



Report explains Justifications, contexts, and consequences of Autonomous Administration decision to impose educational curriculums in Deir Ezzor



 contact@deirezzor24.net  www.deirezzor24.net

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Studies- Evaluating position

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Introduction:

On July 12, 2020, the Civil Deir Ezzor Council Educational Committee met students' parents and teachers to discuss educational curriculums. The attendees discussed the curriculum alternative for the UNICEF one that has been adopted in the area since defeating Daesh. The attendees discussed the Autonomous Administration educational curriculum of primary stage from first to fourth classes, and how possible to adopt it.¹ The decision that followed meetings with residents, students' parents, and teachers, resulted in a shock and reactions among the residents, especially as the curriculum does not include the Religion subject that is taught in the Syrian government educational curriculum starting from the first class. The Syrian government did not change or delete Religion subject despite significant amendments of the educational curriculum. Activists, and followers interested in public affairs in Deir Ezzor fear a potential significant effect on the residents if the Autonomous Administration implements the decision. The residents continue to organize expanded demonstrations. One of the pre-implementation consequences of the decision was demonstrations in the Deir Ezzor countryside. The demonstrations occurred in areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration Deir Ezzor Civil Council on the administrative level and by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on the military one. The demonstrators raised signs rejecting the curriculum and describing it imported and does not fit with the nature of the area.²

¹ From the meetings of the Autonomous Administration Educational Committee with residents. Deir Ezzor Media Center formal page. For more details click the [link](#).

² From a message during an administration, a sign says, "Your educational curriculum spoils society." From a video of a demonstration in the Deir Ezzor countryside. Deir Ezzor 24 Network. For more details click the [link](#).

Autonomous Administration justifies decision:

Kawthar Duku, the joint head of the Autonomous Administration Educational Committee in Northeastern Syria said that there is no justification to continue to adopt the UNICEF curriculum that included four subjects; Mathematics, Science, English, and Arabic, and four entertainment subjects. Duku added that these subjects which students, especially in Deir Ezzor, al-Raqqa, al-Tabaqa, and Manbij studied were not purposeful because UNICEF provided them during the emergency state.³

The Autonomous Administration says that it will not impose any curriculum without discussing it with the residents. The Autonomous Administration justified its decision that has not entered into force yet by saying that the residents of Deir Ezzor complained about the lack of students' books as school started, because of adopting the UNICEF curriculum, The Autonomous Administration added that following meetings



to find an alternative for the UNICEF curriculum, the administration suggested this curriculum that it adopted in the al-Hasakah governorate⁴. The Autonomous Administration proposed a curriculum starting from the first until the fourth class; however, samples of the Autonomous Administration curriculum of the preparatory and secondary school taught in the al-Hasakah governorate, were circulated and posted. The samples included History, Genealogy, and Culture

³ An interview with Kawthar Duku the joint head of the Autonomous Administration Educational Committee in Northeastern Syria, about unifying educational curriculums in the administration areas. ADAR Press website. The interview was posted on March 19, 2020. The last visit on July 20, 2020. For more details click the [link](#).

⁴ From a meeting of the Autonomous Administration Educational Committee with residents. Deir Ezzor Media Center formal page. A former source. For more details click the [link](#).

and Ethics. People did not criticize the suggested classes (from the first until the fourth) on social media or media outlets in Deir Ezzor.⁵

The decision is consistent with the Autonomous Administration orientation and conviction of implementing its administrative experience in al-Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. The Autonomous Administration faces significant difficulty in implementing the experience due to the tribal communities, especially in Deir Ezzor that includes a community sharing the same ethnic, religion, and tribal nature.

Decision context:

After establishing the Autonomous Administration in 2014, it announced a special educational curriculum for the school year 2015-2016. The Kurdish-integrated curriculum was dedicated for Kurds alone. The Autonomous Administration faced criticism that did not prevent it from implementing the decision. People found the decision as a chance to be fair to Kurdish language which Assad's regime neglected for decades.

Starting from the school year 2017-2018, the Autonomous Administration prepared an educational curriculum in Arabic for Arabs in the al-Hasakah governorate, Afrin, and Ayn al-Arab. The Autonomous Administration prepared another curriculum in Assyriac for Assyrians in these areas. The curriculum stated that only Kurds study the Kurdish curriculum with subjects to learn Arabic starting from the fourth class; however, only Arabs study the Arabic curriculum with subjects to learn Kurdish starting from the fourth class. The same applies to Assyriac. The attempt to impose the curriculum in areas in Deir Ezzor contributes to the attempt to create a sense of harmony in the Autonomous Administration on the administrative aspect, especially about an

⁵ From a post on the Deir Ezzor Media Center formal page. The former source.

important subject like education. The Autonomous Administration decision seems in harmony with the Autonomous Administration orientation to mainstream its experience regarding women's reality and intellectual ideologies.

The Autonomous Administration decision included meetings with students' parents and teachers, and promises by Laila al-Hassan the joint head of the Deir Ezzor Civil Council that the curriculum can be discussed and amended in line with the area.⁶ Hasan delivered promises after people criticized the Autonomous Administration deleting Religion subject.

