The Nature of Islamic Education

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Abstract

Education is a transmission of values and knowledge. It involves teaching, learning, socialization and enculturation. Islamic education is comprehensive (shamil), balanced, and it targets personality development, cognizant mind set, patriotism, open-mindedness, intellectual, spiritual and harmonious coexistence. Education in Islam focuses on beneficial knowledge which has a direct influence on the receiver. It moulds both the intellectual faculties and character of the individual. The best educator in Islam was Prophet Muhammad and he is a perfect role model for all teachers (uswatanhassanah) and educators. He was able to educate humans through the Qur'an and the hadith, the fundamental sources of Islamic education, through action and speech and through wisdom, with its diverse levels and varieties. It is important to note that Islamic education is not mere memorization of some Islamic texts; rather it is the comprehensive and conscious understanding of all aspects of life.

1. Introduction

Islamic education refers to any input that makes the individual a better person, be it in the form of *tarbiyah, ta'lim* or in general *ma'rifah*. It involves deeply in the behavior, attitude and value formation of the person. An educated person in Islam therefore, becomes a better person in all aspects; his action, thought, lifestyle, decision making and approach to issues that affect and influence life as a whole. Unlike the conventional education, Islamic education involves values, spirituality and ethical aspects of the receiver. It moulds the mind-set, character and way of thinking. The objective of this paper is to create another bridge within the existing knowledge on the subject. The significance of the research is that it simplifies our understanding of Islamic education. It will be a beneficial to all levels of educators and learners including teachers and students. The researcher evaluates the available literature and sifts through all the complicated concepts to come up with simple and understandable explanation on this important subject matter. Methodologically, it is theoretical in nature, library based and no scientific data involves, but the sources are reliable and authority in the area. Besides, the researcher identifies the nature of Islamic education during Prophet Muhammad's era and in the other parts of Islamic history.

2. The Nature of Islamic Education

Education plays an essential role in performing the duty to preserve values, knowledge, culture and tradition of any society. There are two approaches to education which are conventional approach and Islamic approach. The first, also referred to sometimes, as modern and secular education, is an approach of education which separates religious and spiritual values from the ecosphere or the worldly or *dunyawi* life. The other approach takes religious values as the supreme and guiding tools in every aspect of life (http://Lubis, 2015). Besides, peace and fulfillment in human life can only be achieved through the value laden education. Islamic education therefore, is a form of training aimed at molding the individual and the society into a dynamic and conscious level. It covers the physical and spiritual perspectives of the receiver. Here, the processes of mental, physical, and spiritual training are important. It is an approach where the education itself would be able to produce individuals who are God-conscious (Nor et al., 2012; Rayan, 2012; Amir, 2014; Alavi, 2008).

According to some scholars Islamic education is defined as

"The term "Islamic Education" could referred into a number of things: It can be viewed as Islamic Religious Education in which the person studies religious knowledge, starting with Qu'ran and matters of worship such as purification, prayer, Zakat, fasting and Hajj. He may also learn other matters like etiquettes of eating and drinking, Islamic dress, family relations, business transactions, criminal law, and inheritance." (Ibarahim and Idris, 2014). Others have also explained that Islamic education may include implementation of knowledge in general which involves the teacher, the student, the school, and the curriculum that complies the Islamic values and teachings. In addition, students may learn various subjects as well as the curriculum with a generous amount of coursework related to Islamic studies (Ibrahim and Idris, 2014; Douglass and Shaikh, 2004). In Islam, pursuing knowledge is part of the education process which educates the human soul and enhances the knowledge in knowing Allah better by instilling the sense of responsibility to worship the Creator and obey His command in any circumstances (Yasin and Jani, 2013; Amir, 2014). In addition, according to another researcher Islamic education is about *tarbiyyah Islamiyyah*, *ta'lim and tahdhib* developed with *hikmah, 'adl, amanah* and *'ibadat* which in turn ensures complete integration and transformation of human life for better. "Islamic education is simply translated as tarbiyyahIslamiyyah. It contains a concept of ta'lim (instruction), tahdhib (rear or sustain) and other sub-concepts like hikmah (wisdom), 'adl (justice), amanah (trust) and as the extreme is khalifah (caliph) and 'ibadat (worship). The main sources in this type of education are Qur'an and Hadith. Islamic education connotes whole life approach and signifies complete integration into man's life. It is the true system that first takes man from the darkness of ignorance and illiteracy to the light of knowledge and education. It shapes so many relevance and advantages not only to Muslim but also to entire humanity. Islam faces education as an act of worship and a lifelong process." (Abubakar et al., 2016)

