

***Stages of Education in Béjaïa during the Hafsid Period
- The Student's Journey from the Kuttab to the Scholarly Ijazah-***

مراحل التدريس ببجاية خلال العهد الحفصي
- رحلة الطالب من الكُتّاب إلى الإجازة العلمية -

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Article abstract :

The purpose of this study is to trace the educational process in the urban centre of Béjaïa during the medieval period. It seeks to identify the educational institutions of the city, The study reaches a number of findings, foremost among them that Béjaïan society displayed a marked commitment to the upbringing and instruction of its children through the careful selection of highly qualified teachers and sustained supervision until graduation. It further demonstrates that the curricula and pedagogical methods employed across the various stages of education proved effective, as reflected in the scholarly level attained by graduates of the city's educational institutions. These graduates exhibited clear intellectual distinction when compared with their counterparts in other urban centres such as Tlemcen, Fez, and others. This distinction became evident through their scholarly production and their assumption of diverse religious and administrative functions within the cities of the Islamic world.

Keywords : Béjaïa; education; mosques; zawiya; ijazah.

ملخص المقال:

الهدف من الدراسة تتبع العملية التعليمية بحاضرة بجاية في الفترة الوسيطة، والتعرف على المؤسسات التعليمية بالمدينة، وقد توصلت إلى مجموعة من النتائج أهمها أن المجتمع البجائي كان حريصا على تربية وتعليم أبنائه من خلال اختيار أفضل الأساتذة ومتابعتهم إلى غاية تخرجهم، وأن المقررات الدراسية ومناهجها في مراحل التعليم المختلفة أثبتت نجاعتها من خلال مستوى الطلبة المتخرجين من المؤسسات التعليمية المنتشرة بالمدينة، وبينوا عن مقدرتهم المعرفية مقارنة بنظرائهم في الحواضر الأخرى كتلمسان وفاس وغيرها ، وظهر ذلك جليا من خلال إنتاجهم المعرفي وتصدرهم للوظائف الشرعية والإدارية المختلفة في حواضر العالم الإسلامي. كلمات مفتاحية : بجاية، التدريس، المساجد، الزاوية، الإجازة.

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Introduction

Several urban centers and cities of Algeria during the medieval period contributed to the enrichment of the human intellectual heritage through scholarly production in numerous transmitted sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-naqliyya*) and rational sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-‘aqliyya*). Among these were Tahert during the Rustamid period, the Qal‘a during the Hammadid period, Tlemcen under Zayyanid rule, and the city of Béjaïa during the Hafsid period. This contribution may be attributed to multiple factors, foremost among them the presence of a learned elite possessing a solid intellectual grounding, trained through successive stages of instruction within the various educational institutions of the city of Béjaïa.

However, what remains largely absent from existing studies is an examination of the mechanisms through which these scholarly elites attained such advanced levels of learning, the educational stages they passed through, and the institutions within which they received their scholarly training. For this reason, the present study addresses this subject under the title: "Stages of Instruction in Béjaïa during the Hafsid Period: The Student's Journey from the Kuttāb to the Scholarly Ijazah."

The principal research problem :This paper probes a central question: to what extent was the educational and pedagogical organization of Béjaïa—through its various stages and institutions—capable of producing a distinguished learned elite?

This research method : I adopted the historical method, integrating multiple approaches—most notably description and analysis—within the context of a limited narrative corpus available in medieval sources on the subject. Consequently, a plurality of analytical perspectives was employed in order to reach substantive conclusions and address the research problem.

The study relies on the methodological deconstruction of texts and their subsequent reconstruction to formulate a coherent historical narrative. This approach seeks to assess the robustness of the city's educational and pedagogical system and its capacity to produce learned elites capable of meeting the needs of both society and political authority, through their integration into the city's social, religious, and political structures.

