

Regional Education Organizations in the Arab World: A case study of the ALECSO

Cherine Sabry

Supervisor: Natalie Papanastasiou

Erasmus GLOBED Programme

Department of Social Sciences

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Universitat Bremen

and University of Cyprus

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I- Introduction

Since the creation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, the world has witnessed a surge in the number of International Organizations (IOs) created to coordinate between nation-states on varying issues. According to Armstrong (2004) most IOs started with a focus in trade and international communication (such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD and the World Bank). The importance of international cooperation became more obvious with the end of colonization in the 19th century and the independence of nations, demanding to play a role in global politics and establishing themselves as legitimate sovereign states. Based on the Yearbook of International Organizations (1990), the number of IOs went from 5 to around 280 organizations between 1900 and 1990, with almost 30% created in the period between 1965 and 1974, coinciding with the era of decolonization. Stemming from the need for stability with nations attempting to maintain peace and avoid further conflict, IOs today “continue to exist, even to thrive, after their original purpose has disappeared or become far less relevant,” and after their original “*raison d’être*” has ceased to matter (Armstrong 2004, p.7). They have done so by shifting their attention to issues which are seen as underlying for sustainable economic development, such as health, *education* and even environmental issues (Heyneman 2016).

In the Arab world, a similar process took place following decolonization, and for newborn nation-states, the need for cooperation was even more pressing, hence the creation of regional organizations around the same time. At their foundation, these organizations were concerned with asserting Arab states’ political independence in a post-colonial context, through economic independence and cooperation among Arab states, but eventually following the same global trends, regional organizations including the League of Arab States (LAS) which started as a purely political entity aiming to better coordinate state affairs, moved to focus on other pressing issues and created specialized organizations to unify the regions’ states on important issues. In emulation of global organizations, the LAS founded the Arab Labor Organization (ALO) in 1965, the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) in 1976 and, the one that is of concern for this dissertation, the Arab

League's Education, Culture and Science Organization (ALECSO) in 1970 focusing on education in the Arab region and aiming to unify and protect Arab culture in the region's education systems.

It is surprising that while there are innumerable studies about global IOs in education (Mundy 1999 and 2007, McGuigan 2007, Mundy & Verger 2015, Martens & Niemann 2018), the role of regional organizations seems overshadowed. Although they are important in their field and in their regions, we know very little about them and their interactions with global IOs (Olaniran & Agnello 2008, Olcott 2010, Collins & Rhoads 2010, Morgan 2017).

Problem Statement

Research in the fields of international relations and education has historically focused on the leading education organizations, namely the World Bank (WB), the United Nations' Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and extensive research has been conducted regarding how they have placed themselves at the fore-front of global education policy-making in recent times (Barnett & Finnemore 1999 and 2004, Armstrong, Lloyd, & Redmond 2004). We know about the history of these organizations, how they came to be and the development of their policies throughout time, including their interest in education policy. However, there is a lack of representation in the scholarship of other IOs which are also specialized organizations, mandated to work on education policy, including regional organizations. Albeit smaller in size and power, it is essential to study their work and their relationship with the leading education IOs to understand the power dynamics created by this structure (Ghabra 2010, Olcott 2010, Ibrahim 2010, Kirkpatrick 2016, Abou-El-Kheir 2017). Global IOs' policy development and diffusion is usually based on the promotion of *best practices* and the creation of *international standards* which should be followed by all to *advance*. This however has been discredited by constructivist authors who see policy diffusion in a different way (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, Berry and Berry 1999, Ladi 2011); if these policies were really best practices, why are they always unidirectional (North->South)? Why do policies that were failures in the original context travel? And what role do regional organizations play in this policy transfer process? Hence post-colonial theorists have demonstrated that many of these policies are not taken up due to their successful outcomes, but rather for politico-economic reasons (condition to receive funding, belong to a certain global "club", etc.) (Steiner-Khamsi 2012).

Theoretical Framework and Approach

From the starting point of regional organizations, they seem to emulate a “higher” ideal, that if not imposed, is promoted by the West; the idea of creating inter-state organizations to coordinate and unify efforts made by individual nation-states towards a common goal (Finnemore 1993 and 1996b, Mundy 2007). This was also the case for the Arab region, where the LAS was established in emulation of the United Nations (Barnett & Solingen 2007, Pinfari 2009), aiming to become a supranational entity because even if there are similarities between the countries of the Arab World, there are also deep disparities that make one wonder what they have in common beyond a language and some cultural aspects (Reiser 1983). This can be explained through the undeniable hegemony of powerful IOs, which is a fact nowadays; some IOs have become more influential than some states and can therefore easily impose their own agendas on them (Mundy 1999 and 2007). The example of the World Bank with its Structural Adjustment Programs in developing countries, which had countless adverse results due to a one-size-fits-all narrative and understudied national economic structures (Green 2003, McGuigan 2007), is one of many. The approach for the dissertation was therefore guided by the theoretical framework which assumes that global and powerful actors have a strong influence on the smaller, weaker players in any field.

Although post-colonial theory originally stems from literary and cultural studies (most famously Edward Said’s *Orientalism* 1978), it is now applied in social sciences to explain phenomena that shape the world order in modern times. Regarding education, it argues that today’s neocolonial powers follow the same domination strategies as during the days of colonization, and prescribe the education policies of the so-called “developing countries” through numerous methods, including provision of loans and technical assistance for educational reforms (Anwaruddin 2014). Technical assistance might include sending large numbers of teachers and trainers to developing countries, providing scholarships for students and teachers to study in the West and learn about Western traditions of curriculum and pedagogy (Anwaruddin 2014, Martens & Niemann 2018). The objective of post-colonial theory became the deconstruction of prevalent hegemonic theories of modernity, economic development through neoclassical methods and global cooperation which inherently means dependency.

Based on the theoretical framework and from the readings in preparation for this research, my hypothesis is that the role of regional organizations is limited and affects national policy-making to a lesser extent than global IOs. Although their claim is to counter global hegemony over

education policy and to establish regionally specific guidelines and structures, they eventually get lost in the sea of more influential IOs (Karami Akkari 2014). Hypotheses as to why regional organizations are less influential than global ones include their lack of funding, qualified experts or appealing policies that lead to economic development (Hickling-Hudson et al. 2004, Rizvi 2007, Olaniran & Agnello 2008, Karami Akkari 2014). Global IOs, some of which are economically driven, have been known to promote policies that can make populations “economically useful”, which has “involved the extension and expansion of institutions such as education and training as well as the development of greater statistical and other kinds of knowledge about populations in low-income countries” (Tikly 2004, p. 178). Global education organizations tend to be more alluring as they present themselves as the leaders on the issue, offering international standardized knowledge-based solutions, but more importantly, proposing policies that claim to lead to economic development. The fact that these are often Western capitalist, neoliberal ideas is not always questioned by the receiving countries (Tikly 2004).

Relevance and Importance of the Research

It can easily be argued that not enough attention is given to the non-leading IOs in global education and that besides “official reports from IOs such as the World Bank (World Bank 2008, 2013a) and UNESCO’s Education for All national and regional reports analysing the quality of education”, there is little scholarly work exploring the regional aspect of educational quality in the Arab region (Morgan 2017, p. 499). The objective of the research project is to discover more about the ALECSO, which is an ideal empirical case study for exploring the role of IOs in a regional context, especially one as understudied as the Arab world. The ALECSO itself is also an under-studied organization, and as a specialized organization of the LAS, it does not have much recognition. This gap in the knowledge poses the legitimate question around the rationale of why they do what they do despite not being recognized as a major player. This leads to the following line of questioning regarding the interaction between the global and regional levels through the post-colonial perspective; whether the struggle (if there is one) of regional organizations to counteract the trend of global IOs to recreate the colonial order by pushing Western agendas onto developing countries has to do with the fact that they are relegated to the background of global education policy making. I am hoping to contribute in filling the gap by providing an empirical contribution to the field.

The geographical scope of this paper is the “Arab world”, a label that defines countries based on their national language, but also a specific cultural background and a common colonial history that binds them and makes them an interesting cluster to study together. The Arab countries considered include all 22 member states of the ALECSO, which are Middle-East and North Africa countries¹.

Research Questions

The research will tentatively focus on the following questions:

- a) What role do regional organizations play in the design of education policy in the Arab world?

Sub-questions: i) What is the rationale behind the choice of specific policies? Are these policies properly adapted and contextualized to this specific region prior to their implementation?

- b) How are these policies shaped by the interaction between regional and global IOs?

Sub-questions ii) What kind of relationship do regional organizations have with global ones? And how are regional organizations influenced by global education IOs?

In order to answer these questions, I have conducted a qualitative case study of the ALECSO as an example of a regional education organization in the Arab world. Conducting an in-depth study of one organization may help explain some aspects of its role in shaping education policy in the region, and how that role is influenced by leading IOs. Case study research is very useful in conducting in-depth, multi-faceted analyses of complex issues in their own contexts (Hartley 2004). This research follows the *instrumental case study* design, exploring a case as one instance of a specific issue, in this case a particular type of organizations within the full range of IOs, which may suggest something about regional organizations in general (Cousin 2005). And although a one-case design is not sufficient to generalize the findings to all similar organizations, it attempts to fill part of the gap and hopefully entice further research in this area.

In the next section, I start by providing a broad overview of the LAS and the ALECSO, followed by a brief literature review to contextualize the research within the scholarship. In the methodology section I explain my approach to the research and the tools I have used in order to answer my research question and finally present my empirical findings.

¹ ALECSO Charter: member states include Jordan, U.A.E., Bahrain, Tunisia, Algeria, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Somalia, Iraq, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Comoros, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Egypt, Morocco, Mauritania and Yemen.

