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Educational Rationality and Cultural Revival in Abdelmadjid Meziane

العقلانية التربوية والانبعاث الحضاري عند عبد المجيد مزيان

* Menad Safia صافية مناد
Safi_a_488@hotmail.fr

Philosophy

University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed / Algeria- Human Sciences Research Unit for Philosophical Social and Humanistic Studies

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Abstract

This article analyzes the intellectual and social conditions that shaped the thought of the Algerian thinker Abdelmadjid Meziane (1926–2001), with particular attention to his concept of cultural revival. Using a historical-analytical approach, it traces Meziane's trajectory from his early formation in Tlemcen to his engagement in the Algerian revolution and his later academic training in philosophy and sociology. The analysis argues that Meziane's project constitutes an organic synthesis between Islamic intellectual heritage, especially the Khaldunian perspective he mobilizes, and a revolutionary modern consciousness forged through national experience. This synthesis underpins a program of cultural renewal grounded in intercivilizational dialogue and a critical rereading of heritage as necessary conditions for contemporary cultural advancement.

Keywords: cultural revival, intellectual background, social background, Algerian philosophy, dialogue between civilisations

ملخص:

يهدف هذا المقال إلى تحليل الخلفية الفكرية والاجتماعية التي أسهمت في تشكيل المشروع الفكري للمفكر الجزائري عبد المجيد مزيان (1926-2001)، مع التركيز على مفهومه المركزي "الانبعاث الحضاري". تعتمد

* Corresponding author: Safi_a_488@hotmail.fr

الدراسة على المنهج التحليلي التاريخي لتتبع مسار مزيان من النشأة في تلمسان إلى الانخراط في الثورة الجزائرية، وصولاً إلى التكوين الأكاديمي المتخصص في الفلسفة وعلم الاجتماع. تخلص الدراسة إلى أن فكر مزيان يمثل توليفاً عضوياً بين التراث الإسلامي العميق، المتمثل في المنهج الخلدوني الذي تبناه، والوعي الحداثي الثوري الذي اكتسبه من تجربته الوطنية. هذا التوليف أنتج مشروعاً فكرياً متكاملاً يرتكز على حوار الحضارات وتجديد قراءة التراث كشرطين أساسيين للنهوض الحضاري المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الانبعاث الحضاري، الخلفية الفكرية، الخلفية الاجتماعية، الفلسفة الجزائرية، حوار الحضارات.

Introduction:

Abdelmadjid Meziane (1926–2001) is one of the most prominent Algerian and Arab thinkers who contributed to contemporary philosophical and social thought, particularly with regard to questions of identity, heritage, modernity, and education. His intellectual trajectory was shaped by a rich combination of social, political, and academic experiences, including his upbringing in Tlemcen, his involvement in the Algerian liberation struggle, and his academic training in philosophy and sociology. This plurality of experiences deeply influenced his intellectual project and granted it a distinctive critical and civilizational dimension.

Within this broader intellectual framework, the issue of educational rationality occupies a central place in Meziane's thought. At a time when educational systems are increasingly dominated by technical, instrumental, and standardized models, Meziane sought to develop a critical conception of rationality that transcends purely functional understandings of education. For him, education is not merely a mechanism for transmitting knowledge or adapting individuals to market demands, but a formative process aimed at constructing critical awareness, ethical responsibility, and social engagement.

Meziane's conception of educational rationality is grounded in a critical philosophical background that combines classical rational heritage, particularly the Khaldunian tradition, with insights from modern critical philosophy. He strongly criticizes instrumental rationality, which reduces reason to efficiency and control, and instead advocates a critical rationality that restores the interpretive, ethical, and emancipatory dimensions of education. From this perspective, educational rationality becomes inseparable from questions of values, meaning, and the construction of the critical self.

The importance of this study lies in its attempt to analyze Meziane's concept of educational rationality by examining its philosophical foundations, its manifestations within the

educational process, and its relevance to the challenges facing contemporary Arab educational systems. In a context marked by educational reforms that often prioritize technical efficiency over human and cultural formation, revisiting Meziane's thought offers a critical framework for rethinking the aims and functions of education.