Previous Studies: Safia Dib addressed the subject of Education and Learning in Hafsid Tunisia (7th–9th AH / 13th–15th CE) in her doctoral dissertation at the University of Algiers 2 (2011–2012). Her study touched upon the stages of education in Tunisia in general terms, without delving into their detailed contexts. Muhammad Al-Sharif Sidi Moussa, in his master's thesis *Intellectual Life in Béjaïa between the 7th and 10th Centuries AH / 13th–16th CE* (University of Algiers, 2002), examined the educational stages in Béjaïa. Meanwhile, Maryam Hashimi, in her study *Cultural Relations between Tlemcen and Béjaïa during the 7th–9th Centuries AH / 13th–15th CE* (Master's thesis in Islamic History, University of Tlemcen, 2010–2011), limited her research to educational institutions such as mosques, kuttāb, and zawiyas, without exploring the stages of instruction themselves.

Objective of the Study: This study aims to trace the stages undertaken by the scholarly elite of Béjaïa, examining the educational trajectory of these students, the institutions in which they were trained, and the instructors from whom they received knowledge—from their initial enrollment in the kuttāb to the attainment of the *ijazah* and subsequent graduation. It further seeks to understand how these scholars went on to assume professional roles and contribute to the intellectual landscape of the Islamic world, both in the Maghreb and the Mashriq, during the medieval period.

1. Theories of Education and Instruction among the Scholars of the Islamic Maghreb:

Muslims demonstrated concern for education from the earliest moments of the Islamic call. In its initial phase, education was primarily concerned with upbringing and discipline, relying on Qur'anic kuttab. It subsequently evolved into formal teaching and instruction, particularly within mosques. A survey of its development in both the eastern and western Islamic worlds during the medieval period reveals no substantial divergences between the two regions, whether in the stages traversed by the student of knowledge, the institutions involved, or the pedagogical practices employed—beginning with the kuttab and culminating in the madrasa.

Education in its formative stage was accessible to all without exception. It encompassed both religious sciences—such as Qur'anic studies, ḥadīth, and jurisprudence—and worldly sciences connected to human needs and social interests, including arithmetic, medicine, and pharmacy, among others.

The lands of the Islamic Maghreb developed advanced educational theories grounded in both religious and worldly frameworks. Imam Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn (256 AH / 869 CE) is regarded as one of the earliest theorists of pedagogical and educational thought in the Maghrebi milieu. This is evident in his various writings, foremost among them "Ādāb al-Mu'allimīn", in which he articulated pedagogical and educational principles addressed to both teacher and learner. His theory emphasized the learner's concentration on listening, memorization, comprehension and the necessity of progression from simpler to more complex subjects. He stressed the primacy of essential sciences such as the Qur'an and ḥadīth (Saḥnūn, 1972: 75), followed by optional and complementary disciplines such as poetry. On the pedagogical level, he addressed the necessity of selecting qualified teachers, stipulating competence, full dedication to teaching, equitable treatment of students (Saḥnūn, 1972: 84-85), and discernment in administering punishment and reward (Saḥnūn, 1972:88-9, In sum, Imam Saḥnūn outlined educational objectives encompassing spiritual and religious cultivation, cognitive and scholarly development, moral formation, and practical utility (Bahellūl,2024 : 83-85).

Ibn al-Jazzār (d. 369 AH / 980 CE), through his work "Siyāsāt al-Ṣibyān wa-Tadbīruhum" offered guidance of an educational, psychological, and social nature concerning the child from birth. He emphasized attention to nourishment and physical health, extending to moral and intellectual upbringing. With regard to the kuttab stage, he focused on discerning blameworthy dispositions in a child's nature and transforming them into praiseworthy traits (Būdalya, 2016: 49-55), Accordingly, the educator was required to possess alertness and perceptiveness in order to guide children through sound pedagogical direction at this stage².

This was followed by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Qābisī (d. 402 AH / 1013 CE), who discussed in his work "al-Risālah al-Mufaṣṣalah li-Aḥwāl al-Muta'allimīn wa-Aḥkām al-Mu'allimīn wa Muta'allimīn" the obligation of raising and disciplining children, the necessity of respecting and venerating teachers, and the nature of the relationship between them. He examined students' conduct toward their teachers and proper etiquette, before turning to educational matters such as teaching methods and instructional approaches. He concluded with discussions on teachers' remuneration, student stipends, and the granting of the scholarly ijazah to students of knowledge (al-Qābisī , 1986: 96-149).

