Similarly, the Muhammeden schools have reached their high level of influence after more than a century of concerted efforts. These long-term timelines are unlike the short-term implementation of many programs to combat violent extremism in the Western education initiatives, including the Post-Bali Education Program, which seeks to instill a lasting commitment to fighting violent extremism only in 30 hours of instruction.

Third: Financial resources are not the only factor of influence. The case studies indicate that Salafi and Mohammedan schools have much greater support than their sponsors and supporters. They have also received organizational guidance, books and training that have, over time, provided much help to achieve their goals. The standardization of curricula in the Mohammedan schools is partly due to the constant intellectual guidance of the parent Muhammadan Organization, in addition to the cooperation of the school with all the government authorities. More importantly, most education programs to combat violent extremism seem to have neglected the social function of education in the interest of technical benefit.

Most education programs which aim to combat violent extremism have neglected the social function of education in favor of technical benefit. The attention of Western education programs to combat violent extremism through abstract learning and cognitive development has separated them from society and rendered them incapable of social and cultural change.

Fourth: Size does not necessarily mean impact; the case studies have shown that the ability of educational program to influence social structures at the national level does not necessarily depend on the number of schools. Not surprisingly, the Mohammedan school system, with more than 15,000 schools, has created enormous influence over Indonesia. However, at the same time, a network of only 50 Salafi schools changed the country's social, political and religious narrative, contributed to the Islamization of society and spread Arabization. On the contrary, the network of schools that implemented the Beyond Bali Educational Program, reaching more than 400 schools in Australia in 2018, did not have sufficient access to the community, to generate meaningful social change in the target community, compared to the success of the smaller Salafi educational system in the schools network.

As such, the influence does not require a large number of schools, and the Western governments do not necessarily need to create too many education programs to combat violent extremism

to achieve wide-ranging effects. The program can spend fewer yet adequate financial resources, while realizing the ambitious results. More importantly, limiting the size of the program in the first stages enables planners to be more focused on quality than quantity to ensure the success of the program as hoped and desired.

Recommendations

Given the power of Socialization Theory to shape identities and the commitment of group members to specific values, the research study produces three recommendations for integrating Socialization Theory into education to combat violent extremism:

- ▶ Practitioners in the private sector education and those involved in combating violent extremism should reconsider the integration of Socialization Theory into the current educational plans of programs to fully combat violent extremism. Planners should incorporate a selective set of social values that will shape the required social norms required to support the program. Likewise, practitioners of counter-violent extremism programs need to be keen to develop program content and enhance the impact of socialization rather than just abstract cognitive learning and skills. The method should be consistent with the program objectives.

Countering violent extremism programs that last only a few years may succeed with the current generation of students. Future students, however, will not be sufficiently qualified to resist violent extremism.

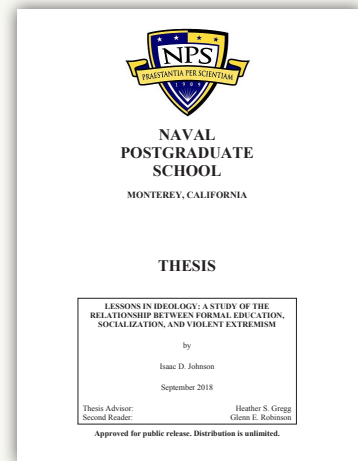
- ▶ The planners and policymakers of countering violent extremism program should save the time and resources required for countering violent extremism education programs to achieve long-lasting results. This includes teacher preparation, highly coordinated content and subject matter to convey a range of social and behavioral values in support of such program objectives. Likewise, planners and policymakers need to think of programs to combat violent extremism to be better implemented for many decades to come.

► It is important to note that schools are not the only source of influence on students; families, social clubs, religious institutions and many other organizations all play a vital role and have a social impact on the student environment. As such, the formation of programs to combat violent

extremism should be consistent with social and cultural activities, beliefs, social attitudes, and the expectations of the target society. This enhances social impact and also helps to preserve the program as part of the traditions and conventions of education in the community.

**LESSONS IN IDEOLOGY:
A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
FORMAL EDUCATION, SOCIALIZATION AND
VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, California, Usa







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