Research Problem

This article seeks to examine the concept of educational rationality in the thought of Abdelmadjid Meziane as a critical philosophical project that challenges the dominance of instrumental rationality in contemporary educational systems. The central research question guiding this study is:

_To what extent does Meziane's conception of educational rationality constitute a critical alternative to instrumental rationality within the Arab educational context?

This main question can be divided into the following sub-questions:

_1What are the philosophical foundations of educational rationality in Meziane's thought?

_2How is this rationality manifested in the educational process and in the construction of the critical self?

_3What are the limits and possibilities of this project in light of the structural challenges facing Arab educational systems?

Methodology; This study adopts a critical analytical approach in order to examine the concept of educational rationality in Abdelmadjid Meziane's thought. The analysis is based primarily on Meziane's major philosophical and educational writings, with reference to selected works in critical philosophy and critical pedagogy. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive comparative study, but rather to highlight the conceptual foundations, educational implications, and critical dimensions of Meziane's project within its social and cultural context.

First: The philosophical foundations of educational rationality according to Abdelmajid Meziane:

Educational rationality according to Abdelmajid Meziane is based on a complex critical philosophical background that combines classical rational heritage, contemporary critical philosophy, and modern educational philosophy. Meziane does not start from an abstract conception of reason, but rather from a reason rooted in social and cultural reality, defined

by specific historical and epistemological conditions. In this context, reason is not a fixed essence or a neutral mental faculty, but rather a critical practice that is shaped through interaction with reality and its epistemological and value-related issues (Meziane, 2006, pp 22–26).

Meziane clearly distinguishes between instrumental rationality and critical rationality. Instrumental rationality, which has dominated modern educational systems, reduces the mind to its functional dimension and makes it a tool for achieving efficiency, control and adaptation to the requirements of the market and bureaucracy. This reduction empties the educational process of its human dimension and transforms education into mere technical training aimed at producing employable skills, without concern for building critical awareness or moral sensibility in learners (Mezian, 2006, pp. 31–36).

In contrast, Mezian defends a critical rationality that sees the mind as capable of understanding, interpretation and questioning. The critical mind is not content with absorbing ready-made knowledge, but works to deconstruct it, understand the conditions of its production, and reveal its ideological and social stakes. This conception intersects with the Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental reason, particularly in the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, who showed how reason, when reduced to its instrumental dimension, can become an instrument of domination rather than a means of liberation (Horkheimer, 1974, pp14–21).

Mezian further emphasizes that educational rationality cannot be conceived as an abstract universal model applied independently of cultural and civilizational contexts. Importing ready-made educational models without critically examining their historical and epistemological conditions leads to educational and cognitive alienation. For this reason, he calls for an open educational rationality capable of engaging in dialogue with universal values, while remaining at the same time aware of the specificities and challenges of Arab society, such as issues of identity, language, modernity, and democracy (Mezian, 2008, pp. 41–47).

In this sense, educational rationality in Mezian's thought constitutes an integrated philosophical project that does not merely aim at reforming education from within, but rather seeks to rethink the function of education and its role in building both the human being and society.

Educational rationality in the thought of Abdelmajid Mazyan is closely linked to the question of values and meaning, as he rejects any separation between reason and ethical norms in educational action. Reason, in his conception, does not operate within a value-free vacuum; rather, it is always situated within a normative horizon that guides its choices and determines its outcomes. From this perspective, Mezian criticizes educational approaches that claim value neutrality, considering such neutrality to be nothing more than an epistemological illusion that conceals unacknowledged ideological choices. Education, regardless of its claims to objectivity, remains a value-oriented practice, whether guided by humanistic emancipatory values or by utilitarian and technical ones (Mezian, 2006, pp. 48–52).

Mezian further asserts that critical educational rationality requires awareness of these value-laden backgrounds and the effort to make them objects of reflection and questioning within the educational process itself. Rather than imposing values implicitly or authoritatively, they should be integrated into educational debate and transformed into subjects of dialogue and critical thinking. In this way, education becomes a space for forming a rational mind capable of balancing knowledge and responsibility, ethical understanding and social commitment. This conception intersects with Max Horkheimer's critique of instrumental reason, which demonstrated that separating reason from values leads to the dominance of efficiency and control rather than emancipation and human rationality (Horkheimer, 1974, pp. 23–28).