As for Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808 AH / 1406 CE), he devoted an entire chapter to education and instruction in his "Muqaddimah", entitled "On the Instruction of Children and the Differences among Islamic Regions in This Regard." In it, he addressed the essence of the educational process and its objectives, summarizing

²Ibn al-Jazzār addresses in the final chapter his principles regarding the disciplining and upbringing of children, advocating a sound and proper education grounded in ethical and moral dimensions. See: The Policy and Management of Children..

them into four foundational elements: the qualities of the exemplary teacher or educator; the pedagogical and instructional method grounded in the Qur'an, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the scholarly exertions of learned authorities; educational institutions and pedagogical structures—foremost among them the mosque; and finally, learners of both sexes, without excluding adults (Ibn Khaldūn, 2006: 200-223).

2. Phase One: Between the Kuttāb, the Mosque, and the Foundations of Learning

2.1. Types of the Kuttāb :

al-Raṣṣā' pointed to the existence of two distinct *kuttāb*, which are: educational institutions, notably identifying an exclusive school dedicated to educating the children of the ruling class, authority figures, and senior state officials, established to maintain their separation from the general populace (Al-Raṣṣā', 1967: 132). Al-Ghubrīnī confirmed the existence of such an institution in Bejaia, referring to it as the Governor's School within the Hafsid Qaṣbah (al-Ghubrīnī, 1971: 315). The Bejaia Qaṣbah extended beyond its political-administrative function, attracting scholarly educators to its schools, which served the children of governors, senior officials, military commanders, and notable citizens. Its location within the Prince's palace is documented in "Unwān al-dirāyah," which records that scholar Abū Tamīm ibn Khalfūn al-Bardawī regularly taught at this institution (al-Ghubrīnī, 1971: 184).

The second category encompasses public education institutions that serve the general population. Children acquire literacy skills in these institutions while memorizing the Holy Quran, facilitating further learning and conferring the distinction of bearing divine scripture. The students master Quranic recitation and its principles and methodologies. Some scholars advocated for exclusive Quranic instruction, avoiding integration with other disciplines until completion, except for Prophetic traditions (al-Raṣṣā', 1967: 132).

2.2. The Age of Entry into the Kuttāb

Scholarly sources indicate considerable variation regarding the normative age for males to begin formal education, although empirical evidence suggests that five years of age was the predominant convention (Khuṭayf, 2011: 260-261). Nevertheless, historical records indicate that certain scholars commenced their studies earlier. A notable example is Abū al-Faḍl al-Mashdālī (864H/1459CE), who had attained the requisite scholarly competencies for Quranic memorization by age five, including the mastery of the "Sabbih" section through systematic recitation prior to evening prayers (al-Sakhāwī: 181).

Historical documentation demonstrates significant variation in the age at which prominent scholars achieved complete Quranic memorization. Muḥammad ibn Abī al-Qāsim al-Mashdālī (865H/1460CE) accomplished this scholarly milestone at seven and a half years (al-Miknāsī, 2002: 278), while jurist Maṣṣūr ibn Muḥammad al-Matnānī³ demonstrated comprehensive mastery of the Quran at age 12 (al-Sakhāwī: 172). Contemporary accounts indicate that students typically pursued instruction under multiple shaykhs while maintaining methodological consistency in Quranic recitation (al-Sakhāwī: 181). This pedagogical pattern is exemplified by jurist Yaḥyā ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Ujaysī (862H/1457CE), who acquired knowledge from various scholars, with his cousin 'Alī ibn Mūsā serving as his primary instructor (al-Sakhāwī: 231).

2.3. The Ethical Aspect of the Educational Curricula :

Educational theorists emphasized moral development and proper upbringing before formal education. Consequently, many exceptional students received preliminary instruction from their fathers or relatives

³He was born in the countryside of Matnana in the year (865 AH/1460 CE) and traveled to Bijaya to complete his education in the year (878 AH/1473 CE).

before entering formal schooling, endowed them with scholarly distinction. The scholar Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūbal-Manjilātī (730 AH/1329 CE) studied under his father, Sheikh AbūYūsufYa'qūb (Al-Miknāsī, 2002: 188). The jurist Sulaymān ibn Yūsufal-Ḥasnāwī (887 AH/1482 CE) received initial instruction from his uncle 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm (Al-Miknāsī, 2002: 437) and his eldest son Abū 'Abd AllāhMuḥammad(Al-Sakhāwī: 270). Abūal-Faḍlal-Mashdālī and his brother Muḥammadstudied under their father (Al-Sakhāwī: 290-188), contributing to their academic excellence in subsequent educational phases.