II- The Arab League and the ALECSO

The Arab League

Formally called the League of Arab States (LAS), but more commonly known as the Arab League (AL), it was first established in 1944 through the “Alexandria Protocol.” Although the call for Arab unity had been on the table for several centuries, the idea of establishing a single Arab organization that brings together Arab countries did not materialize or have clear features until during the Second World War due to a number of Arab, regional and international variables (LAS History of the League webpage 2020). According to the second article of the Arab League Charter (Alexandria Protocol, 1944):

“The purpose of the League is to strengthen the ties between the countries participating in it, coordinate their political plans, achieve cooperation between them, maintain their independence and sovereignty, and examine the affairs and interests of the Arab countries.”

The League started out with only 7 members at the time of its establishment (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Jordan in 1944, followed closely by Saudi Arabia and Yemen in 1945), but included clauses on the plan to add members as Arab States gain their independence in the years to come, with special clauses for Palestine.

The AL’s main mission was and still is to politically and strategically coordinate between countries of the region. What started as an anti-colonial movement, including combatting the creation of the Israeli state in Palestine in 1948, continues to organize the relations among states on issues that concern them. As was the case for many of the global IOs, the Arab League started out as an economic, strategic (security) and legal coordination entity which worked on coordinating Arab-Arab relations in these areas, it has expanded to encompass various other issues which were seen as essential in the development and cooperation between nations. The AL consists of three main branches established according to the provisions of the Charter, and these are the League Council,

the permanent committees, and the General Secretariat; each member state has one vote in the League Council, and decisions are binding only for those states that have voted for them.

According to the AL's official website (LAS History of the League webpage 2020), the organization describes its role as the following: throughout its history, the League of Arab States has been able to play four main roles as follows:

- a) Contributing to Arab countries gaining their independence.
- b) Participation in settlement of Arab-Arab disputes, and the ability of the League in this field is linked to the degree of acceptance of its role by conflicting parties, showing that the League's authority does not exceed the powers of its members.
- c) Encouraging Arab cooperation through specialized organizations. Their activities include issues of employment, economic and social development, scientific and cultural affairs, means of communication and the media, and some organizations such as the Arab Labor Organization (ALO) and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) and the Arab Organization for Education, Culture and Science (ALECSO) have risen.
- d) Representing Arab countries in various international forums and organizations such as the United Nations and its specialized organizations and the Organization of African Unity.

The ALECSO

The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) is a Tunis-based specialized institution working under the umbrella of the League of Arab States. It is essentially concerned with the development and coordination of activities related to education, culture and sciences in the Arab World. It was established through Article 3 of the Arab Cultural Unity Charter, and was officially announced in Cairo on July 25, 1970. The members of the ALECSO are the same as those of the Arab League, meaning all 22 Arab speaking States in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, (North) Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

As stated in Article 1 of its Constitution², ALECSO was established with the aim of promoting

² Constitution and Charter used interchangeably. Arabic word is the same.

Arab intellectual unity through education, culture and sciences, and enhancing the educational, cultural and scientific level in the Arab world so that it can positively contribute to universal civilization (ALECSO 1972). Within this overall objective, ALECSO performs a number of tasks, including in particular: i) upgrading the level of human resources in the Arab World; ii) providing favorable conditions for the development of education, culture, sciences, the environment, and communication in the Arab world; iii) promoting and disseminating the Arabic Language and the Arab-Islamic culture in the Arab world and elsewhere; and iv) establishing channels of dialogue and communication with other cultures worldwide.

The organization's Constitution, which the Arab member states have approved, establishes the diplomatic and coordination role of the organization on the following issues:

- a) Coordination of Arab efforts in the fields of education, culture and science.
- b) Supporting Arab cooperation to develop Arab educational systems.
- c) Coordinating the efforts of Arab civil society institutions.
- d) Coordinating the efforts of Arab countries in developing and updating curricula and methods of teaching and learning the Arabic language (ALECSO 2014, pp. 5-6).

Organizational structure:

The ALECSO is made up of two governing bodies; a legislative arm and an executive arm. The legislative body consists of the General Conference (which meets once every two years) and the Executive Council (which meets at least three times each fiscal year). The executive body is made up of the Director-General (elected by the General Conference for a four-year term renewable only once) and the Assistant Director-General. These entities manage the work of the organization through four departments: The Education, Culture, Science and Research and the Information and Communication departments (ALECSO 2019, Organizational Structure page).

It also has five external centers that are part of the organization called subsidiary institutions: The Arabization Coordination Bureau in Rabat, the Institute of Arabic Manuscripts and the Institute of Arab Research and Studies in Cairo, the Khartoum International Institute for Arabic Language in Khartoum and the Arab Center for Arabization, Translation, Authorship and Publication in Damascus. While the ALECSO is no longer closely affiliated with the Arab League, these centers are direct subordinates of the ALECSO, meaning that the ALECSO manages everything within them and they are affiliated to it administratively and financially, unlike its relation to the AL of

which it has become more autonomous. ALECSO is a medium-sized organization, with a total of 199 employees at headquarters and in the external centers (ALECSO 2014).

The ALECSO lists a number of partner organizations ranging from global (UNESCO, Handicap International), to regional (ICESCO, The Latin Union, Arab Women Organization), inter-regional (Arab-French Chamber of Commerce) as well as national partners (universities and local foundations). As part of its main strategies, the ALECSO is quite focused on all-level partnerships to create better cooperation to reinforce and promote the organization's presence in the Arab and international fora relevant to its different fields of action.

“Today, ALECSO is seeking to reinforce its active presence within the global system, through forging strategic partnerships and implementing purposeful programs that meet its priorities, within a changing world marked by ever-accelerating developments and challenges” (ALECSO 2019, Partners page).

Main policies and strategies

The ALECSO has a number of different strategies and policies that it promotes through its different departments depending on their specialization. In the education department, ALECSO policies are mainly guided through the “Plan for the Development of Education in the Arab countries” developed by the ALECSO and its members in 2008 at the Damascus Conference; it is an overarching plan for improving the quality of education in all member countries which will be discussed further in the following sections. The organization's policies are also very much guided by global frameworks such as the UN's SDG 4, as well as UNESCO, and World Bank guidelines.

Departments can also collaborate on certain issues; for instance, an important common project between the education and scientific research departments is concerned with the publishing of the Arab Journal of Education, one of the most important educational magazines in the Arab world. It is a refereed journal which publishes scholarly work by youth in the Arab world for no cost in order to encourage Arab scientific research in the field of education (interviewee 1, 2021).

It is worth noting here that through this research, it has come to my attention that the ALECSO as an organization has been the focus of very few studies; some specialized Arab scholars or foreign scholars who have worked on and in the Arab world have attempted to analyze some of its specific projects (Osman 1981, Morgan 2017), but there has been no overarching examination of how and where it draws its policies from. That is why this dissertation stands to make an important empirical contribution to the field of education IOs by revealing new insights about a relatively unknown

regional IO, that is a key organization in the Arab region, operating in a post-colonial context and drawing strength from its foundational narrative to combat it. The ALECSO is an ideal case to analyze in order to answer the proposed research questions. In order to do so, the following section reviews available scholarship to contextualize the issue further.

III- Literature Review

Key Concepts, Theories and Studies

The world of education IOs is complex and encompasses different types of organizations with varying interests. First, I seek to understand how the ALECSO as an IO views its role within the region; according to their Charter, the organization's aim is to work only for the benefit of its member states. However, as highlighted by Barnett and Finnemore in *The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations* (1999, p. 699); "many IOs exercise power autonomously in ways unintended and unanticipated by states at their creation," they take a life of their own. In this research, I analyze whether this is the case for the ALECSO, or if the organization has stayed true to its word. The second focus of the dissertation is on the interaction between different levels of IOs and how they influence each other, whether through cooperation, competition or pressure. Post-colonial theorists such as Young (2001), Steiner-Khamsi (2004, 2012) and Shahjahan (2013, 2016) have tackled the issue of power relations between global IOs and other actors within the education sphere such as national governments and local organizations, especially concerning policy diffusion and travel. The dissertation relies on literature that focus on the interaction between the international, regional and national levels, the influence and pressure by the leading IOs on governments and the role that regional organizations play in the mix. In the following review, I will firstly look into arguments by education scholars regarding the role of IOs in shaping education policy. Following that I will outline the key debates in policy transfer literature concerning *how* and *why* policies travel, especially through the postcolonial literature.

IOs

Research regarding education IOs is profuse, especially concerning the global players; UNESCO, the WB and the OECD (Barnett & Finnemore 1999 and 2004, Abbott & Sindal 2005, Mundy & Verger 2015). Scholars have studied how leading IOs influence policy-making in national states; Mundy (1999, 2007, 2015), Martens and Niemann (2018) have heavily researched how leading IOs, especially the OECD and UNESCO have shaped global governance on the most important

issues, establishing themselves as prominent actors despite not having binding or coercive governance instruments in relation to states. In *Global Discourses, Regional Framings and Individual Showcasing: Analyzing the World of Education IOs*, Martens and Niemann (2020) provide an analysis of the existing education IOs and classify them into a typology that puts into perspective the hierarchy of global and regional organizations. According to this typology there are *multi-purpose organizations*, which are all regional and trans-regional that have more than one focus such as the ASEAN or the AU, *specialized organizations*, that focus on specific issues that include education and they are all global (UNICEF, ILO, UNHCR), *IOs with a primarily economic focus*, but which work in education fields based on a human capital theory frame (World Bank, OECD on a global level, Development Banks on a regional level) and finally the *education IOs* which are specialized with a chief focus on education development activities (UNESCO, ICESCO, ALECSO). This is similar to the Armstrong et al. (2004) classification according to which the ALECSO is a regional (“membership based on geographical propinquity”) specific (“devoted to a particular activity”) organization.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I use Barnett and Finnemore’s (2004) definition of International Organizations identified in *Rules for the World. International Organizations in Global Politics*: they are organizations whose members are states (three or more) and are supported by a permanent secretariat to perform tasks related to a common purpose. IOs are complex hubs of policy communities formed of nation states that tackle domestic and foreign policy issues at the regional and/or international levels (Shahjahan 2016). Western and Arab scholars noted the increasingly important role IOs play as transnational actors, focusing in particular on their capacity to dominate educational discourse and set agendas for educational reform at the regional and domestic scales (Karami Akkary 2014). As Finnemore has astutely phrased it in *IOs as Teachers of Norms* (1993, p. 592):

“When initially analyzing the data on creation of science policy organizations I noted that for the earliest innovators in this area [...], demand-driven explanations maybe sufficient. UNESCO [...] picked up the notion from successful and powerful states and popularized it. Thus, while the first science policy organizations may have been created in response to domestic demand, subsequent adoptions were strongly influenced by systemic norms promoted by UNESCO”.

