



# The Impact of Napoleon Bonaparte's Expedition on Islamic Education in Egypt

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## Abstract

The history of Islam records periods of advancement, decline, and reform, including in Egypt. This study examines the impact of Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition on Islamic education in Egypt, which, although primarily a military campaign, also created opportunities for intellectual and educational reform. The research employs a qualitative method with a content analysis approach, analyzing historical documents, literature, and scholarly publications to explore the social, political, and educational influences of the expedition. The findings indicate that the presence of Napoleon and his entourage, including scholars, generated new awareness among Egyptian intellectuals, fostering the adoption of scientific methods and educational renewal. These results suggest that interactions between European colonial forces and local society can indirectly facilitate the transformation of education and the development of intellectual life in Egypt.

## INTRODUCTION

The French occupation of Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798 CE marked a significant event that profoundly influenced social, political, and intellectual change within the Islamic world, particularly in Egypt (Gursoy, 2019; Rahmawan, 2019). The expedition was not merely a military campaign but also carried strong scientific and cultural dimensions. Napoleon arrived with his army as well as a group of scholars and brought with him modern scientific instruments that were previously unknown in the Islamic world (Karim & Fathoni, 2020). This moment became the starting point for a new awareness among Egyptians of the scientific and civilizational progress taking place in Europe (Karo, 2020).

Approaching the nineteenth century, the Middle Eastern region including the Arab countries and Egypt was experiencing a period of stagnation and decline (Fekih-Romdhane et al., 2023). Political, economic, and cultural conditions were at their weakest, while the spirit of scientific inquiry that had flourished during the golden age of Islam had faded. Many historians describe this period as a "long slumber" for the Arab nations. Within this context, Napoleon's arrival in Egypt acted as a historical shock that awakened Egyptian society to their backwardness compared with Europe's advancement at the time (Baidarus & Fitri, 2021).

The Napoleonic expedition was not only aimed at expanding French political power but also served as a vehicle for introducing modern knowledge, technology, and administrative systems. Through the presence of French scholars, institutions for research and education were established, introducing scientific methods,

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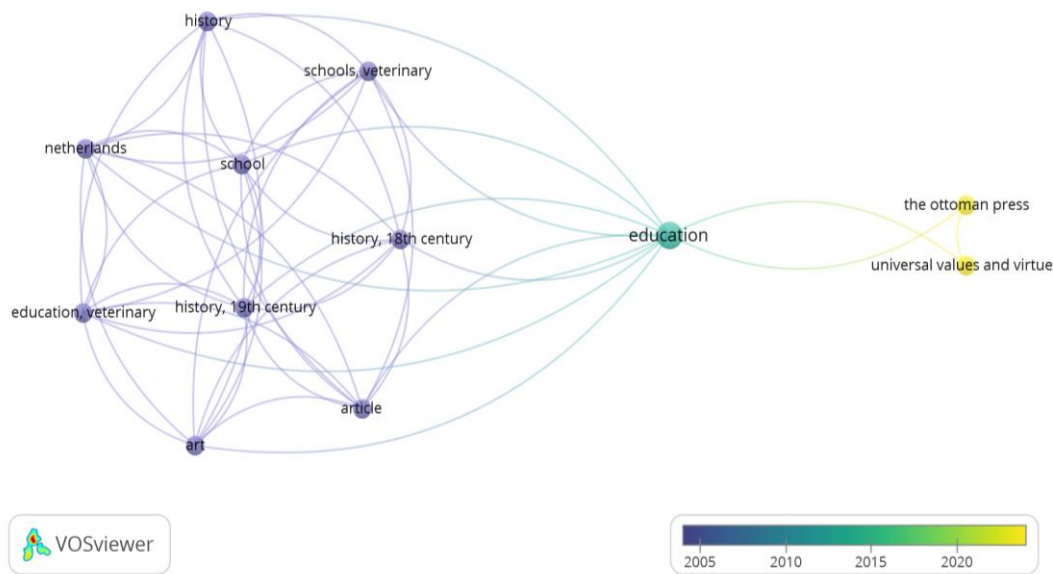
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geographical mapping, and systematic documentation of Egyptian culture. These innovations opened the eyes of Egypt's intellectual and social elites to the nation's condition of decline and stimulated a desire for reform across various aspects of life (Caiani, 2017; Caquet, 2016; Maruschke, 2021; Sarfatti, 2022).