Educational institutions and families implemented motivational practices through ceremonial celebrations known as "al-Ḥadaqah" (Ḥarakāt, 1979: 52) or "al-Khatmah"⁴ (Al-Raṣṣā', 1967: 73) to commemorate students' successful completion of Quranic memorization. These celebrations functioned as significant psychological and moral incentives, motivating students to pursue their educational pursuits and explore additional academic disciplines. The ceremonial gatherings represented a formalized incentive system documented in the educational texts. The practice extended beyond Quranic memorization to acknowledge the completion of any prescribed text throughout the educational hierarchy, including works such as Ibn al-Ḥāḡib'sMukhtaṣarMudawwanah. The pedagogical methodology integrated Quranic memorization with orthographic instruction, systematically incorporating fundamental literacy skills from the beginning of the instruction. While the Andalusian educational model incorporated poetry and additional subjects (Erfeuille, 1998:40-41), this system maintained a focused curriculum without incorporating other sciences.

2.4. The Educational Curriculum :

Foundational texts, notably Al-Waghliṣīyah, have been incorporated into jurisprudence studies to enhance students' comprehension. This curriculum systematically introduced young learners to the basic principles of Islamic law. During this formative period, the educational focus emphasized content pertinent to post-pubescent life. Additionally, the students received instructions regarding prohibited behaviors, including theft and alcohol consumption.

Educational authorities emphasized parental responsibility in monitoring academic progress and providing appropriate supervision of their children's educational development, substantiating this obligation through scripturalreference: «O believers! Protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, overseen by formidable and severe angels, who never disobey whatever Allah orders—always doing as commanded." (Surah At-Tahrim: 6).

The offspring of religious scholars have pursued formal education at established institutions for academic and literacy instruction. A prominent example is scholar Rabi' ibn Ghamr⁵, who developed his expertise through concurrent studies at educational institutions and mosques, achieving mastery in Quranic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, and the Arabic language. His scholarly accomplishments ultimately led to his appointment as a scribe at Bejaia's administrative center. During this educational period, memorizing sacred texts was a standard practice (Khalīfī, 2008: 245).

Ibn Khaldūn emphasized the pedagogical significance of Quranic instruction during children's formative years, noting its fundamental role in establishing Islamic principles in developing minds and asserting that early acquisition facilitates permanent retention. He observed a methodological distinction between regions: while Maghrebi educational practices focused exclusively on Quranic instruction and memorization, the Andalusian approach integrated multiple academic disciplines (Ibn Khaldūn, n.d.: 390).

⁴Some jurists maintained that it was obligatory to give the completion reward (ḥaqq al-khatma) to the teacher, whether it was stipulated in advance or not.

⁵He is from the Andalusian families of Béjaïa.

The dominant pedagogical methodology for Quranic recitation and memorization adhered to Warsh's transmission from Nafi'. This methodology was notably exemplified by Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān al-Bijā'ī⁶ (860H/1455CE), who conducted his memorization and recitation studies under Sheikh Muḥammad ibn Zayn al-Dīn Bejaia following Warsh's transmission (al-Sakhāwī: 146). Additionally, Yaḥyá ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Ajīsī (862H/1457CE) mastered the text under his cousin 'Alī ibn Mūsá's tutelage in Ajisa, employing the identical transmission method (al-Sakhāwī: 231).

Rural regions demonstrated a marked deficiency in educational and pedagogical infrastructure during this period⁷, particularly regarding qualified instructors and religious scholars (Fatḥah, 1999: 113). This deficiency necessitated parents to employ accomplished students as both instructors and prayer leaders for their children, providing financial incentives to prevent their relocation to more economically advantageous regions. This arrangement significantly impeded the capacity of the rural educational system to achieve optimal academic standards.