Tarbiyyah signifies nurturing, developing, fostering, and rearing. Therefore, this concept should be employed in the early stage of education. While *ta'lim* connotes teaching, educating and leaning and it should be focused in the later stage of the learning period. *Ta'dib* refers to discipline and it covers all levels and aspects of human life regardless of age, stage and period. In the modern current literature, after Imam al-Ghazali, the best available works on the subject are those formulated by al-Attas. *Ta'dib,* he argues, as also elucidated by (Hamid, A. F. A. (2010), is related to human whose spiritual nature is made up of one's soul (*nafs*) and intellect (*aql*) that are responsible for one's actions in fulfilling or neglecting one's individual pledge with God. Such responsibility is valid throughout the human's adult life as long as he is sound intellectuallyand physically matures. According to Al-Attas, *adab* is the most important thing in man, where it disciplines the mind and soul to achieve good qualities. Besides that, *adab* is also related to the correct or right action that is against the erroneous or wrong action and protection from disgrace. Thus, this is why *ta'dib* mirrors more on a moralistic outlook on life within a hierarchical structure of authority which distinguishes the awe-inspiring position of God as "the Fountain of all true knowledge", to be followed by legitimate men of "intelligence, spiritual knowledge and virtue" (al-Attas, 1980, Hamid, 2010).

Others take the concept into a different stage of discussion. Islamic education, to some scholars, is divided into three areas which are: to know (cognitive), to love (affective), and to act (psychomotor).This approach combines all aspects of human personality and is unlimited regardless of place and time. As a result, it is best defined as a human choosing God as their One and Only Lord, to know and recognize Him, to love Him, to be freed from limitations of all that is divergent to God, to act faithfully according to His mandates and order, and to surrender and submit to Him. Since by believing that God exists, where God created the world as well as the universe is manifested by God, then the purpose and the aim of the Islamic education becomes crucial by bringing the human race nearer to God in order to worship Him (Alavi, 2008; Sahadat, 1997). Even though, the definition of Islamic education is almost similar to the definition given by the Husain and Ashraf, but they emphasize more on the human characteristics, whereby Islamic education is seen as: "an education which trains the sensibility of pupils in such a manner that in their … approach to all kinds of knowledge they are governed by the deeply felt ethical values of Islam. They are trained and mentally so disciplined that they want to acquire knowledge not merely to satisfy an intellectual curiosity or just for material worldly benefit but to grow up as rational, righteous beings and to bring about the spiritual, moral and physical welfare of their families, their people and mankind.

Their attitude derives from a deep faith in God and wholehearted acceptance of a God-given moral code" (Husain and Ashraf, 1979) Hence, Islamic education is an intellectual, moral, and spiritual development (Halstead, 1995; Ould Bah, 1998).

3. Development of Islamic Education in Early Periods of Islam

3.1 During the Time of the Prophet

Education bestows knowledge and knowledge remains the ultimate priority in life. For this purpose, Islam emphasizes to acquire knowledge. In fact, the first verse revealed in the Qur'an says to mankind read, which directly combats illiteracy and encourages seeking knowledge in all fields. The Qur'an reads:

(Read! in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who creates; created man out of a mere clot of congealed blood. Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful. He who teaches the use of the Pen." (al-Qur'an 96:1-4)

On the importance of seeking knowledge the Qur'an reads:

"O ye who believe! When it is said, Make room! In assembles, then make room; Allah will make way for you (hereafter). And when it is said; come up higher! Go up higher; Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, to high ranks. Allah is informed of what ye do." (al-Qur'an 58:11)

The Qur'an also explains:

"He give wisdom unto whom He will, and he to whom wisdom is given, he truly hath received abundant good. But none remember except men of understanding." (al-Qur'an 2:269)