Mezian also argues that restoring the value dimension within educational rationality constitutes a fundamental condition for overcoming the crisis of meaning affecting contemporary educational systems. Education that focuses solely on technical competence, without questioning its human and social purposes, produces individuals who are professionally qualified but ethically and critically fragile. Hence, he advocates an integrated educational rationality that makes human values an inseparable part of the project of building reason, rather than treating them as external additions or parallel moral discourses (Mezian, 2008, pp. 52–56).

'Mezian s writings further demonstrate that educational rationality cannot be understood apart from the question of the epistemological legitimacy of educational knowledge itself. Education, in his view, is not a purely applied field deriving its legitimacy from experimental sciences or technical efficiency; rather, it is a complex field in which the cognitive intersects

with the normative, and the descriptive with the prescriptive. Accordingly, he criticizes positivist tendencies that sought to subject education to strict measurement and experimentation, arguing that this approach marginalized the interpretive and critical dimensions of educational practice and transformed schools into spaces for reproducing standardized patterns of thought and behavior (Mezian, 2006, pp. 52–56).

On the basis of this critique, Mezian calls for restoring the philosophical dimension of educational thinking as a prerequisite for establishing a critical rationality capable of questioning the epistemological foundations and social purposes of education. Educational rationality, in this sense, does not mean accumulating knowledge or improving technical performance; rather, it primarily signifies the capacity to reflect on the meaning of knowledge, its social function, and its limits and possibilities. This perspective converges with Jürgen Habermas's view, which links rationality to normativity, emphasizing that any rational practice loses its critical dimension when detached from questions of values and legitimacy (Habermas, 1984, pp. 8–12).

Mezian also insists that educational rationality presupposes a critical awareness of the history of educational ideas themselves, since pedagogical models are not neutral but are products of specific historical and ideological contexts. Consequently, uncritical replication of Western educational models, without examining the conditions of their emergence, results in a form of cognitive dependency that empties educational reason of its creative and critical potential. He therefore stresses the necessity of constructing an open Arab educational rationality—one that neither breaks with universal thought nor dissolves into it, but rather engages in critical dialogue with it (Mezian, 2008, pp. 49–53).

From this perspective, educational rationality in Meziane's thought cannot be reduced to a technical or procedural framework. Rather, it constitutes a comprehensive philosophical position that redefines the very meaning of reason in education. Reason, as Meziane conceives it, is not an abstract or neutral faculty but a historically and socially situated practice shaped by cultural, ethical, and epistemological conditions.

This conception allows educational rationality to function as a critical tool capable of unveiling the ideological assumptions underlying dominant educational models. By restoring the link between reason, values, and social responsibility, Meziane's project seeks to overcome the reduction of education to efficiency and performance, and to reassert its role in the formation of autonomous, reflective, and critically engaged individuals.

Secondly: Manifestations of Educational Rationality in the Educational Process

Educational rationality in Abdelmajid Mazyan's thought is manifested in his conception of the educational process as a communicative and interactive act rather than a linear transmission of knowledge from teacher to learner. Education, in this framework, should aim at developing capacities for understanding, critique, and dialogue, instead of merely accumulating information or training learners to comply with predefined standards (Mezian, 2006, pp. 57–60).

Mezian considers the curriculum to be one of the most significant sites where educational rationality is embodied. When constructed according to a rigid technical logic, the curriculum becomes an instrument of cognitive and ideological control, excluding open-ended questions and critical thinking. By contrast, a critical rational curriculum must be flexible, open to interpretation, and responsive to social and cultural realities, enabling learners to connect theoretical knowledge with lived experience (Mezian, 2008, pp. 66–69).

He also assigns particular importance to the role of the teacher in realizing educational rationality within the classroom. The teacher, in his view, is not a neutral transmitter of knowledge, but a pedagogical agent responsible for guiding learners toward independent thinking, questioning, and the creation of dialogical spaces that allow for multiple perspectives. This role requires philosophical and pedagogical training that enables teachers to transcend rote methods and adopt participatory teaching strategies based on dialogue and discussion (Freire, 1970/2005, pp. 72–75).

In this regard, Mezian's conception converges with critical pedagogy, which holds that education cannot be neutral but is always conditioned by cognitive and value-based choices. Educational rationality, as articulated by Mazyan, seeks to enable learners to become aware of these conditions and to critically engage with them rather than unconsciously submitting to them. Consequently, the educational process becomes a space for constructing rational and active subjectivity rather than merely reproducing the existing order.