Therefore, I would like to take it one step further and in the post-colonial framework of this research treat them as “teachers of *Western* norms”. Based on what has been outlined in the introduction, IOs do more than just represent their member states, but more often than not they are charged with

pushing policies that are framed as best practice solutions for all problems on developing countries despite many experiences showing the failure of this one-size fits all thematic.

Post-colonial Approaches to Policy Travel

Postcolonial theory seeks to explain issues of opposition, privilege, domination, struggle and resistance (Anne Hickling-Hudson, Julie Matthews & Annette Woods 2004). Postcolonial approaches have contributed to extending our understanding of policy borrowing between states, “because they draw attention to the false universalism of globalization and show how contemporary social, political, economic, and cultural practices continue to be located within the processes of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power” (Rizvi 2007, p.257). The colonial history of the region helps contextualize and explain why power relations are the way they are. In *The politics of educational transfer and policymaking in Egypt*, Ibrahim (2010) presents such a historical angle to put contemporary events into perspective:

“Today Egyptian education [...] is characterized by a series of schisms: between modern secular education and religious education, and between traditional teaching and learning modes, an extreme version of French centralization, a deformed version of British inspection and exams, a socialist legacy of “free” and equitable access to education, and Western capitalist (neoliberal) notions of privatization and active-learning pedagogies” (Ibrahim 2010, p. 510).

And although his writings concern Egypt, they can be applied to most of the Arab region who share a similar colonial history. In Stone’s *Transfer and translation of policy* (2012), the author explores literature around the role of IOs in policy diffusion; although ‘diffusion’ and ‘transfer’ might explain the conscious spread of policies and ideas between countries, ‘convergence’ represents a counter-idea explaining spread of policy that is not seemingly logical, better describing institutional isomorphism as a result of ‘path dependencies’ and the taken-for-granted situations where actors follow shared interpretations, schema and meanings (Ladi 2011). “‘Pioneer’ states that lead the adoption of a policy ‘laggard’ states eventually adopt” (Berry and Berry 1999, pp. 172-178). ‘Institutional isomorphism’ attempts to explain the drive of organizations to become homogenous by emulating more established organizations (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). This constructivist understanding of how policies travel between regions seems better able to explain why failed policies travel and why diffusion only happens unilaterally North to South.

Examples of dominant policies in education in the region revolve mainly around English language education as a tool to establish Western hegemony (Ghabra 2010, Olcott 2010, Kirkpatrick 2016, Abou-El-Kheir 2017) and privatization of education, in line with neoliberal economic policies (Ibrahim, 2010). Such trends are promoted as norms, in the name of globalization and internationalization. In *Constructing educational quality in the Arab region: a bottom-up critique of regional educational governance* (2017), Morgan sums up the issue of Western hegemony;

“Arab scholars have emphasised how these ‘hypernarratives’ (Stronach 2010) reinforce dominant views of education or what Fasheh (1990) calls ‘visible’ levels of education [...] while neglecting other educational views and objectives that are ‘invisible.’”

The power of global IOs is pronounced in this respect by promoting one-sided policies on an international scale, which brings me back to the point about them being teachers of *Western* norms; “Their power lies in what they exclude and their capacity to replace one form of knowledge with another” (Fasheh 1990, p. 24), reinforcing educational inequality by marginalization. More recently, constructivist studies highlight how international agencies and governments actively construct theories of action (Ruggie 1998, Wendt 1999, Finnemore & Sikkink 2001). Scholars have framed IOs’ education initiatives within ‘client countries’ as neocolonial domination suggesting that IOs reproduce client dependencies, limit local decision-making, and promote one-size fit all solutions based on Western knowledge and neoliberal ideology (Anwaruddin 2014, Collins & Rhoads 2010). Neocolonial forms of domination are grounded in unequal economic relationships and manifest through cultural domination and/or political interference (Young 2001).

Pan-Arabism

Booming in the 19th century, the idea of Pan-Arabism stems from anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-zionist feelings that were bubbling at the surface. In *Pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism and interstate relations in the Arab World* (2002), Mellon highlights that it is important to note that most countries in the Middle East did not start seeing themselves as “nations” in the modern sense until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when “focus on language and the determination of nationality typically on the basis of a shared language developed [...] in Europe” (p. 2). An interesting aspect is how this ideology, albeit Arab in principle, seems to emanate from European examples: “This reflects the fact that Pan-Arabism as a form of nationalism represents both an imitation of the West, and a reaction against the West” (Mellon 2002, p. 2). It is worth noting that

there is a difference between the movement for the unification of Arab countries and the movement that seeks to create a unified Islamic state. Pan-Arabism, in contrast to Pan-Islamism favors separation between religion and politics, or even at its extremes, the subordination of religious observance to political authority, which is similar to the European approach. And we can already see in this inherently Arab movement, an emulation of Western, Euro-centric ideals.

Similarly, Rodinson (1981, pp.104-5) notes in *The Arabs* that:

“Arab nationalism has fashioned for itself an ideology which includes a theory of the nation [...] put together in response to the spontaneous aspirations and practical political problems arising out of the experience of the Arab peoples, but using ideological tools fabricated in Europe.”

The figure most prominently associated with Pan-Arabism was Egyptian President Gamal Abd El Nasser, who was among the founders of the non-aligned movement, stemming from similar post-colonial ideas.

“The nature of this expression has ranged from intergovernmental cooperation between the sovereign states in military, political, cultural and economic matters-the *raison d'être* of the Arab League-all the way to the establishment of a single state for a united Arab nation” (Reiser 1983, p. 218).

The ideology peaked through the Nasserite and Baathist movements and with the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) between Egypt and Syria (ALECSO 2008, p. 24). Humphreys (1999, p.82) observes that Pan-Arabism persists as a vital cultural force but “does not provide a framework for political action that goes beyond the narrow confines of state nationalism and presents a vision of a ‘greater destiny’”. As Ajami (1978) argues, Pan-Arabism represented an anti-Ottoman and anti-colonial nationalist movement supported by intellectuals and political elite outraged by the 1948 displacement of Palestinians and inspired by the charismatic leadership of Nasser. When these ideas receded in the 1970s, during which time both colonialism and the Ottoman empire had become ancient history, and after the death of the charismatic leader of the movement, the ideology became less prominent. The differences between Arab states, namely regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how to deal with it, created a rupture among the group that turned out not to be as unified as they thought. New nationalists presented a new conception of Arab unity that is closer to the European project (Mellon 2002). The new concept was based on economic integration and the freedom of movement of people and goods between different countries, in addition to activating the joint Arab defense agreement to reach an Arab union while

preserving social and cultural characteristics that exist in Arab countries. This was the basic principle for the creation of the Arab League and later on the ALECSO (ALECSO 2019).

Gaps in Existing Knowledge

The research design is built on the consensus by scholars in education policy that there is a lack of literature concerning IOs that are not as influential on the global level as the WB or UNESCO (Martens & Niemann 2018 and 2020, Morgan 2017, Karami Akkary 2014). And

“beyond single case studies on prominent IOs in education we know comparatively little about how the population of education IOs is constituted and how they reflect on and promote education purposes” (Martens & Niemann 2020, p. 2).

Regional IOs and the Arab World are both understudied areas in education literature, which is why there is a need to shed light on the role that they play. There is especially a scarcity of analysis regarding the role that regional organizations play within the policy diffusion process and in the recreation of postcolonial/imperialist power structures.

This literature review has highlighted two key gaps in the extensive literature which focuses on the work of IOs in the field of education policy. Firstly, there is a significant gap in understanding the work of regional IOs compared to the major global IOs. By researching how the ALECSO identifies the policies it chooses to promote and what the underlying rationale of that choice is, this dissertation stands to make a contribution to the ongoing efforts of scholars to address this relatively neglected area of study. Secondly, the review has shown that there is a striking empirical gap in understanding how regional organizations fit in the global policy transfer process that occurs, and the influence of this policy transfer on postcolonial regions, specifically the Arab region. By exploring the case study of ALECSO in the Arab region, this dissertation begins to address this gap by analyzing document and interview data in order to identify signs of the struggle to implement relevant policies in the region.

In the methodology section I will go over the different tools used to collect and analyze data and how these instruments will help in answering the abovementioned research questions.

IV- Methodology

Research design

The reality of the existence of global pressure on regional organizations to design specific education policies differs from case to case. Therefore, rather than drawing conclusions about the reasons why all regional IOs as a construct make certain decisions or choose specific policies, which would be a futile exercise as IOs are a large and diverse group, the research is more focused on identifying some of the underlying factors that influence these decisions, specific to their context, using the ALECSO as the example of a case to identify some of these factors (Flyvbjerg 2006). Using a post-colonial framework for the analysis, I have conducted a qualitative case study (QCS) of one regional IO focusing on the Arab world; the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO). The case study method allows for a holistic understanding of an issue within real-life settings from the viewpoint of those involved. Stake (2005) has portrayed the case study approach as having the capacity to grasp the complexities of a certain event or issue, making QCS best suited to research that asks *how* and *why* (Stake 2005, Yin 2003). The area of study is the Arab world, which includes states from the Middle East and North Africa, is a geographical region defined mainly by the existence of a common language, Arabic. The main IO that coordinates different issues between these nations on a regional level is the League of Arab States. There are obviously other regional organizations that are worth studying, as there is a lack of information about them in the scholarship, but due to time and resource restrictions I was forced to choose only one for the purpose of this research. I acknowledge the limitations of an analysis focused on only one organization, but I am confident that close qualitative examination of the discourse and tools used by this actor in global education policy brings important insights into how policy making is shaped in the region (Flyvbjerg 2006).