Based on the above *ayat*, in the Qur'an 58:11, an educated person is regarded as more honorable than a religious but ignorant person. In addition, knowledgeable people are given a high status in the eyes of God. As mention in ayah 2:269, God will give wisdom (*hikmah*) to those who acquire knowledge. However, education of the Qur'an should be given the most priority compared to the worldly knowledge since it helps in strengthening the Muslims' faith. In Islam, a Muslim is encouraged to continuously seek knowledge as mentioned by the Prophet "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" (Lubis 2015). In a Hadith, the Prophet mentioned that seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim. He holds a high esteem to those who possesses knowledge as mentioned in one of his Hadith, where he stated that a learned person is closer to Allah compared to a thousand worshippers and those who have knowledge are among the honorable and faithful people (Nor et al., 2012).

As a result, Muslims devoted their time to seek knowledge from the very early days of Islam. Education was part of life too; it was initiated by the family during the early stages of Islamic history. At the time, the most strategic place to acquire knowledge was Prophet's house and *darularqam*. It is important to note that, there were less than 18 people from Quraysh who knew how to write before Islam. By 622 CE, the masjid became an educational institution to seek and impart knowledge. It was the responsibility of the individuals and teachers to educate others; without the involvement of government. The system of education, at the time, depended on the social climate of the society. In this period the emphasis was on faith enhancement, character building, unity orientation, development of personality. It is paramount to observe that, during this time teaching has to be discreet in nature and to close family members. Questions of Islamic law were among the priorities (Delic, 2006). Khadijah, Prophet's wife, Ali Bin Abu Talib, Zaid Bin Harith, and Abu Bakar were the first group of sahabah who received education from the Prophet. Later, a group of Muslims were formed after three years. Then, after sometime, education was publicly taught in various venues in which the prophet openly preached Islam (Ibrahim, 2012; Abubakar et al., 2016).

Masjid Quba and Masjid Nabawi were the earliest educational institutions and centers of learning in Islam, although the structure of education remained informal before it became formal in the history of Islam. In a much later period, as-Suffah (a connecting veranda to the mosque) was created to make teaching and learning more systematic. The prophet instructed those who can write and read to officially teach those who need their services. He also sent teachers into areas of new converts. The sahabah and tabi'iyun employed the same method of teaching. In fact, the aim of education in this early period of Islam was to strengthen solidarity as well as, basic teachings of Islam. An important issue to note, education was not only focused on men, but women as well. Prophet Muhammad would take one day to specifically teach the women. The education for women covered all aspects of life (Anzar, 2003).

3.2 Islamic Education after the Death of the Prophet

After the death of the Prophet new methods of education and new sciences have emerged. Similarly new religious, social and political circumstances appeared.

As a response to the new situation; the companions, as the first batch Muslim scholars, and later the tabi'iyum came up with solutions. This was a mind-set change. Muslims for the first time have to interpret the Qur'an for themselves and adopt and follow the sunnah of the Prophet. As a result, the development of traditions of following the *Sunna*; the knowledge of the deeds of the Prophet and Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet, came into the pictures of the Muslim life. After the death of Prophet Muhammad, the mosque still remains as the centre of learning. However, as the Muslim population increased, the development of textbooks on various Islamic sciences became necessary. As time passed, also, the Madrassa system began with the initial purpose of preserving conformity through uniform teachings of Islam (Anzar, 2003).

The first Madrassa was established in Egypt in 1005 AD by the Fatimid caliphs. It had all the ingredients for an educational institution such as library; teachers for different subjects were employed, as well as students were admitted with free pens, ink, and papers. In year 1045, it was revealed that this Madrassa had 6500 volumes on different subjects including astronomy, architecture, and philosophy. Later in year 1067, a huge number of the books were taken to Baghdad where Seljuk Vizier called Nizam-ul-Mulk Hassan Bin Al-Tusi, established the first organized Madrassa. In this new Madrassa, two types of education were provided which were scholastic theology to produce spiritual leaders and earthly knowledge to produce government servants who would be appointed in various countries and the regions of the Islamic government. During Nizam-ul-Mulk reign, numerous Madrassas all over the Muslim territory were established. It was in fact, a university of a real sense; providing Islamic knowledge in all fields, such as, sciences, philosophy, public administration, and governance. As a matter of fact, Nizam-ul-Mulk remains the father of Islamic public education system (Anzar, 2003).