Educational rationality in Mezian's work further deepens the critique of the relationship between reason and knowledge, rejecting any conception that separates knowledge from its social and historical conditions of production. Educational knowledge, in his view, is not a ready-made given or an absolute truth, but a human construction subject to questioning,

revision, and continuous critique. Treating knowledge as final certainty within educational spaces reinforces closed consciousness and limits creativity and free thinking among learners (Mezian, 2006, pp. 53–56).

Accordingly, educational rationality becomes a critical practice that restores the interpretive dimension of knowledge, whereby reason is not confined to literal understanding of texts and content but extends to interpretation and contextualization. This perspective aligns with Paul Ricœur's emphasis on the interpretive nature of reason, which is realized through meaning-making in relation to self and world rather than through purely technical logic (Ricœur, 1986, pp. 121–126)

Accordingly, educational rationality in Mezian's thought is grounded in a critical epistemological conception that conceives education as a space for the production of meaning rather than merely a channel for the transmission of information. It assigns to reason an emancipatory role that goes beyond simple adaptation to reality, toward understanding it and transforming it. Thus, educational rationality becomes a fundamental condition for building an educational consciousness capable of confronting the challenges of modernity, without falling into the trap of instrumental rationality or dogmatic closure.

Educational rationality in the thought of Abdelmadjid Meziyan also highlights the necessity of rethinking the role of the teacher within the educational process. It is not possible to embody critical rationality as long as the teacher remains a mere transmitter of knowledge or an automatic executor of curricula. In Mezian's conception, the teacher is an educational agent and a critical intellectual whose role is to guide learners toward understanding, analysis, and questioning rather than memorization and repetition. Consequently, the teacher's true competence is linked to their ability to create problematic learning situations that stimulate thinking and encourage learners to construct their knowledge autonomously within a dialogical and participatory framework (Mezian, 2006, pp. 70–74).

This conception is closely connected to Mezian's critique of what he calls "false pedagogical neutrality," whereby education is presented as a technical activity devoid of values and intellectual choices. Every educational practice, in his view, necessarily involves a specific conception of the human being, knowledge, and society, whether this is explicitly stated or not. Educational rationality therefore requires educational actors to become aware of these choices and assume their ethical and epistemological responsibility, rather than hiding behind technical procedures or administrative instructions (Mezian, 2008, pp. 72–76). In

this sense, educational rationality is not confined to abstract theoretical discourse but finds concrete expression in pedagogical practice. Curriculum design, teaching methods, classroom interaction, and evaluation mechanisms all reflect the dominant form of rationality within the educational system. When these elements are governed by rigid standardization and technical efficiency, education reproduces instrumental rationality.

By contrast, a critical educational rationality promotes dialogue, interpretive understanding, and learner participation. It encourages pedagogical practices that transform the classroom into a space of inquiry and meaning-making rather than passive reception. Education thus becomes a communicative process oriented toward understanding and critical reflection, rather than mere adaptation to predefined norms.

Mezian further emphasizes that the realization of educational rationality within schools presupposes overcoming the traditional separation between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Knowledge that is not connected to its social contexts and not tested in reality remains fragmented and incapable of contributing to the construction of critical consciousness. From this perspective, he calls for a pedagogy that links education to social issues and trains learners to analyze the social and cultural phenomena they experience, thereby strengthening their sense of responsibility and conscious engagement in public life (Mezian, 2006, pp. 76–80).

In addition, Mezian asserts that educational rationality is not achieved merely at the level of discourse or theoretical conception, but is concretely embodied in the organization of educational practice within institutions. The management of school time, the organization of educational space, and the patterns of communication among educational actors all reflect the dominant form of rationality. When the educational system is built upon rigid control and forced standardization of learning rhythms, it reproduces a technical rationality that subjects learners to a logic of compliance rather than fostering intellectual autonomy (Mezian, 2008, pp. 71–74).

Mezian argues that critical educational rationality requires restoring the educational experience as a meaningful human experience rather than a procedural pathway governed solely by curricula and examinations. Learning, in this perspective, should enable learners to build a conscious relationship with knowledge based on understanding, interpretation, and

contextualization within social and cultural frameworks. This necessitates transcending the traditional divide between theoretical and practical knowledge and integrating learning into real-life problems that stimulate thinking and analysis rather than memorization and repetition (Mezian, 2006, pp. 60–64).