2.5. The Duration of the Student's Instruction in the Kuttāb :

While precise documentation regarding the duration of the initial educational phase remains unavailable, extant evidence indicates substantial variation based on students' aptitudes, competencies, and preparedness coupled with the instructor's pedagogical expertise. Scholarly consensus suggests that progression to subsequent educational phases typically occurred after students reached 13 years of age (Māmī, 2006: 30), indicating an approximate duration of six to eight years in the initial phase, considering that Quranic school enrolment generally commenced between ages five and seven. Notably, numerous students' academic trajectories terminated at this phase due to economic constraints⁸, necessitating their withdrawal from studies to pursue employment addressing familial financial obligations (Ghazālah, 2017: 329-352).

Result:

The kuttāb occupied a foundational position within the educational and pedagogical framework of Bejaia. The principal aim of this initial stage lay in the formation of the child's spiritual and moral disposition, alongside the consolidation of doctrinal affiliation and a conscious sense of identity. At this level, the distinguishing characteristics of gifted pupils emerged clearly through rapid memorization, strong powers of comprehension, sustained diligence, and intellectual alertness qualities that enabled outstanding students to progress to the subsequent stage of instruction.

3. Second Phase: The Integration of Mosque, Zawiya, and Advanced Learning :

It is evident that these stages were not organized according to rigid or sharply defined divisions. Rather, they frequently overlapped in accordance with each student's intellectual capacity. Ibn Khaldūn drew attention to notable deficiencies within the educational system and its stages in the lands of the Islamic West, directing particular criticism toward the length of time required to reach graduation and the absence of clear boundaries separating the first and second stages. The decisive point of transition between these two phases consisted in the move toward the systematic reception of the religious sciences through explanation and clarification, as well as acquaintance with areas of scholarly divergence (Qaryan, 2011: 261-262).

⁶He was born and educated in Bejaia, then relocated to Alexandria and made it his permanent residence after performing the Hajj and visiting Damascus and Cairo.

⁷Some studies have attributed this phenomenon to either the inadequate compensation they received or the teacher and imam's relocation to places offering superior living conditions and settlement prospects.

⁸About poor students, their social levels, the nature of their studies, and their relationships with different segments of society.

3.1. The Mosque: Educational Programs and Student Demographics

At this stage, students advanced to the systematic study of religious sciences within the mosque under the supervision of scholars. Although the curriculum included auxiliary sciences such as arithmetic, medicine, astronomy, and logic, specialists in these disciplines remained relatively few, given the prevailing emphasis on transmitted religious sciences. The integration of transmitted and rational sciences is well illustrated by the jurist Maṣṣūr ibn Muḥammad al-Matnānī, who, after arriving in Béjaïa at the age of twelve, pursued a comprehensive course of study combining jurisprudence and theology with arithmetic and logic, under the instruction of eminent scholars such as Sulaymān ibn Yūsuf al-Ḥasnāwī, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Yajrī, and others (Al-Sakhāwī: 172).

Pedagogical methodology during this phase centered on the memorization of foundational texts and versified works across various disciplines, particularly jurisprudence. Teachers assigned specific texts for memorization, which students were required to present to their shaykh upon completion.

Abūal-Faḍlal-Mashdālī (865 AH/1460 CE) exemplifies this pedagogical approach, having memorized⁹ the two Shāṭibīyah works, al-Kharrāzī's versified text on orthography, al-Kāfiyah-Shāfiyah, Ibn Malik's Lāmīyatal-afālon grammar and morphology, and al-Tilimsānī's epistle and poem on inheritance law¹⁵ (al-Sakhāwī: 181-182). Similarly, historical sources document that ‘Īsā ibn Mas‘ūd al-Zawāwī (743 AH/1342 CE) memorized Ibn al-Ḥājjib's derivative compendium in three and a half months and presented it to his sheikh while simultaneously memorizing and dictating Mālik's Muwaṭṭa' to his instructor (al-Miknāsī, 2002: 376). These achievements are significant indicators of scholarly excellence and knowledge mastery.