Similarly, Madrassas were established in India and Central Asia, teaching Arabic language, grammar, poetry, literature, logic, math, and other disciplines of Islamic education. After the decline of Muslim power and arrival of the colonials, education in the Muslim world became under the control of the occupiers. Subsequently, Islamic education began to decline too. The so-called modern system of education was developed to replace the Madrassa educational system, but most Muslims resisted the move and this created a dichotomy in the system of education in the Muslim world. One that is called modern or secular education and another called Islamic or madarasa system. In fact, in Islam, education is always modern and Islamic as long as it is in line with Islamic values. This move also alienated Muslim scholars and they were treated as a threat to the establishment (Anzar, 2003). In actual fact, Islamic madarasas Institutions founded before the colonial era which are still in operation as universities are: University of Munawwar-ul-Islam, Al-Azhar University, Al-Mustansiriya University, Al-Nizamiyya, Aliah University, JamiaHashmia, Bijapur, JamiaNizamia, JAMIA Darussalam University, Nizamiyya University of Al-Qarawiyyin, and University of Ez-Zitouna (Yasin and Jani, 2013).
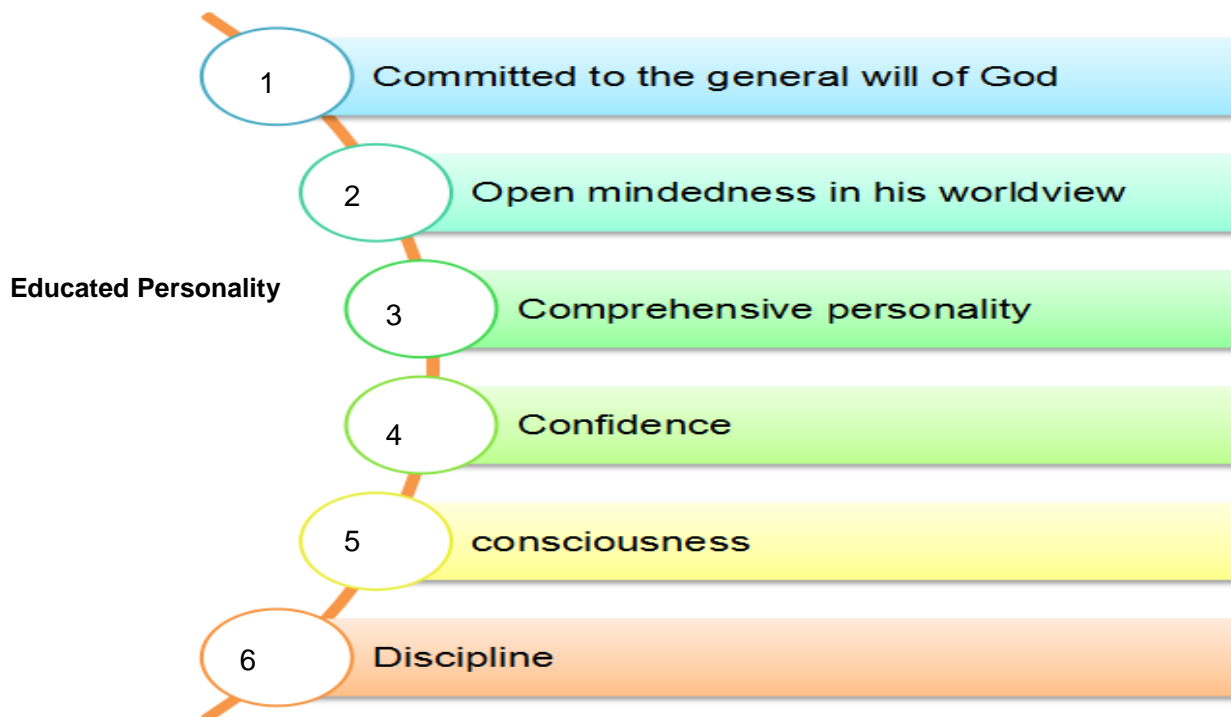
4. Aims of Islamic Education