The analysis was conducted with a specific post-colonial lens to identify trends of resistance to or coordination with global IOs within the organizations' discourse that either support or refute my hypothesis. Within that framework, I have used a Thematic Analysis approach (TA); a method for

identifying and analyzing patterns of meaning (themes) in qualitative data (Gavin 2008, Braun & Clarke 2014). TA involves the generation of codes and then themes from qualitative data, which capture interesting features of the data that is relevant to the research questions. “Codes captures both semantic (surface) meaning within the data and latent (underlying) meaning, while themes, constructed from coding, capture broader patterns of meaning within the data and are used to structure the presentation of results” (Braun & Clarke 2014). During the research, I was looking for signs and patterns in the analyzed documents as well as in the interviewees’ speech. It was sometimes quite clear how ALECSO views global IOs as a guiding light for their work, but sometimes it was also subtler in the way they phrase certain policies, that reflects how they tend to imitate global trends and look up to them.

Methods and Sources

The study has relied heavily on primary data collected through an extensive desktop review of the organizations’ own publications (research, policy briefs, strategic documents, etc.) and publications from partner organizations that work with the ALECSO. I also conducted two interviews which complemented the research. My original plan was to conduct a qualitative study mainly based on interviews and complemented by secondary data, but the circumstances were not convenient when planning for the final design. I had to shift the methodology to find another way to reach my purpose. So, in order to understand what the organization views as its role in designing and shaping education policy in the region, and to answer my first research question, I used the available online materials. The main publications that I use in my review are:

Document title	Year	Type	Language
ALECSO Charter	1972	Charter	Arabic
Plan for the Development of Education in the Arab Countries	2008	Strategic Plan	Arabic
ALECSO Strategic Plan 2017-2022	2017	Strategic Plan	Arabic
The Arab Regional Agenda for Improving Education Quality	2012	Project documents	English
Education Policies and their Role in Achieving SDG 4	2019	Policy Paper	Arabic
Including the Concept of Pan-Arabism and the Arab Dimension in General Education Curricula	2019	Policy Paper	Arabic
Study for Developing and Updating the Organizational Structure of the ALECSO	2014	Policy Paper	Arabic

In addition, for the second research question (b) I have conducted two in-depth expert interviews with key organization staff, which have been done remotely through the online platform Zoom.

Reaching staff from the organization was more difficult than originally anticipated. As will be shown in the findings, the organization is not very big and the education department within has a limited number of staff members. Therefore, when I was able to reach the organization and get referred to a project coordinator in the education department (interviewee 1), I had reached the ceiling from that side. I also attempted to reach out to former employees of the organization, whom I expected to be more inclined to discuss and share their experience with the ALECSO, but somehow what I found was the opposite; they were more reluctant to participate in the research as they felt they could no longer speak in the name of the organization, as they phrased it. Only one person agreed to be interviewed; a former Chief of Staff of the ALECSO (interviewee 2) and it was quite helpful, although it is important for me to admit to the limitation of the number of interviews provided. The interviewees were then treated as “elite”, and the findings were used to complement the findings from the document review (Natow 2019). As Kezar (2008) notes, it is challenging to acquire a large number of “elite interviews” and therefore it is important to start with extensive desktop research. The interviews were semi-structured in order to better understand how the staff view the organization’s interaction with global IOs, guiding participants in the enquiry but also allowing them freedom to discuss topics they deemed relevant after explaining the purpose of the study. The benefit was that the two participants were strategically positioned (ex)staff within the organization, and so their inputs were quite valuable. Interviewee 1 provided the official view of the organization and the stance it conveys for itself, which was important in feeding into RQ a), while interviewee 2 gave a thorough analytical outlook of the organization from someone who was quite involved in most aspects and departments of the ALECSO and played an important role in the decision and policy-making processes. A sample of an interview guide is attached as Annex 1.

The use of interviews allows for subjectivity and complexity within human experience. This makes interviews a powerful tool for understanding how the organization defines itself through the analysis of its employees’ speech (for RQ a) (Alvesson 2003). Similar to the document analysis, interview data was also coded within the same identified themes to identify specific terminology relating to Arabism, cultural specificity, global hegemony and constructivist approaches to policy diffusion. This process allowed for a triangulation of the data to ensure data from different sources is complementary and provides a fuller picture of the situation (Davies 2001, Thurmond 2001, Denzin 2009, Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Triangulation with multiple sources provides “corroboration” of initial findings, as well as “incorporation of additional information” to what one data source provides (Davies 2001, p.78). As will be clear in the findings section, data was then

grouped into the three main themes that came out most from the reviewed documents. These themes revolve around the dichotomy that the ALECSO faces in identifying its policies, and the pull of two different trends that define it; the Arab cultural narrative and the global dominant agenda.

Practical Considerations

The original plan was for the research to be conducted in Tunis, Tunisia, where the headquarters of the organization is located, in order to be close to staff members and attempt to attend any events, conferences or meetings I would be able to, in order to conduct more interviews and some observational analysis. However, and due to the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed on travel, I had to switch my design. The current research design relies heavily on primary sources through an intensive desk review of the organization's publications pertaining to its work in the Arab region.

Since I am looking at the issue through a post-colonial lens, the fact that I am a native Arabic speaker was extremely helpful in the field work. I was able to read documents in their original language, but more importantly, address key informants in their own language, avoiding misunderstandings and making them feel more comfortable. In the Arab world, people tend to recoil from foreign (Western) researchers, but with me it was not the case. I was able to chat more freely with the participants by speaking in their native language and not presenting any barrier in the discussion. The main challenge in studying the Arab world as part of an English-language Masters programme is that the majority of the studied material is written in Arabic. As Arabic is my native language, I had no issue in understanding the material, the challenge however was in coding and collecting codes into themes while using different languages concomitantly. The most time-consuming task was also translating the interviews conducted from Arabic to English in order to help me in the data analysis, as well as translating quotations to be included in the thesis.

The research complies to ethical standards; the interviewed participants were made aware of the purpose and design of the project, and were given the choice to be anonymized in the final product, if they so wished. They did not object to being named, but as is standard with research, their names were not mentioned, only their job titles (Allen 2017, Coffelt 2017). This was documented through obtaining their informed consent via a signed Data Confidentiality Agreement (Annexes 2 and 3).

V- Findings

The analysis of the documents and interview data revealed an antagonism between two major themes. The ALECSO as a regional organization is divided between two major trends that pull it in different directions; on the one hand its foundational *cultural specificity* and its roots in the Arab world, and on the other the *dominant global trends in education* that cannot be avoided on any level (whether national, regional or international). This then becomes clear in how the ALECSO defines its role in the region, as well as its relationship with the global IOs.

ALECSO Unmoored Between Regional Specificity and Universalism

According to ALECSO's Constitution, the organization's original mandate is to "enable intellectual unity among the Arab world through education, culture and science, and to raise the cultural level so that Arab people are able to participate positively as Global Citizens" (Article 1, ALECSO Charter 1972). And since the first article, we find this dichotomy between two roles that the organization has set for itself: encouraging *Arab unity* and *preservation of Arab culture* but never forgetting its larger role in a global environment where the organization also needs to "extend bridges of dialogue and cooperation between this culture and other cultures in the world" (ALECSO Charter 1972). Entrenched in an ideological framework and based on a cultural backdrop that embraces the ideology of Pan-Arabism, the *importance of the Arabic language*, and to a lesser extent a broad conception of Islamic culture, the ALECSO struggles to position itself within a universalist, globalized arena of education policy making.

According to the analysis of the different organizational documents as well as the interviews conducted, the ALECSO draws the designs of its policies from 3 different sources concurrently: i) Arab regional education experts' recommendations, ii) National level suggestions from member countries and iii) Global guidelines and trends. Therefore, agendas are often designed by incorporating several lenses. An example of this process was the development of the Strategic Plan 2017-2022; the plan was based on a set of references and sources from which its main objectives and work priorities were derived, and were as follows:

- a) The Charter of Arab Cultural Unity.
- b) The Constitution of the Organization.
- c) Strategies and plans issued by the organization.
- d) The Plan for Developing Education in the Arab world.
- e) The project for the advancement of the Arabic language to move towards a knowledge society.
- f) The basic features of the plan as approved by the General Conference.
- g) Results of the evaluation of previous plans.
- h) The challenges and difficulties facing the Arab countries, and the organization is facing in the performance of its tasks entrusted to it.
- i) The best Arab and international experiences in the fields of the organization's work.
- j) The views of the organization and the orientations of its various departments and its affiliated centers.
- k) Member states' opinions and the orientations of their national committees

ALECSO Strategic Plan 2017-2022 (2016)

We see here how the ALECSO bases its policies on various sources, many of them Arab, as the ideological foundation of the organization demands, and which give it this special positionality, but also and always on international resources. This is also made clear by the very strong cooperation between the ALECSO and other organizations; on the Arab regional level (mainly ICESCO and the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States) and on the global level (UNESCO and the WB), which are constant partners. It is clear from the documents reviewed and the interviews conducted that the ALECSO works in very close coordination and partnership with its partners; "ALECSO works in an Arab context, in a regional context and in a global context, meaning all of these organizations work in the framework of an international alliance" (interviewee 1, 2021).