An analysis of numerous jurists' biographies reveals a notable phenomenon: the existence of an elite cohort possessing extraordinary memorization capabilities and accelerated comprehension skills. Abūal-Faḍlal-Mashdālī particularly demonstrates this intellectual capacity, having memorized major scholarly works across multiple disciplines before reaching nineteen years of age. Biographical sources indicate that by the beginning of 840 AH/1436 CE, he had memorized and mastered more than 20 fundamental works and numerous additional texts, encompassing jurisprudence, linguistics, grammar, morphology, theological principles, legal theory, logic, mathematics, and astronomical timekeeping. Eastern scholars recognized his exceptional mnemonic and recall abilities, leading to his designation as "the marvel of his time in memorization and understanding" (al-Sakhāwī: 181-184).

3.2. The Zawiya as a Parallel Educational Institution

The zawiya emerged as a prominent institution during this period, despite its initial establishment as a retreat for disciples devoted to spiritual discipline and withdrawal from worldly affairs. Over time, it expanded its role to include systematic instruction directed toward disciples and followers. Its growth was facilitated by its relative independence from government funding¹⁰ (Al-Idrīsī: 122-123). Zawiyas¹¹ flourished across Hafsid urban centers, particularly in the capital Tunis, where they provided educational services to both young and adult learners (Māmī, 2006: 24).

⁹He also memorized major works from other books, which were likely studied in the subsequent phase that require strong comprehension and understanding and the innate capacity for memorization, such as Ibn Al-Banna's arithmetic summary, the Summary of Al-Miftah, and others.

¹⁰It was primarily funded through institutional endowments designated for charitable purposes, particularly those supporting the righteous and benevolent. See the discussion of their emergence, proliferation, and funding mechanisms in Hafsid Tunisia.

¹¹Such as the zawiya of Muhriz ibn Khalaf (5th century AH/11th century CE) and the zawiya of Muhammad al-Hadidi, and others.

The transformation of the zawiya into an educational and pedagogical institution was closely linked to the presence of qualified leadership and competent teachers. These institutions attracted large numbers of students and adherents seeking instruction in Islamic law. A notable example is the zawiya of Abū Zakariyā Yahyā al-Zawā, which developed into a regional center of learning. Al-Ghubrīnī records the substantial scholarly attendance¹² at this zawiya (Al-Ghubrīnī, 1971: 136), employing the term '*al-khalq*' to convey both the large number and diverse origins of its attendees, reflecting the shaykh's wide reputation throughout the Islamic Maghreb.

Hagiographical sources further describe how students and disciples joined Sufi circles following spiritual transformation and the adoption of ascetic discipline. This is exemplified by the jurist Abū Zahr ibn Rabī' ibn 'Umar, who resigned from his administrative post at the Béjaïa qaṣbah (Rafiq, 2008: 245-248) and affiliated himself with Abū Madyan Shu'ayb through one of his disciples (Al-Ghubrīnī, 1971: 58-59).

In Béjaïa, ribāṭs functioned as institutions of educational supervision under the authority of Sufi shaykhs. Of particular importance was the ribāṭ of the jurist Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Naṣr (652 AH / 1254 CE), which gained distinction for its specialization in ḥadīth instruction and transmission (Al-Ghubrīnī, 1971: 142). Likewise, the ribāṭ of Ibn al-Zayyāt fulfilled both devotional and instructional roles, with a particular emphasis on *awrad* and *adhkār* (liturgical litanies and devotional remembrance) (Al-Tādīlī, 1997: 330).

During this phase, clear distinctions emerged among students who demonstrated dedication to advanced scholarship. Teachers displayed notable skill in discerning individual intellectual capacities. This discernment is evident in Al-Sakhāwī's¹³ biographical account of the jurist 'Isā ibn Aḥmad al-Handisī (Al-Tinbukṭī, 2002: 224), in which he remarks: "He advanced in jurisprudence, its principles, the Arabic language, and other sciences, both in memorization and in understanding their meanings, along with his horsemanship and mastery of its various forms, and his religious devotion" (Al-Sakhāwī: 151).