The most evident impact of the expedition was reflected in the transformation of Egyptian mentality and attitudes. A new awareness emerged regarding the importance of knowledge and education as the foundation of a nation's progress. At the same time, traditional values considered incompatible with modern development began to be reassessed (Champion, 2012; Näser, 2019). Social and cultural renewal gradually expanded, giving rise to reformist figures such as Rifa'ah al-Tahtawi and Muhammad Abduh, who played key roles in shaping Egypt's intellectual revival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Hutagaluh et al., 2023).



**Fig 1. Vosviewer analysis based on keywords**

In the context of the intellectual revival triggered by Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer provides additional insight into the trajectory and thematic evolution of educational research within a broader historical framework. The keyword network visualization shows that the theme of *education* is closely linked to terms such as *history*, *school*, and *universal values and virtue*, as well as more specific topics like *the Ottoman press* and *veterinary schools*. The colors on the map reflect the average year of publication, indicating that discourse on universal values and modern education has gained prominence over the past two decades. Although no direct conclusions can be drawn, this pattern of interconnection suggests that education shaped by historical interactions between the Islamic and Western worlds since the late eighteenth century remains a dynamic and relevant field of inquiry in studies of history and social reform.

In the political sphere, the influence of Napoleon's expedition could be seen in the emergence of ideas concerning modernization of governance (Planert, 2016; Suthisamphat, 2018). Contact with the Western world inspired new concepts of state administration, legal reform, and more rational approaches to economic management. Furthermore, Egypt's increasing interaction with international powers strengthened its position as an intellectual and political center in the Middle East. This transformation later became the foundation for the development of nationalism and a growing sense of collective identity among Egyptians.

Ideologically, the renewal movement that developed in Egypt was not limited to social and political change but also extended to religious thought. Islamic intellectual reform began to take shape through efforts to reinterpret religious teachings in a more contextual and rational framework. This new perspective on Islam became a hallmark of the modernist Islamic movement, which later spread throughout the Muslim world. Hence, the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt can be viewed as a historical turning point that initiated Egypt's intellectual awakening and the broader renewal of modern Islamic thought (Burhanudin, 2021).

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method with a content analysis approach. The qualitative design was chosen because it enables an in-depth examination of various texts and documents to understand meanings, contexts, and patterns of thought related to the research topic (Allsop et al., 2022; Heinmiller, 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The content analysis approach was applied to identify, interpret, and organize thematic patterns emerging from written data relevant to the research problem (Engkizar et al., 2023; Febriani et al., 2020; Islamoğlu et al., 2022). The data were obtained from credible and up-to-date scholarly sources, including books, journal articles, research reports, and academic documents that support both conceptual and historical analyses (Parina et al., 2021; Pringgar & Sujatmiko, 2020).

The research procedure consisted of several stages: i) collecting data sources from literature relevant to the renewal of thought in Egypt following Napoleon's expedition; ii) critical reading and content review to identify key concepts and arguments; iii) data note-taking and coding to organize emerging themes; iv) content analysis and interpretation to explore relationships among concepts; and v) systematic presentation of findings in accordance with academic writing conventions (Eliza et al., 2022; Fuadi & Mirsal, 2023). This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual and ideological transformation that occurred in Egypt within its socio-historical context (Balsas, 2022; Berg et al., 2019).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The expedition of Napoleon Bonaparte to Egypt in 1798 marked a turning point in the intellectual and socio-political awareness of the Egyptian people. Although the expedition's primary goal was to expand French colonial influence, it also unintentionally exposed Egyptian society to new scientific, administrative, and cultural practices (Champion, 2012; Suthisamphat, 2018; Кобищанов, 2024). The encounter with French military organization, research methods, and governance systems highlighted the extent of Egypt's stagnation and prompted local elites to re-evaluate their approaches to knowledge, leadership, and social order. This exposure created the conditions for gradual reflection and discussion on reform and modernization within various sectors of Egyptian society.