This appears to have led to a slight identity crisis within the priorities of the organization. This crisis is specifically mentioned in the *Including the Concept of Pan-Arabism and the Arab Dimension in General Education Curricula* (ALECSO 2019, p.9) publication;

"The dangerous situations that our region is going through, in which the Arab land has become permissible, Arab energies and resources are dissipated, and with them the *Arab*

identity, where the Arab sense of belonging and Arab culture are receding, it is necessary for all of us to stand with oneself and take a reflective pause to reassess the situation.”

This becomes even more obvious when we delve deeper into the organization’s choice of policies; it becomes clear that to maintain its special position in the region, the ALECSO resorts to choosing policies that are very specific to the region, some would argue too specific, to the extent that they could essentially contribute to the hindrance of their own development strategies. An important example of this would be the Arabization of Higher Education in Arab countries policy that was promoted by the organization in 2012 during the *Accessing Higher Education – The language debate* forum, claiming “that teaching science and other subjects in Arabic at more Arab universities would be better than teaching them in foreign languages, to remain up to date on modern technology and sciences” (Sawahel 2012), following from the 2008 Plan for the Development of Education in the Arab Countries and based on the rationale that Arabizing education would make it more accessible to populations that only speak the native language. However, it has been shown over and over again that “the Arabisation of degrees faces a serious threat from the dominance of English and the inadequacy of technical material translated and published in Arabic” (Sawahel 2012) and the Arab scholar is always left behind if they are unable to keep up with innovation, such as what happened in Syria in the 1990s (interviewee 2, 2021).

I will explore further in the next sections these different aspects that create a dichotomy within the ALECSO and attempt to identify which of the two trends holds the balance of power.

a) Preservation of Arab Culture and Identity

In order to ascertain what is meant by “Arab identity”, I use the definition of “identity” as defined by ALECSO in *Including the Concept of Pan-Arabism and the Arab Dimension in General Education Curricula* (2019):

“Identity means a strong awareness and feeling of the individual towards his family, his homeland and his nation. Identity is part of the individual’s concept of himself, and stems from his perception that he is a member of a group bound by a territory as well as by cultural, value-laden and sentimental factors that shape his relationship to this group.”

According to the author, what defines Arab identity is: the Islamic religion, a biological sense of identity wherein Arabs are one race, a geographical closeness, a common history and culture and most importantly, the Arabic language (ALECSO 2019). This gives us a clear idea of the foundational narrative that the organization is based on and how it defines the general ideology that

explains its existence. This emphasis on *Arabization and the importance of the Arabic language* as a common factor between these nations is clearly stressed by the number of times the terms “Arab” “preservation” “culture” “pan-Arabism” “Arabic” “Arabization” etc. are mentioned in every single ALECSO publication, which are evidently the core values promoted by the organization. In a document entitled *ALECSO Activities in the Field of Translation* which presents an important part of the organization’s work around the translation of important literature to and from Arabic, work that has culminated in the creation of The Arab Centre for Arabization, Translation, Writing and Publishing in Damascus, whose number one objective was to assist the Arabization of higher education in the Arab countries, the author explains that “The term ‘national’ (qawmīy) is often used in Arab documents in the sense of ‘Pan-Arab’. The Arabs regard themselves as one ‘nation’” (Libdeh 1986).

Through the analysis of the documents, it is easy to note an obvious Pan-Arab stance taken by the ALECSO, glorifying aspects of Arabization while subtly rejecting aspects of Westernization. The *Education Policy and its Role in Achieving SDG 4 (2019)* document emphasizes how the efforts of the Arab countries in the field of planning for education have been great, beginning at the inception of the ALECSO and increasing their pace during the mid-twentieth century. This planning was originally based on getting rid of the effects of colonialism and at the same time, seeking to advance and modernize. Hence, Arab states acted towards developing their education systems at the moment of decolonization; education was also related to a number of political, social and cultural issues that guided the elaboration of new education systems, which was an inevitable and logical result of the situation in which the Arab countries were (ALECSO 2019). The author admits that there were some challenges that hindered the improvement of educational systems in the region “especially in countries that were suffering from economic crises or where colonialism permeated their cultural and intellectual structure in an influential manner, which required them to strive harder to uproot the influence of colonialism from the roots it had extended over decades in the heart of the Arab land.” This was done through focusing on 3 main issues; i) the complete elimination of colonialism in all its forms, on political, social, cultural and other levels, ii) seeking to reinforce the concepts of national unity by embodying concepts of national and social cohesion and iii) emphasizing the national dimension and strengthening Arab belonging (ALECSO 2019).

This rejection of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism is a constant in most reviewed documents:

“How long will we be satisfied with the fact that our schools’ performance is lower than

that achieved in countries with which we are in a fierce competition in order to break the restrictions of ‘dependency’, liberate the initiative and control our destiny?” (ALECSO 2009).

In practice and as part of this rejection of neo-colonialism, the ALECSO works on a national level in the different countries through the *Arab National Commissions for Education, Culture and Science* in the member countries. These are entities created by the organization composed of members from local institutions such as ministries of education, higher education and culture who are responsible for implementing its projects (ALECSO 2019, National Commissions webpage). This shows a commitment to create development projects “for the countries, by the countries” (interviewee 1, 2021).

Another area where the theme of preservation is clear is through the recommendations provided by the different documents, which often include “Using the available Arab expertise, because it is better able to understand the Arab complex culture” (ALECSO 2019 p.66). Focused on “The process of building *Arab identity and citizenship*” and being part of a “global village” while maintaining the integrity of “traditional Arab values” (ALECSO 2019). The strategic plan clearly states that the policies needed for “fixing” the Arab educational systems must emanate of an Arab dialogue in the framework of the common Arab development work and cannot be imposed from the outside, by foreign powers (ALECSO 2009) and Arab educational decision-makers need to make use of the existing “large reservoir of experiences and innovations by adopting other countries’ successful experiences, provided that these experiences are adapted to—and made to comply with—the specificities of the Arab countries” (ALECSO 2008, p. 14).

The focus remains on the *importance of the Arabic language* as the main common aspect between the different member states, the dream to unite based on this aspect alone and the struggle to protect it against Western influence and the hegemony of foreign languages in the region (English and French especially) as well as different local dialects in every country, which leads to differences rather than the unity that the ALECSO is striving for. For instance, according to former ALECSO Chief of Staff interviewed for this research, the *Project for the Advancement of the Arabic Language* was among the projects that the ALECSO spent large sums of money on and mobilized all their resources for, and the countries were very enthusiastic about (interviewee 2, 2021). Similarly, the Arabization of higher education policy, which emanated as far back as the 1980s and was put forward again more recently as part of the Plan for the Development of Education in Arab Countries (2008), can be explained by the foundational narrative of the ALECSO;

“As an organization, it is governed by certain controls, the most important of these controls is the *Arabism* of the organization, it is an Arab organization and one of its fundamentals is that it glorifies and promotes the Arabic language and Arab culture, and of course because of the association of Arab culture with Islamic culture” (interviewee 2, 2021)

and the Quran is written in Arabic, which glorifies the language even more.

In order to better understand the organizational thinking, one must always remember that from its foundation the ALECSO wanted to portray itself as an Arab “House of Expertise”, a sort of think tank that develops regional policies for education, culture and scientific research and that Arab countries can turn to in order to get feedback and advice for their own policies. The most recent and most prominent representation of this is the *Strategic Plan for the Development of Education in the Arab World* developed in 2008. It is, as described by ALECSO, a frame of reference and strategic guideline for the different countries to work towards; each individual state, as well as through organizations such as the ALECSO, should develop projects that contribute to the achievement of this overall strategic plan (ALECSO 2008). In order to produce such strategies, the ALECSO’s agenda setting process is based on recommendations from regional experts and national level suggestions from ministries of education, culture, scientific research, etc. as they are the ones who know their own conditions better than anyone. And although this can sometimes lead to proposing some controversial policies, such as the Arabization of Higher Education in the Arab World, without much success, if we take for instance the Syrian example where medical doctors were falling behind as they could not keep up with international scientific research and innovation, it remains the *raison d’être* of the ALECSO (interviewee 2, 2021).

Finally, regarding its relationship with other IOs, the research data shows that ALECSO maintains a strong autonomy from both global IOs as well as regional organizations. For instance, it remains an integral part of the League of Arab States, but it is autonomous from it and does not follow it administratively or financially. Other IOs are treated in the documents merely as “partners” with whom the organization can cooperate when their policies align. According to interviewee 1, the organization is only accountable to its member states; the ALECSO only cooperates with other IOs when they find common ground and a common goal, because the Arab states are members themselves in the international organizations:

“Of course, in matters that are specific to our legislative frameworks, in which we work separately from the international organizations, it is not necessary for them to be our partners in it” (interviewee 1, 2021).

This explains for instance how the ALECSO can go against global trends in education related to the internationalization and globalization of education, as well as the prevalence of the English language as a medium of teaching in order to be up-to-date with innovations, and promote policies that revolve strongly around Arabization. And even though the ALECSO’s policies are inspired by guidelines from global IOs as well, such as the use of ICT and modernization of education for example, still it does so in order to achieve the goals set by the ALECSO; the promotion of the Arabic language for instance (Jemni 2016).

b) The Pull of Global/Universal Values

On the other hand, we find a strong presence of global values within the ALECSO, which sometimes seem to be, if not contradictory, then in tension with the stated purpose of the organization. Starting from its name and founded around the same time, the ALECSO is seen as an emulation of the UNESCO; it is often called the Arab UNESCO (interviewee 2, 2021). Sharing similar aims and purposes of cooperation in education, science and culture, focusing on the same three areas of work, “to advance the ideal of equality of educational opportunity without regard to race, sex or any distinctions, economic or social” (UNESCO Constitution 1945). Both organizations even share quite a similar structure with a General Conference, an Executive Board and a Secretariat. And although the UNESCO focuses on more international, universalist values such as *peace, freedom of expression, cultural diversity and human rights*, whereas the ALECSO has a foundational narrative that is more culturally specific, their drivers are more often than not the same. They are strong allies according to the reviewed documents and the interviews conducted (UNESCO 2015, ALECSO 2016, interviewee 1, 2021). And as actors within the education global arena, they are both heavily focused on achieving the UN’s common goals defined by SDG 4 for the improvement of education quality.