Such scholarly abilities typically developed through prolonged study and were further strengthened by scholarly travel (*al-riḥlah al-'ilmiyyah*). Those hindered by financial constraints or lacking the preparation for such journeys generally remained at an intermediate level, qualifying them for religious roles such as leading prayers, providing basic instruction, and performing auxiliary judicial functions.

4. Third Phase: Higher Education and Intellectual Development

Ibn Khaldūn further maintained that this stage rested upon revisiting the disciplines previously studied, but with increased precision and analytical depth. The student was expected to immerse himself in each field and resolve the conceptual difficulties encountered during the earlier phase (Qaryan, 2011: 262), thereby attaining mastery and comprehensive command of the acquired sciences. Such a process demanded instructors of high competence and pedagogical proficiency, well acquainted with methods of instruction and teaching practice.

4.1. Advanced Level of Students and the Educational Body :

Students of strong intellectual ambition actively sought out eminent mentors¹⁴ renowned for the breadth of their learning and their pedagogical authority (Askān, 2004: 24-25). These mentors were distinguished by

¹²In his saying: 'Thus people benefited at his hands.

¹³Most other sources refer to him as al-Hindisi, which is more likely since many of the biographies that al-Sakhawī documented were transmitted orally from students who had studied in Béjaïa under the subjects of *al-Daw' al-Lami'* (The Luminous Light). See his designation as al-Hindisi.

¹⁴Especially since the scholars and educational theorists of the Western Islamic world insisted on receiving knowledge directly from the sheikh, considering direct transmission from written works an innovation and advocating for the

their mastery of instructional practice, transmitted sciences. Upon completing the foundational and intermediate stages of learning, guardians and scholars customarily directed promising students toward renowned jurists and teachers known for both intellectual distinction and moral probity¹⁵, thereby facilitating advanced scholarly growth and deeper conceptual understanding (Al-Idrīsī: 128)

Manṣūr ibn ‘Alī al-Zāwāwī records that his teacher advised him to pursue study under the eminent Shaykh Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Mashdalī, whose scholarly discourse and depth of insight exercised a powerful influence on his intellectual development (Al-Khaṭīb, 1973: 327). Students who reached this level were characterized by exceptional perseverance and endurance in the face of hardship. They recognized the arduous and prolonged nature of the scholarly path, while maintaining vigilance over their conduct in both private and public life. A poet captured these essential qualities in verse:

Whoever has not tasted the humiliation of learning cannot attain knowledge and dies in ignorance.
Knowledge is gained through earnestness along with obedience to the Great, Exalted God."
patience (Manuscript: 126)

Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Mashdalī, in his commentary on these verses, stressed the necessity of perseverance through adversity and unwavering commitment to the pursuit of knowledge. He explained that enduring hardship includes accepting the instructor’s rebuke and strict guidance. The student, he cautioned, must not reject such treatment and abandon learning, thereby consigning himself to ignorance (Manuscript: 126). Such trials, he noted, most often arise during extended and demanding scholarly endeavors, particularly those conducted far from one’s homeland. He further warned against retreat, hesitation, or fear, as these lead inevitably to intellectual decline (Manuscript: 126).

The study of this advanced stage of learning requires close examination of the instructors’ qualifications and pedagogical competence. Such analysis offers insight into the effectiveness of this educational phase. Historical sources attest to the presence of highly qualified masters who carefully selected outstanding students for private instruction and supervision.

Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Samghān (7th century AH / 13th century CE) conducted teaching sessions in the portico of his residence, admitting only the most distinguished and capable students¹⁶. As noted by Al-Ghubrīnī (1971: 214), this approach contributed to the formation of learned jurists prepared to serve society. By removing students from the distractions of large assemblies, this method ensured close supervision and evaluation, and preserved high scholarly standards. Moreover, instruction conducted within scholars’ homes often benefited from access to personal libraries, which supported both students and visiting participants.