From a social and psychological perspective, the presence of French forces introduced Egyptians to European approaches to education, scientific inquiry, and systematic administration. The experience encouraged a shift in mentality, challenging long-standing assumptions about authority and knowledge that had been dominated by the *Mamluk* class for centuries. Observations of French scientific methods, organizational efficiency, and civic structures led to the realization that Egypt had fallen behind in comparison to European societies (Abdou, 2023). This exposure fostered a more critical awareness among local scholars and intellectuals, forming the basis for emerging discourses on national dignity and self-governance

(Nafisah, 2018).

In the political domain, Napoleon's expedition contributed to the introduction of modern governance concepts (Lok, 2015; van der Burg, 2021). Ideas such as republicanism, equality before the law, and civic participation were observed through French administrative practices. While these ideas did not immediately translate into institutional reform under Egyptian authority, they served as a reference for local elites to consider alternative models of governance beyond the traditional systems imposed by successive foreign rulers. Such exposure gradually planted the ideological seeds for concepts of national sovereignty and citizenship, which later informed nationalist and reformist movements in Egypt.

In the intellectual and cultural domain, the expedition facilitated direct interaction with European scholars and scientists who were part of Napoleon's entourage. The establishment of the Institut d'Égypte and publications such as *Le Décade Égyptienne* and *Le Courier d'Égypte* introduced empirical research methods, documentation of local culture, and systematic study of natural phenomena. These institutions and publications provided models of knowledge organization and dissemination previously unfamiliar to Egyptian society. Local scholars, such as Rifa'ah al-Tahtawi and Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, later drew upon these experiences to promote educational reform, translation projects, and the integration of scientific knowledge into social and cultural initiatives, thus shaping a new intellectual landscape in Egypt (Lok, 2015; Nakissa, 2022).

Economically and industrially, the presence of French engineers and technical experts facilitated the introduction of new machinery, production techniques, and organizational approaches inspired by the Industrial Revolution in Europe. While large-scale industrial development did not occur immediately, the expedition contributed to the gradual diffusion of technical knowledge and awareness of modern trade practices. Additionally, discussions regarding the Suez Canal and regional trade routes, which were revisited by French engineers, underscored the potential for strategic infrastructural development. Over time, these ideas contributed to the modernization of Egypt's economy and its eventual engagement with international trade networks.

Finally, while the expedition was fundamentally a colonial enterprise, it paradoxically acted as a catalyst for intellectual and socio-political reflection in Egypt. The interactions between Egyptian society and French forces created opportunities for observation, learning, and gradual reform (Abouelhassan & Meyer, 2016; Fakher, 2016; Hinnebusch, 2015; Nakissa, 2022).

The influence of French scientific methods, governance models, and cultural practices provided reference points for Egyptian reformers, shaping both the intellectual environment and emerging movements of social, political, and economic renewal. As such, the Napoleonic expedition can be viewed as a formative moment that indirectly supported the development of modernist Islamic thought and reform initiatives in the nineteenth century.

## CONCLUSION

Although Napoleon's expedition to Egypt was primarily motivated by French colonial interests, it had several positive effects on Egypt and certain regions of the Arab world. The expedition heightened awareness of scientific, social, and political underdevelopment, while also creating opportunities for reform in education, governance, and the economy. Napoleon's arrival in Egypt was driven by strategic and economic considerations, including Egypt's position along key trade routes

between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, as well as the potential to expand markets for European industrial products. Therefore, despite its colonial nature, the expedition indirectly contributed to the process of modernization and intellectual renewal in Egypt and its surrounding regions.

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## DECLARATIONS

### Author Contribution

**Muhammad Saminu:** Writing-Preparation of original manuscript, Conceptualization, Investigation, **Awang Ringgit:** Visualization, Methodology, Improve Content, **Anggi Afrina Rambe:** Data accuracy, Improve Language.

### AI Statement

The data and language usage in this article have been validated and verified by English language experts and no AI-generated sentences are included in this article.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this research was conducted without any conflict of interest in the research.

### Ethical Clearance

The place or location studied has agreed to conduct research and is willing if the results of this study are published.

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