It becomes clear through the analysis than even if the ALECSO defines itself as an inherently Arab organization, it cannot work outside of the realm of global structures and guidelines, of which the SDGs are an example. According to interviewee 1, a project coordinator at the ALECSO, “the ALECSO works in an Arab context, in a regional context and in a global context” (interviewee 1, 2021), which is obvious in all their publications (ALECSO 2008, ARAIEQ 2012, Jemni 2016,

ALECSO 2019);

“According to ALECSO vision and plan for the development of education in the Arab region, the effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education is considered as a primarily avenue allowing to reach not only the objectives of enhancing education and its quality, but also to reach the Sustainable Development Goals SDGs in the long run” (Jemni 2016).

The theme of global values is most obvious in the ALECSO document developed specifically to highlight how Arab countries can improve their education policies in order to achieve SDG 4, which is used as a main guide for developing education policy; *Education Policies and their Role in Achieving SDG4* (ALECSO 2019). Suggestions from this publication include national constitutional amendments to put forward the role of education and assert the role of the state as the main provider of education services for everyone equally. Identifying the philosophy of education for states, the cultural and sociological components that define it (such as the national and regional identity, human rights principals, international agreements, etc.). It can be noted from this publication how both regional and global aspects are omnipresent in their agenda setting and the definition of their policies. The document relies heavily on examples and cases from OECD 2015 which are identified as “international best practices”.

The analysis also reveals that despite a general rejection of Western values and of imposing foreign ideas on Arab countries within all ALECSO publications, the organization cannot help but define educational quality and achievement according to global criteria. We see this in the ALECSO’s main policy document, the *Strategic Plan for the Development of Education in the Arab World*, where the text also allows for “using successful experiences from different countries, only if contextualized and adapted to suit the specificities of the Arab regional context,” and that the Arab world should be open to international efforts and to successful practices in order to adapt them to the local context and benefit from them (ALECSO 2008). As the main strategic document relating to education that was developed by the organization, full with an implementation and a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans, it is a high-level policy document that attempts to incorporate guidelines which would be beneficial for member states, despite their differing educational situations. It does demonstrate however an unusual approach wherein it lacks important figures and statistics; while some are mentioned, they are very few and one cannot help wonder on what bases this document has been drawn? And this is not the only publication where this is the case; in *Promoting Effective Use of ICT* (ALECSO 2014), even when reporting on a survey, there are no

figures or statistics to support the results.

This might not necessarily reflect a weakness on its part, but only goes further to prove the reality that Western institutions now have the upper hand in *establishing, evaluating and measuring such standards* (Morgan 2017); according to the ALECSO's Arab Regional Agenda for Improving Education Quality-ARAEIQ project:

“Arab education systems are facing major challenges regarding quality of learning outcomes, as illustrated by the low scores of Arab students in the International Assessments of Educational Attainment (PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS...) and the low number of Arab universities enlisted in the Top 500 of the ‘Academic Ranking of World Universities’ in 2013” (ALECSO 2012).

This is basically how global organizations maintain their stronger position on an international as well as regional and national level; “by drawing on the results of these international student assessments as the only measure of educational quality, the World Bank creates a space for governing education in the Arab region” (Morgan 2017). This is quite in line with the World Bank's vision of becoming a knowledge bank (Steiner-Khamsi 2012, Anwaruddin 2014).

Following from this point, ALECSO's strategic plans are usually drawn from some of its large projects, which are implemented in partnership with larger organizations and donors. A main such example was the Arab Regional Agenda for Improving Education Quality (ARAEIQ 2012) in cooperation with the World Bank. “ARAEIQ's narrative echoes the World Bank's views on educational quality” (Morgan 2017), pointing to poor performance by students based on results in the OECD's PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS high stakes exams. Funded by the World Bank, the initiative symbolized an extension of World Bank policies in the region that aim to improve the quality of education through evidence-based policy making. The project was ambitious and included agenda items regarding Early Childhood Development and Education, Curriculum Innovation and ICT in Education, Teacher Professional Development, Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis and Entrepreneurship Education and Innovation. And despite a common narrative of both the ALECSO and the World Bank highlighting that the project was developed “by the Region for the Region” (World Bank 2013a), a simple analysis shows that the project is framed in the context of the “essential role of quality of education in driving economic growth” (ALECSO and World Bank 2012) which echoes the WB's human capital theory of education quality. And although the ALECSO has put in numerous resources and conducted a number of studies, including developing

KPIs for educational systems, nothing was implemented, and with no apparent outputs, the World Bank decided to stop the activity. The project was never taken up by the ALECSO independently after that (interviewee 2, 2021).

Hence, although the organization claims to gather input mainly from regional experts and member states, policies suggested outside of the global frameworks do not usually receive much success. This was seen clearly around the issue of promoting the Arabization of education policy, where the organization has not succeeded in establishing strong bases for this policy, as it is not feasible. Interviewee 2 (2021) calls it “stupid” during the interview, citing the example of Syria which had undergone this transformation in the pre-conflict era and now practitioners, most prominently medical doctors, who need to follow the latest developments in medical sciences cannot do so because they cannot read and study in English. “But the ALECSO, [...] follow[s] an ideological standpoint, influenced by the culture in which [it is] created, unlike UNESCO and others that advocate more universalist principles” (interviewee 2, 2021).

It can be interpreted that while both the global and the regional organizations pretend to work in collaboration, for a common purpose as equals, in reality it is not the case. There is an unequal power relation, and the *weaker* organization cannot work without the *stronger* one. For example, in the UNESCO-ALECSO partnership agreement document (UNESCO 2016), there is a note that states that the document is drafted and signed in both French and Arabic, but in case of discrepancy, the French document takes precedent, proving this unequal power dynamic. From the analysis of the reviewed documents and the interviews, the ALECSO upholds a certain narrative, which is most obvious in interview 1 with a current member of the organization, that helps it sustain an apparent autonomy and importance, but seeing the lack of recognition it gets both in the literature and in practice within the region, one wonders whether it has *de facto* power. This will be explored further in the next section to identify which of the two trends is more powerful within the organization; is it clinging to cultural ideology or succumbing to (unspoken) global pressures?

c) Which Side Wins?

As described in the previous two sections, ALECSO policy-makers are simultaneously faced with three competing trends in order to design and implement reform initiatives:

- “i) aligning with the international calls for setting standards, accountability, and technological modernization; ii) responding to the regional calls for collaboration among

Arab States and focusing on safeguarding the Arab cultural heritage and identity; and iii) responding to the unique social, political, and economic demands of particular countries” (Akkary 2014 p.182).

This led to a series of somewhat confused and inconsistent strategies promoted by the organization trying to satisfy different stakeholders at the same time. And although the question of which pull factor is more influential cannot be answered through this research alone, I would like to propose a potential analysis that could explain the ALECSO’s current situation.

Firstly, there is a decline in the role of specialized Arab organizations including ALECSO, which does not necessarily emanate from outside pressures such as the more powerful role of global IOs on the region; “their failure to convince Arabs of their competency and effectiveness is no secret” (ALECSO 2014, p.7). Other reasons have been identified through the analysis that could better explain this waning of the ALECSO’s role, among them 3 seem to be more dominant: i) HR and staffing strategies, ii) strong feeling of sovereignty in Arab states, and iii) lack of funding, leading an overall decline in the effectiveness of the organization to implement its projects.

According to a survey conducted in 2014 by ALECSO, the organization had 199 employees; 123 at headquarters in Tunis and 76 in the external centers in the 4 different countries. The most shocking statistic that was found through this survey was that out of the 199 employees, only 22% had post-graduate certification including Masters and PhDs (meaning 45 employees), while 85 employees held only basic degrees (high school graduates, amounting to 43% of staff).

“And if we dig deeper into the analysis, we will find that the Education Department, which is one of the pivotal departments with a number of strategic vital projects, such as the *Strategy for the Development of Education in the Arab World* and *Adult Education*, we find that it includes only four employees who have post-university degrees in educational fields” (ALECSO 2014, pp. 22-23).

What we can see from this is how an organization such as the ALECSO intends to emulate global organizations without really thinking about the causes of success of these leading IOs. According to interviewee 2, if the organization really is seeking to transform from a coordinated response of the states, playing purely bureaucratic administrative roles, to an actual regional “House of Expertise” in the domains of education, culture, science and scientific research, then this study draws attention to the need to reconsider the specialized human resource structure within the organization (interviewee 2, 2021).

Another aspect causing the undistinguished role of the ALECSO has to do with the declining role of the Arab League as a whole in the region; the League has become a senile organization which plays almost no role in the coordination and cooperation between Arab states, which is then reflected in its specialized organizations, including the ALECSO. At their inception, both the LAS and the ALECSO presented high hopes for the region, setting themselves up as a guiding light and reference for states to rely on, which is clear from their very ambitious foundational charters. However, with time, their roles have taken a deep dive due to increased favoritism and consequent lack of competencies within the organizational hierarchies, which led to a mistrust in their ability to guide states (Barnett and Solingen 2007, Pinfari 2009). The ALECSO's primary role emanating from its Constitution is to be a "House of Expertise", the place to which states turn to learn how to implement the policies they adopt (ALECSO Charter 1945), and "this role has completely collapsed in the ALECSO due to employment policies" (interviewee 2, 2021). And as this lack of competencies increased, so did the lack of trust from states to consider it an "expert", transforming ALECSO's role because it did not possess the necessary capabilities to advise countries, so its role became diplomatic coordination between countries (interviewee 1, 2021).