Islamic education is one of the core elements of Islamic value- systems; it represents the spirit of Islam in human building and character formation. Muslim scholars, be it in the medieval period, or in the contemporary period have laid the principles of Islamic education. According to Al-Ghazali the aim of education is "to cultivate man so that he abides by the teachings of religion, and is hence assured of salvation and happiness in the eternal life hereafter" (al-Ghazali, Ihya 'ulum ad-Din). He emphasizes on the significance of childhood character formation as they are born in a state of tabula rasa. Education for al-Gazali is not only about training the mind and filling it with information, but it involves all aspects of the learner including intellectual, religious, moral and physical of the person (ibid). In other words, the aim of education according to al-Ghazali is to help man to attain true happiness. In the views of Farabi, Islamic education deals with the human soul and it aims to ensure that the individual is being prepared from an early age to become a beneficial member of his community and in the universe at large. The ultimate purpose of education is to elevate the individual to reach the level of perfection (kamal). In other words, acquisition of virtues, practical skills and knowledge are the core purpose of education. Besides, education guides the individual towards the status of perfect man or al-insan al-kamil (Al-Farabi, 1983). IbnKhaldun on the other hand focuses on both moral and intellectual aspects.

Education aims according to him to combine both the moral and intellectual trainings to bring out the potential of humans and help man to develop the character and build up the desired personality (IbnuKhaldun, al-Muqadimah). IbnSina's approach is more comprehensive. He argues that, education aims to help the overall growth of the individual; including, physical, mental and moral. Education also aims to create complete citizen and prepare the person for a profession to contribute to the society (IbnSina, Risalat al-Quwwa al-Insaniyya

waIdrakatuha). From the time of the Prophet to the current times of Muslim society, the aim of Islamic education has not changed. However, the times, the environment and the social structures have gradually shifted. Therefore, it is only the approach to education that has to maneuvered to fit the needs of society. For this reason, Muslim scholars and leaders met in Makkah in 1977 to draft the aims of education that could be implemented on the Muslim umah to improve its current status. Hence, the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Jedda-Mecca declared that:

"The aim of education in Islam is to produce a good man; it aims at the "balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of man's spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses." It caters for the growth in all aspects including spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively, and incorporate all these aspect in a holistic system of education towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. The ultimate aim lies in the realization of complete submission to Allah as the Creator, on the level of individual, community and humanity at large." (Yasin and Jani, 2013) To farther elucidate, the aim of education must be related to the purpose of life and to the current situation of the Muslim umah. In today's world, an educated person has to be committed to the general will of God, achieve open-mindedness in his worldview, comprehensive in his approach to all aspects of life, confidence, and conscious, as well as, disciplined. In the view of this researcher, Islamic education should emphasis on these aspects of the personality building, as this is the kind of education the Muslim umah needs today. The diagram below highlights the traits of an educated individual.

Educated Personality

1. Committed to the general will of God
2. Open mindedness in his worldview
3. Comprehensive personality
4. Confidence
5. consciousness
6. Discipline

This diagram simplifies the qualities and traits of an educated personality

To sum up, education in general and Islamic education in particular is the key mechanism used to nurture better personality. The main aspects to be concentrated in achieving this should be instilling the six values mentioned above. The feeling of self-assurance arising from one's appreciation of one's own abilities emanates from the quality of the education one has undertaken. The same education gives awareness about the environment and surroundings one lives in; so as to make better decisions not only in the individual level but also in the societal, governmental and financial levels of life.

Besides, true education gives permanent code of behavior; maintaining control and balance in life for the trainings, teachings and instructions one undertook during the process of education; which, ultimately results in a good behavior, obedience, orderliness and self-restraint.

At the same time, Islamic education bestows the individual the quality of being comprehensive in scope, inclusive in worldview and universal in approach to issues. In addition, only though proper education one learns the concept of commitment and performs his or her duties with open-mindedness as he or she incorporates the beliefs, values and views of others into the decision making process.

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