However, the people weren't the only ones who criticized the curriculum, as many parents of students and personnel working in the education sector staged demonstrations and issued statements, refusing the curriculum. One of their most prominent statements was signed by five local councils under the autonomous administration. The statement included a set of demands. After holding meetings to discuss the curriculum of the autonomous administration, the people, students' parents, elders of the region, sheikhs, intellectuals, clerics and communes' heads issued a statement including several points, the most prominent of which: "The people of the region categorically reject the curriculum issued by the autonomous administration because its content and the ideas mentioned in it don't suit our customs, traditions and religious and moral heritage."⁷

⁶ From a meeting of the Autonomous Administration Educational Committee with residents. Deir Ezzor Media Center formal page. A former source. For more details.

⁷ A statement circulated on a wide scale on social media, provided with signatures and stamps of the Autonomous Administration local councils. The councils are: Martyr Dahash al-Abdullah Council 2- Martyr Hussein al-Atah Council 3- Martyr Ahmad al-Sheikh Council-4- Martyr Yazeed Furat Council - 5 Khatt abu Khashab Council.

People's reactions to the decision imposing the curriculum:

The students' parents, teachers and clerics of Deir Ezzor greatly criticized the decision on social media and media outlets.⁸ It was remarkable that all people rejected the curriculum "categorically". Some persons took advantage of the people's indignation to publish pages from the curriculum's later levels which no one have mentioned any thing about them that they would be taught in Deir Ezzor. The people' objections were expressed in statements, demonstrations and various meetings. In one of the

statement issued by " the civil actors in Deir Ezzor in all areas of the autonomous administration," the student's parents, educational personnel, intellectuals, clerics, tribal elders and all civil society organizations expressed their



category rejection of the curriculum issued by the autonomous administration to be taught in their areas at the beginning of the next school year. People justified their rejection by several points, most notably: "it is clear that the curriculum carries ideologies serving the interests of one political group in society at the expense of other groups, which is contrary to the intellectual freedom and democracy principles. The Islamic religion subject is essential in education, and it is contrary to the principle of intellectual freedom and respect for religious beliefs to replace it with a book talking about religions and beliefs that have no presence in our society."⁹

⁸ Deir Ezzor teachers issue a statement rejecting the new curriculum, Deir Ezzor 24 network, last visit, 20 July 2020. For more details click the [link](#).

⁹ A statement published on 16 July 2020. It was posted on social media and news sites on a large scale.

The most important reasons for the people's rejection:

- The people of the region categorically reject the curriculum issued by the autonomous administration due to its content and the ideas it contains.
- The curriculum is not suitable for students' educational future and the certificates they aspire to.
- The issued curriculum doesn't include the Islamic religion subject.
- People want internationally recognized curriculum and certificates for their children.
- The curriculum missed many researches and lessons related to the history and geography of the region, while it contains many lessons and inaccurate information that have nothing to do with the geography and history of Deir Ezzor.
- The curriculum contains many ideas alien to the customs, culture and heritage of the people of the region.
- The Islamic religion subject is essential in education, and it is contrary to the principle of intellectual freedom and respect for religious beliefs to replace it with a book talking about religions and beliefs that have no presence in Deir Ezzor society.
- "it is clear that the curriculum carries ideologies serving the interests of one political group in society at the expense of other groups, which is contrary to the intellectual freedom and democracy principles."
- The proposed curriculum implies separatist intentions, as the idea of formulating an educational curriculum that is contrary to the general mood of the people of the region clearly suggests that there is an explicit intention to change the value system of the people of the region, and it is obvious that the most effective way to reach the material separation is to achieve it at the intellectual and spiritual level first.
- No curriculum should be adopted unless it is piloted.

Conclusion and recommendations:

The autonomous administration has found that imposing an educational curriculum on the areas of Deir Ezzor is not an easy thing, and that making any attempts to implement the decision would have serious repercussions on the region, as people would escalate demonstrations and increase their demands beyond the curriculum issue. It has also become clear that any decision affecting the people, and compromising their religious, tribal and community values will not be welcome, on the opposite, it would be met with indignation and opposition even by people working in the autonomous administration. There are some persons who always try to raise issues affecting people, and exploit their discontent to achieve hidden goals aimed at targeting the special nature of Deir Ezzor areas.

Here is a set of recommendations to Deir Ezzor Civil Council Education Committee, the Syrian Democratic Forces and the International Coalition:

- The autonomous administration should release a clear and explicit statement, explaining to the people what has been reached with regard to the curriculum without delaying.
- The people will not change their view if the curriculum was suspended or the discussion about it was postponed.
- The autonomous administration will not allow schools in Deir Ezzor areas to teach Assad regime's curriculum. It might accept the United Nations curriculum but for a limited time, so a committee of experienced professional educationalists should be formed to formulate a curriculum that meets the people's aspirations and respects their religious and community values in cooperation and consultation with the Education Committee.
- Decisions should be considered before being issued, especially those affecting the people's life, and societal and religious values.
- People's demands should be dealt with seriously to avoid losing the popular support, which is a factor of stability in the region.
- Decisions should be clarified in time to avoid tension and prevent bad persons from taking advantage of it to serve their ill intentions.