



Iranian clerics teaching to schoolboys

Clerics Taking Over Iranian Schools With Hardliner Support

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Recruitment of clerics as teachers and new legislation allowing mosques to run private schools has fueled concerns about the future of Iran's educational system.

In a statement published on its Telegram channel on January 18, the Coordination Council of Iranian Teachers' Unions strongly criticized the employment of clerics as teachers by the education ministry.

The statement alleged that this meant "purging schools" from expert teaching staff and replacing them with clerics and seminary students who have no expertise in child education, or a standard education. The teachers' union called the decision a "reactionary move" that resurrects the concept of schools run by the clergy (maktab), which were abolished nearly a hundred years ago. **The ministry has denied a nationwide purge is underway.**

However, hardliners controlling the parliament and the executive branch have been also purging university faculties and **openly speak about "purification."**

The powerful Shiite clergy in Iran lost its monopoly on education and the justice system with the establishment of modern courts and schools by the founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty, Reza Shah, in the 1920s who fundamentally curbed their powers.

The council also warned Iranian families about the consequences of "the systematic presence of clergy in schools and its dangers to children."



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi among a group of schoolgirls in Tehran (September 2022)

The ministry has expelled scores of teachers and forced many others to retire early for supporting last year's protests, instead hiring 3,500 clerics and seminarians as teachers to fill some of the tens of thousands of new positions it has created to overcome the **shortage of teaching staff**.

Ali Farhadi, the ministry's spokesman, has claimed that the ministry only became aware of the recruitment after the fact. "We, too, found out that these individuals had been accepted [for the positions] after the examinations [of candidates for teaching positions] were held," he claimed. However, regime-controlled media have been talking about the subject for months, saying that clerics should become schoolteachers.

The clergy have been running unofficial schools for over a decade but last week the establishment of "mosque-centered schools" was given official status when lawmakers hastily approved a proposal to oblige the ministry of education to issue licenses to persons and legal entities to establish private schools attached to mosques if building requirements were met.

In a report entitled "Autonomous Schools" Monday, the reformist Ham-Mihan newspaper said there are around 150 so-called "mosque-centered" schools with around 7,000 students now that operate unofficially.

An administrator of a "mosque-centered" school for girls told Ham-Mihan that their curriculum included homemaking, sewing, cooking and traditional medicine as well as computers and mobile photography to their students. They also selected and screened their own teachers, he said, but could not issue any kind of certificates under the current circumstances.

Former Minister of Education Mohsen Haji Mirzaei told Ham-Mihan that mosque-centered schools are "a rebellion against the official educational system" and warned that they could "delegitimize" the formal education system and foster extremist beliefs.

Speaking to the conservative Farhikhtegan newspaper, Rezvan Hakimzadeh, former Deputy Minister of Education, also expressed concern about the curriculum of these schools. “Who will supervise how the curriculum is replaced if the official one is to be disregarded? Who will approve of its suitability?” he asked.

Other critics **such as another former education minister, Ali-Asghar Fani**, have warned that the education ministry may fail to supervise these schools due to the political influence of the imams of the mosques to which they are attached.

Lawmakers supporting the legislation such as Ahmad-Hossein Fallahi, spokesman of the Education, Research and Technology committee, argue that schools attached to mosques can answer the dire need for more educational facilities, but claim the education ministry will have control over the curriculum of these schools.

An organization calling itself ‘Mosque-Centered Schools Headquarters’, **says on its website** that those behind the drive aim to “fulfil the heavy task of training and preparing an efficient revolutionary workforce” to meet the need for “human resources worthy of the Islamic Revolution.”

The organization’s secretary, Hossein-Ali Deylam, told Ham-Mihan that establishment of schools attached to mosques started in the religious city of Mashhad twelve years ago. He claimed that the number of these schools has grown since then due to the great demand from families who want their children to study in these schools, most of which are at the primary level.

“From the start, these schools have not been under the supervision of education ministry ... Each school determines its tuition fees based on its activities and specifications,” he said without elaboration on their curriculum.

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