He further insists on redefining the teacher's role, which should not be reduced to a mere transmitter of content but rather conceived as a cognitive mediator and pedagogical facilitator who guides thinking, stimulates discussion, and contributes to the construction of shared meaning within the classroom. This conception resonates with Paulo Freire's view that dialogical education is the fundamental condition for the liberation of consciousness, whereas banking education produces a dependent consciousness incapable of action (Freire, 2005, pp. 79–83).

Thus, educational rationality in' Mezian s thought becomes a daily practice manifested in the details of the educational process rather than a purely abstract theoretical slogan. Its real stakes lie in its capacity to transform the school into a space for thinking, dialogue, and the construction of the rational self.

Third: Educational Rationality and the Construction of the Critical Self

Mezian's project of educational rationality is closely linked to the construction of the critical self, which he considers the ultimate goal of any humane educational endeavor. Education, in his view, should not be confined to adapting individuals to existing social realities, but should enable them to understand, question, and seek to transform those realities. Educational rationality thus becomes an instrument for the liberation of consciousness rather than a mechanism for behavioral regulation or the production of functional competencies (Mezian, 2006, pp. 79–83).

The construction of the critical self represents the ultimate horizon of educational rationality in Meziane's thought. Education, in this framework, is not intended to produce compliant subjects adapted to existing social structures, but reflective individuals capable of understanding the conditions of their existence and questioning established forms of knowledge and authority.

Critical educational rationality thus functions as a process of intellectual emancipation, enabling learners to distinguish between knowledge and ideology, opinion and truth. Through dialogue, interpretation, and ethical reflection, education contributes to the

formation of a self that is not only cognitively competent but also morally responsible and socially engaged.

Mezian strongly criticizes educational models based on rote learning and the reproduction of ready-made knowledge, arguing that they contribute to the formation of a submissive self lacking critical capacity and intellectual independence. Such education produces individuals unable to grasp the conditions of knowledge production or to distinguish between opinion and truth, and between knowledge and ideology. In contrast, critical educational rationality aims to form a conscious self capable of reflective thinking, taking positions, and assuming ethical and social responsibility (Mezian, 2006, pp. 85–89).

He further emphasizes that constructing the critical self requires integrating the axiological dimension into the educational process, since reason does not operate independently of values. Educational rationality does not imply value neutrality but rather awareness of the values that frame knowledge and practice, such as freedom, justice, and human dignity. In this respect Mezian,'s perspective converges with Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative rationality, which conceives reason as embodied in dialogical action based on mutual recognition and rational argumentation (Habermas, 1984, pp. 285–290).

Mezian thus links educational rationality directly to the project of constructing the critical self, asserting that the ultimate aim of education is not passive social integration but empowering learners with tools for understanding, analysis, and questioning. Rationality, in its educational dimension, is not measured by the quantity of acquired knowledge but by the learner's capacity for independent thinking, judgment, and ethical engagement with reality (Mezian, 2006, pp. 81–85).

Fourth: The Limits and Horizons of Educational Rationality in the Arab Context

Mezian attributes a clear political and ethical dimension to educational rationality by linking it to education for citizenship and democracy. Education, in his view, cannot be detached from societal stakes or from questions of political participation and the public sphere. There can be no meaningful educational rationality that does not contribute to forming citizens capable of dialogue, participation, and respect for plurality and difference (Mezian, 2008, pp. 91–95).

He argues that educational systems that marginalize critical thinking produce individuals who are easily controlled but incapable of active citizenship. Democracy, at its core, is not merely a political system but a culture and a daily practice that can only be established through rational education based on dialogue, respect for others' opinions, and learning to live with difference. The school thus becomes a primary space for practicing democracy rather than merely an institution for transmitting knowledge (Mezian, 2008, pp. 98–102).

Despite the emancipatory and critical nature of Mezian's conception of educational rationality, its implementation in the Arab educational context faces significant structural challenges. Many educational systems remain dominated by examination-oriented logic, quantitative evaluation, and administrative control, which severely limit opportunities for critical thinking and dialogue within schools and universities (Mezian, 2008, pp. 103–107).