This leads to the following issue with policy diffusion across states, which is the problem of sovereignty and top-down policy-making. In the Arab region, it is very difficult to impose ideas and strategies on monarchs and presidents. "Decision makers do not take ALECSO seriously" (interviewee 2, 2021), and therefore the organization cannot play the role that it originally intended. And even if no organization's suggestions are binding, even the strongest among them, there is definitely more trust in the global organizations. According to interviewee 2, this is mainly due to the quality of input received from them and the level of expertise that is much higher in these organizations, which brings us back to the issue of human resources. Thus, thinking back on Finnemore's theory about how IOs "exercise power autonomously in ways unintended and unanticipated by states at their creation" (1999), it can safely be said that for the specific example of the ALECSO, the organization is unable to transcend the interests of its member states in order to promote policies that could benefit the region. This is especially true of the more powerful states in the region such as Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia, who also happen to be the largest financial contributors. The issue around sovereignty is of particular interest in the studied region as Arab countries have a particular politico-economic situation, authoritarian, non-democratic regimes, and this greatly affects decision-making and policy-making (Barnett 1995, Diamond 2015). It is true that most of the available literature around policy diffusion and policy travel in political and social

sciences are concerned with policy diffusion between democratic countries (Martens and Niemann 2018, Mundy 1999, 2007, Mundy & Verger 2015), but there “is a gap in the literature which does not allow us to understand how countries create their policies and what the bases on which they determine these policies are” (interviewee 2, 2021). Therefore, the role of a regional organization, especially such as the ALECSO is compromised by its situation.

When asked about the existence of any type of pressure from the leading IOs on Arab states to implement their policies, rather than for instance those of the ALECSO, interviewee 2 claims that the opposite is true; states are the ones pushing the buttons with an organization such as the UNESCO or the ALECSO as they depend on national funding to go on. In the global arena, there are more powerful states that fund more and therefore sustain the work of the IOs, but with the ALECSO over time, countries began to fail to pay their contributions due to a lack of results seen from their funding.

“Thus, ALECSO [...] began to pay salaries to employees without work, and the activities and programs decreased dramatically, and [...] due to the fact that countries do not pay their financial contributions, [the ALECSO] began to reduce their presence in the countries, so no one knows about them. So, the financial issue became the crux of the problem” (interviewee 2, 2021).

Hence, the third contributing factor is financing which appears as a major theme within the analysis, wherein a vicious cycle of lack of competence on the organization’s side, leading to a lack of trust from states, provoking them to abstain from contributing to the ALECSO’s budget and therefore the organization lacking resources to finance its projects, leading to more inefficiencies...

Therefore, partnerships were drawn up as a solution to some of the organization’s failures: avoiding the issue of dependency by hiding behind partnerships and cooperation with different organizations on the global and regional levels.

“ALECSO does not work in isolation, the organization works in an Arab alliance with organizations of the common Arab world, such as the Women’s Organization, the Arab Labor Organization and other organizations under the umbrella of the League of Arab States and on the regional and international level with the UNESCO” (interviewee 1, 2021).

Based on the document analysis (ALECSO 2008, 2014, 2016, UNESCO 2016), the largest global partners of the ALECSO are the UNESCO and the World Bank, while on the regional arena it is the ICESCO, which shares many similarities with the ALECSO, including a large number of

common member states. The ALECSO and ICESCO work very closely together often times operating as one organization within the Arab states; in many of the publications, their names come up jointly (UNESCO 2010, ICESCO 2019, 2020, ALECSO 2021). This arrangement makes them more or less independent from foreign intervention, unlike for instance when working on WB funded projects, but makes them quite co-dependent. It is also worth noting that partnerships with global IOs reflect a somewhat unequal power dynamic within them; in the ALECSO-UNESCO partnership agreement it is mentioned that the document is drafted in both Arabic and French, but that in case of inconsistencies, the French document is the one relied upon (UNESCO 2016).

Because although the influence of global IOs is not the main pressure point according to the analysis, it is impossible to ignore its existence. The main WB funded project that the ALECSO attempted to implement in recent times is the ARAIEQ project. According to Morgan (2017), problem-solving approaches such as the ones offered by this project promoted globalized versions of what “quality education” means, and the criteria against which the different nation states are measured, remaining blind to context and complexity, which is not a fair measurement. Implied in the ARAIEQ was the idea that regional educational policies correspond to national ones and that what is understood at the regional level will be automatically transferred to the national level. But that was not the case, and as interviewee 2 explained, ARAIEQ did not have sufficient support and commitment from ministries of education to be upheld on a national level. Context is important here; Arab states have adopted neo-liberal policies in the 90s and 2000s to comply with International Monetary Fund (IMF) and WB regulations and Structural Adjustment Programs, leading to a decrease in public spending and consequently an erosion of public education across the region, leaving space for private actors to enter the market and provide educational services, leading to all kinds of inequalities and inefficiencies in the system, rather than improvements. Existing in a world led by the IMF and the WB, “the theoretical bases which underlay the work of ALECSO are strongly influenced by the work of economists” (Osman 1981). According to Morgan (2017), it is global norms that win because policies are not rooted in local contexts and conditions.

“ARAIEQ’s solutions to improving educational quality in the form of measurement tools for student learning outcomes and teacher quality are decontextualised from the on-the-ground political, economic and social conditions in which teaching and learning in the Arab region take place” (Morgan 2017, p.507).

Her analysis and primary data collection suggest that more pressing issues need to be dealt with in order to improve education in the region including:

“the state of the political economy in the countries and specific barriers to educational quality [...] including teachers’ poor working conditions and low wages, inequalities of opportunities and lack of resources and the politics of educational reform.”

ARAIEQ follows the WB’s SABER approach and framework focused on teacher training and development without addressing the core problem of improving teachers’ wages and working conditions. The framework also failed to address the issues of inequality and unequitable access to education based on geographical area and social class, which are the two main causes of educational inequality (Boughazala and Hamdi 2014, Herrera and Torres 2006).

But, even after all of that, the ALECSO will keep fighting for its ideologically and culturally specific foundational narrative because as interviewee 2 summed it up quite nicely, “removing the ideological or cultural side from the ALECSO will essentially signify that their presence has become obsolete.” In the final section, I will conclude by summarizing the findings and reflecting on how they pertain to the research questions.

VI- Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Summary of Findings

In conclusion, the research has aimed to make two main contributions to the theory; the first is providing a better understanding of the scope of the work of regional organizations as compared to global ones, while the second is to shed light on the role played by regional IOs in the education policy making and travel processes.

Through the research and analysis of findings, it was found that the ALECSO is in between two trends that pull it in different directions, hindering its policy-making process. It relies on 3 main sources for its agenda-setting: regional experts, national recommendations and global guidelines. And instead of benefitting from its strategic position between the global and the local and utilizing resources optimally in order to strike a balance between the needs of states and the existing knowledge outside of the region, the ALECSO is left drifting between these sometimes-opposing trends. The organization tries through its policy documents and publications to prove that it is only concerned with the interests of its member states, focusing on policies of promotion and preservation of Arab culture and especially the Arabic language. This idea is often paired with a rejection of foreign values, and outside intervention in Arab affairs, creating an impression of opposition. The promotion of a Pan-Arab identity through the advancement of joint Arab action and the increased use of the Arabic language in education, science and research is at the core of the organization, further pushing the agenda of a continuation of the Pan-Arab movement.

Regarding its relation to global IOs, they may seem equal at a first glance through ALECSO's own documents and publications where the UNESCO and the WB are portrayed as partners. However, if we dig a little deeper we can find that these IOs tend to hold the funding for ALECSO's largest projects and the ALECSO is often unable to follow up with activities once the funding ends. Although it seems like they are able to hire outside expertise to support them in designing policies and strategies, this is often the end of the road, and the implementation step is not taken up by individual states, creating an array of unused guidelines and policies. This may very much be an

issue of funding, compounded with a long-standing lack of trust in the organization as opposed to other more established IOs.

However, while the ALECSO presents a culturally specific ideological stance, one cannot ignore the many aspects in which it emulates global IOs. It is clear from the choice of the organization's name closely imitating the UNESCO, sharing areas of focus and an organizational structure, all the way to the use of WB guidelines and criteria to measure educational quality. Based on the analysis of the reviewed documents and interviews, it can be concluded that the ALECSO, as is the case with the LAS itself, is struggling to establish a strong position for itself within the region. Several other players seem to have more power and influence on the policy-making process, including leading global IOs, but also national governments which do not accept outside intervention from the ALECSO, although they might potentially accept it from other actors. This is possibly due to a feeling of inefficiency from the ALECSO and lack of funding, although I cannot make conclusions in that regard based on this research alone. The role of the ALECSO then ends up being more coordinative rather than the intended "House of Expertise". Although the organization continues to strive for a more pronounced role through developing strategies to advance education systems in the region and hiring experts to create implementation and monitoring plans for them, this role is often undermined by the lack of competencies within the organization, the strong sense of sovereignty among Arab states who do not easily accept outside intervention, even if it is from an organization that represents them, and finally due to a vicious cycle of lack of trust leading to lack of funding. The role of the ALECSO in the global policy diffusion process is therefore often bypassed, wherein global IOs have more influence on this postcolonial region than an organization which is supposed to preserve Arab culture and protect it from foreign hegemony.