4.2. The Curriculum at This Stage

A range of subjects was studied within the transmitted (naqlī) sciences, including Qur’anic exegesis, with standard texts such as Tafsīr al-Thalābī and Tafsīr Ibn ‘Atīyah. The science of ḥadīth encompassed works such as Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, the Sunan of al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah, as well as ḥadīth methodology, exemplified by Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and Ikmal al-Mu‘allim by al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ. Jurisprudence included texts such as Al-Tahdhīb by al-Barāḍī and the Mukhtaṣar al-Madkhal; principles of jurisprudence were taught through the Mukhtaṣar of Ibn al-Hājib. The student also studied prophetic biography through works such as Sīrat Ibn Ishāq and Al-Shifā’ by al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, alongside subjects in

abandonment of its practitioners. They declared that those who read from 'notebooks,' as they termed them, were not permitted to teach or be consulted for religious guidance.

¹⁵Most scholars consider the Zitouna Mosque to have functioned as a university, attended by students from schools, zawiyas, and mosques throughout Tunisia during the Hafsid period.

¹⁶exceptional students who demonstrate strong intellectual capabilities - including intelligence, acumen, memorization ability, and comprehensive understanding - qualifying them to pursue advanced levels of study.



Sufism and theological doctrine. In addition, the pupil received instruction in rational ('aqlī) sciences, including arithmetic, geometry, and logic (Al-Mannouni, 1996 : 265-340)

At this advanced stage, scholars frequently encountered the limits of local learning environments, having attained a level of mastery that required engagement with eminent authorities possessing distinct epistemological approaches and refined methodological tools. Such masters provided advanced means for dialectical reasoning, critical analysis, scholarly debate, and formal certification. Consequently, scholarly travel (*al-riḥlah al-'ilmiyyah*) emerged as an essential requirement for the completion of higher intellectual development.

Conclusion:

This study has revealed significant findings concerning educational practices in Béjaïa during the period under examination. The inhabitants demonstrated a strong commitment to education, giving priority to early childhood instruction through Qur'ānic schools, which emphasized cognitive development based on memorization and religious learning. Parents and educators closely supervised students' behavior and character formation, adopting an integrated approach that combined scholarly instruction with moral and religious guidance. Educational achievement was recognized through both material and moral incentives, particularly upon the completion of the initial stages and the memorization of the Qur'ān.

The curriculum was firmly grounded in the Mālikī School of Thought, drawing on its foundational texts and interpretative works, while giving precedence to local scholarly compositions—such as the *Waghliṣiyya*—in the teaching of jurisprudence. Academic advancement required students to demonstrate comprehensive mastery across multiple disciplines, while allowing them a degree of autonomy in selecting their instructors at the advanced levels.

While urban Béjaïa flourished with educational institutions, rural areas experienced an institutional shortfall beyond elementary Qur'ānic schools, leading families either to send their children to the city or to rely on private tutors. Advanced scholarly education was reserved for distinguished students and was conducted primarily within the private residences of eminent scholars, where instruction focused on the explanation of complex concepts, the development of reasoned debate, and the use of rational argumentation grounded in transmitted knowledge. Graduates, upon completion of their studies and the attainment of certification, contributed meaningfully to intellectual production, educational standards, and social mobility.

The system of scientific *ijazah* clearly reflects the level of educational rigor and pedagogical discipline prevailing in Béjaïa. It affirmed the city's prominent position in scholarly production while facilitating sustained intellectual exchange across regions. Through this system, scholars effectively integrated scientific knowledge across multiple fields and developed structured teaching methods that ensured sound transmission. This sustained pattern of scholarly activity established Béjaïa as a center of learning distinguished by methodological precision and high standards, producing scholars of notable competence within the Hafsid intellectual world.

The educational and pedagogical system of Bejaia succeeded in realizing its intellectual project through the convergence of multiple determining factors and sustained collective efforts. Foremost among these was the coherence and soundness of instruction across its three principal stages, as outlined above. Equally significant was the teaching body, which undertook its responsibilities with marked dedication and competence, together with a curriculum that achieved a balanced integration of the transmitted sciences and the rational disciplines, supported by a dense network of educational institutions throughout the city. This integrated structure led to the formation of a scholarly elite that assumed religious functions such as preaching, imamate, legal opinion, and judicature, as well as administrative offices including chamberlainship and ministerial service, across the cities and urban centers of both the Islamic Maghreb and the Mashriq. Through scholarly authorship in diverse scientific fields, these graduates made a substantive contribution to the broader legacy of human civilizational production.

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