Moreover, the dominance of technical approaches to educational reform—often imported as ready-made models—leads to the marginalization of the philosophical and value-based dimensions of education. Reform is frequently reduced to curriculum updates or technological integration without questioning the epistemological and cultural foundations of educational practice. According to Meziyan, this situation empties education of its human dimension and reduces rationality to a technical slogan (Mezian, 2008, pp. 112–116).

Despite the critical and emancipatory potential of Meziane's conception of educational rationality, its implementation within the Arab educational context remains constrained by structural, institutional, and political factors. Educational systems are often dominated by examination-oriented logics, administrative control, and standardized curricula, which leave little room for dialogue and critical thinking.

Moreover, educational reforms frequently adopt imported technical models without sufficient consideration of their cultural and epistemological foundations. This situation risks reducing educational rationality to a rhetorical slogan rather than a transformative practice. Nevertheless, these limitations do not undermine the relevance of Meziane's project; rather, they highlight the urgency of rethinking education beyond technical reform toward a genuinely humanistic and critical horizon.

Nevertheless, Mezian insists that these challenges do not negate the relevance of educational rationality but rather underscore its urgent necessity. Educational rationality offers a critical horizon for reorienting educational policies toward human formation rather than mere workforce preparation. Hence, he calls for restoring philosophy, critical thinking,

and value education within schools and universities as essential conditions for any emancipatory educational project in the Arab world.

On this basis, educational rationality in Meziane's thought emerges as both a critical diagnosis of contemporary educational crises and a normative horizon for reorienting education toward human formation, critical awareness, and social responsibility.

Conclusion:

This study has demonstrated that educational rationality in Abdelmadjid Meziane's thought represents a coherent and conceptually grounded alternative to instrumental rationality in contemporary education. The findings confirm that Meziane's project is based on a critical understanding of reason that integrates ethical values, social responsibility, and historical consciousness, rather than reducing education to technical efficiency or functional adaptation.

The analysis has shown that educational rationality in Meziane's thought is deeply rooted in a dialogue between intellectual heritage and modern critical philosophy. Drawing on the Khaldunian tradition and engaging with contemporary critical thinkers, Meziane develops a conception of reason that is historically situated, value-laden, and oriented toward emancipation. This rationality finds concrete expression in pedagogical practices that promote dialogue, interpretation, and the construction of the critical self.

Moreover, the study has highlighted the relevance of Meziane's project in the context of the current crises facing Arab educational systems, which are often characterized by excessive standardization, examination-oriented logic, and the uncritical importation of technical models. In this context, educational rationality emerges not merely as a theoretical framework but as a normative horizon for rethinking the aims and functions of education in relation to citizenship, democracy, and cultural renewal.

Despite the structural and institutional obstacles that limit the practical realization of critical educational rationality, Meziane's thought remains a valuable intellectual resource for contemporary educational reform. It invites educators, policymakers, and researchers to move beyond technical solutions and to re-center education around critical thinking, ethical engagement, and the construction of autonomous and responsible subjects.

Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for educational theory and practice in the Arab context. First, Meziane's conception of educational rationality highlights the need to move beyond narrowly instrumental approaches to education that prioritize efficiency, standardization, and technical performance. Educational policies and curricula should therefore integrate critical thinking, ethical reflection, and dialogue as core components of the learning process.

Second, the study suggests that teacher education programs should place greater emphasis on philosophical and critical training. Teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge but key agents in fostering critical rationality within educational spaces. Equipping educators with the intellectual tools to engage learners in questioning, interpretation, and dialogue is essential for translating educational rationality into concrete pedagogical practice.

Finally, the implications of Meziane's project extend to educational reform at the institutional level. Reconsidering assessment methods, curriculum design, and classroom interaction in light of critical educational rationality may contribute to the formation of autonomous, responsible, and socially engaged learners. In this sense, educational rationality represents not only a theoretical framework but also a practical orientation for rethinking education as a human and civic project.

Perspectives for Further Research:

This study opens several avenues for further research on educational rationality in the Arab context. Future studies could explore the practical implementation of Meziane's educational ideas through empirical research in schools and universities, or through comparative studies with other models of critical pedagogy.

Additionally, examining the implications of educational rationality in the context of digital education and globalization may provide valuable insights into the contemporary relevance of Meziane's project and its capacity to respond to emerging educational challenges.

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