According to the findings, it can also be said that unlike expected, IOs are not necessarily teachers of *Western* norms, but can be teachers of norms of the more powerful, on any level. Taking the example of the ALECSO, which endeavors to counter Western hegemony, in sometimes misguided ways, it can be noted that the stronger, bigger contributors within its member states tend to have more say in the organizations' politics. As opposed to what Barnett and Finnemore (1999) postulate about the changing role of IOs and how many of them become autonomous of nation-states, the ALECSO ends up not really transcending the interests of its member states, but remains quite restrained by them and especially the more powerful ones, going back to the idea of sovereignty.

Indeed, a major theme that has emerged through the analysis of the data was the issue of politicization of education in the region due to the existing political non-democratic systems: “Every country has goals that it wants to achieve through education. Rather, it is a legitimate goal and a right for the state that no one may dispute, in addition to the fact that the educational policy includes a political significance within it, because it aims to prepare a good citizen.” (ALECSO 2019). There is indeed a strong sense of sovereignty particular to Arab states, which is clear by the persisting existence of constitutional monarchies. The political and economic nature of the region largely affects the policy-making process because countries have authoritarian, non-democratic systems of government (interviewee 2, 2021). There is insufficient knowledge and research about how the process of selecting and determining policies takes place in these countries as most of the available studies in public policy making are written about democratic countries.

Recommendations

My recommendations based on the findings of this research are two-fold: i) a set of recommendations for the ALECSO as an organization and ii) some recommendations for future research in the area.

Firstly, for the ALECSO I suggest three important changes that would allow the ALECSO to strengthen its position and establish a larger role for itself in the region. i) Changes to the institutional structure of the organization and more importantly to the hiring scheme in order to allow for more competent personnel and in-house expertise. From the findings, it can be noted that the organization relies heavily on outside expertise (ALECSO 2008, 2019, interviewees 1 & 2, 2021) due to a lack of competence within the ALECSO (ALECSO 2014). And although it is common for IOs to seek external support sometimes, it should not be the only available resource. It is also important to have enough internal proficiency to be able to review the consultants’ suggestions and not simply take for granted what is presented to it.

ii) As a second step, the ALECSO should give more focus to the design of large-scale projects such as the *Plan for Development of Education in Arab countries* (2008), in order to prove its relevance in the region and re-establish its intended role as a “House of Expertise”. This should in turn restore the faith in the organization’s work and consequently attract more funding from member states, leading to a renewed ability to implement better quality projects in the region, thereby fixing the broken cycle mentioned in the findings section.

iii) Finally, and in order to ensure the impactful utility of its projects, the ALECSO should prioritize the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process throughout the implementation of its work and not take its effects for granted. Instead of borrowing only what seems trendy from global tendencies, there should be a more systematic way to select what aspects are emulated, aspects that would benefit the organization. It can be argued that the tendency to measure everything by organizations such as the OECD or the World Bank is what increased their success nowadays, as they accumulate knowledge to be used in their work, thereby improving the quality of implementation (Steiner-Khamsi 2012, Anwaruddin 2014, Morgan 2017). This step will be useful in showcasing the impact of their work and promoting their activities.

Secondly, in what concerns the need for future research, as noted by several prominent postcolonial scholars (Fasheh 1990, Tikly 2004, Morgan 2017) there is a strong need for more research to be conducted on specific regional organizations in order to understand the full picture of the situation on a regional level. And albeit the research is based on a one-case study, we can still make some generalizations about the broader classification of regional organizations (Flyvbjerg 2006). These organizations are strategically positioned between the global and the national levels and their role can potentially be very important in adapting and contextualizing policies before they are implemented instinctively by governments, if they had the necessary resources. Therefore, the case study of the ALECSO shows that as of yet, it has not reached its full potential in achieving a supportive role for education systems in the region. Further research is crucial in order to understand the existing conditions in the Arab region and improving the quality of education policies suggested. Morgan (2017) identifies three broad constraints to policy travel between the global and the national: a) poor working conditions and low wages of teachers in the receiving countries; b) inequalities and lack of resources to implement the proposed policies; and c) the existing politics of educational reform in this specific context. The ALECSO could potentially play a role in resolving some of these issues and supporting governments in taking what is needed from global policies and adapting it to their contexts, which the ALECSO is more familiar with.

Which brings me to my second and final recommendation; the need for more research regarding non-democratic systems. As hinted at throughout the dissertation, Western, global, leading research and policies have been dominating the narrative for the recent past (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews & Woods 2004, Olaniran 2008, Shahjahan 2016). And as such, there is a specific focus on areas of concern to the West, including democratic systems and the policy transfer processes

that occur within them. On the other hand, in Arab countries with non-democratic systems, where the issue of sovereignty is key and the policy transfer process can be affected by the politico-economic situation, there is often a lack of research, or biased research affected by this dominant narrative (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews & Woods 2004, Ibrahim 2010, Shahjahan 2016). There is a deep need for further literature on this aspect, as the current state of the scholarship ignores a large part of the world. And as several postcolonial scholars have argued, the best way to deconstruct postcolonial structures is by localizing research. The research needs to stem from the region itself, whether by local researchers or experts on the region, who create a more context-sensitive understanding of the situation and how this leads to specific patterns of policy diffusion (Crossley & Tikly 2004, Swadener & Mutua 2008, Tikly & Bond 2013).

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Appendices

Annex 1: Sample Interview Topic Guide (Semi-structured)

1-Give me a brief description of the organization and your role within it.
Aim and mission, key projects, main partners.

2- Please provide a description of your role within the ALECSO. (Dates and period of work, job title and description, projects you have worked on...).

3- How do you see the role of ALECSO as a regional organization in the field of regional education policy making?

4-In your opinion, why is there no clear knowledge of the role of ALECSO even in the Arab world? In your opinion, how do you explain that other organizations seem stronger even though their decisions are also non-binding, such as the UN or the OECD, which nevertheless have a very strong influence.

5-How does the ALECSO define its role in the region?

6-What are the main policy items promoted by your organization in the education/culture/scientific research department?

7-What main tools does your organization utilize to implement such policies on the national level? (Advocacy, cooperation with IOs, working directly with MoEs, funded projects).

8-Who are the organization's main global partners in education-UNESCO/WB/OECD?

9-Who are the organization's main regional partners-ICESCO?

10- How does your organization interact with its partners on the global level? (Constant discussions and coordination, sharing experiences and provision of data, using each other's guidelines).

11-How would you describe the relationship of your organization with the global leaders on education?

12-In case of conflict of interest, what happens?

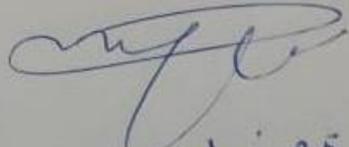
13-What are ALECSO's bases in determining the policies that it promotes in the region? Do they really only stem from the recommendations and suggestions of the Member States? How is agreement between all these countries of different situations?

14-Through your work with ALECSO, did you work on any of the following policies: Arabization of university education in the Arab region or the introduction of the use of the Internet and information and communication technology in education?

Annex 2: Data Confidentiality Statement Interviewee 1

بيان سرية البيانات
يرجى وضع علامة في المربعات المناسبة:

لا	نعم	
<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	لقد تم إبلاغي بالمحتوى والغرض من الدراسة. لقد تمكنت من طرح أسئلة حول الدراسة وتم الرد على أسئلتني.
<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	أوافق على إجراء مقابلة لغرض الدراسة وأدرك أنه يمكنني رفض الإجابة على الأسئلة ويمكنني الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت دون الحاجة إلى إبداء أسباب.
<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	أوافق على تسجيل المقابلة بالصوت. سيتم نسخ التسجيل كنص. سيتم ايداع التسجيل والنسخ على أجهزة محمية بكلمة مرور مع الباحث. سيتمكن الأشخاص المصرح لهم فقط من الوصول إلى هذه المواد.
<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	أفهم أن المعلومات التي أقدمها ستستخدم لأغراض البحث والمنشورات العلمية فقط.
<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	أفهم أن المعلومات الشخصية التي تم جمعها عني والتي يمكن أن تحدد هويتي، مثل اسمي، لن تتم مشاركتها خارج فريق المشروع، ما لم أوافق على ذلك.
<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	وافق على أنه يمكن استخدام اسمي الحقيقي للاقتباسات إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، فيرجى تقديم الاسم الذي ترغب في استخدامه: جيلة العبدوي

التوقيع:

25 فبراير 2021

Annex 3: Data Confidentiality Statement Interviewee 2**Data Confidentiality Statement**

Please tick the appropriate boxes:

	YES	NO
I have been informed about the content and purpose the study. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to being interviewed for the purpose of the study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason. My withdrawal from the study has no negative consequences for me.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the interview being audio-recorded. The recording will be transcribed as text. The recording and the transcription will be deposited on password protected devices within the researcher. Only authorized persons will have access to this material.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that information I provide will be used for research purposes and scientific publications only.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name, will not be shared beyond the project team, unless I consent to it.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that my real name can be used for quotes. If yes, please provide the name you would like to be used: Ramy Abdel Azim	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature:



CS Scanned with CamScanner

Annex 4: UAB Thesis Authentication Form

FACULTY/INSTITUTE/CENTRE/SCHOOL Fac. CC.Polítiques i Soc.
 DECLARATIONS BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Student's I.D. / Code 1 5 4 4 2 0 6

Student's Name & Surname Cherine Ismail Sabry

Course GLOBED (Education Policies for Global Development)

Title of Dissertation

Regional Education Organizations in the Arab World: A case study of the ALECSO

(a) Authenticity of Dissertation

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this Dissertation and that it is my original work.

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institution of higher education.

I hold the Autonomous University of Barcelona harmless against any third-party claims with regard to copyright violation, breach of confidentiality, defamation and any other third-party right infringement.

(b) Research Code of Practice and Ethics Review Procedures

I declare that I have abided by the University's Research Ethics Review Procedures.

CHERINE ISMAIL SABRY

Name of Student (in Caps)

Signature of Student

01/06/2021

Date