Islamic Education: Towards A Comprehensive View

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Abstract. The writer has attempted in this paper to go beyond the present state of cultural disorientation and overemphasis of the importance of the scientific elements in the modern education of the Muslim people to a more balanced appreciation of "Islamic education" as a stabilizing integrating cultural determinant and a useful tool for change and development. In order to achieve this, the concept of "Islamic education" was discussed, and to clarify it further, some criteria for it were suggested by the writer.

Introduction

It would seem odd a non-Muslim who reads about the "education of the Muslim people" to find the word "Islamic" pre-affixed to the term referring to the content of its traditional part, as though it is offered, outside "the world of Islam", to learners whose indigenous culture is not "Islamic". He would be even more surprised not to read the word "liberal" or "western" preceding the usage of the same term "education," when he finds it used to refer to a modern part of it which he considers more or less identical with that of "liberal" or "western" education – with the difference being only in degree and not in kind. His surprise would be complete when he finally knows that the content of "modern" Muslim education, especially that part of it related to the study of the "Humanities" is just a repetition of Western education [1, p.4] and that it is not studied for comparative reasons, but for its intrinsic value and as an end in itself.

While this position, may be "stunning" to an "outsider," it is hardly appreciated by many educated Muslims to whom the "ideal of Islamic life" might not mean much.

The problem, as Mar'i (1982) put it, is that "theories, models, research findings and techniques of application – especially those related to the field of education are not automatically transferable from a modern (Western) to traditional (Islamic) cultures." [2, p. 247].

This state of affairs highlights the importance of arriving at a clearer understanding of the nature and function of modern education in Muslim countries – especially with regard to its orientation or disorientation from Islam as an ideology and a philosophy of life. The question is: can modern education in Muslim countries be offered without an ideological frame? Can the emphasis be laid only on its scientific "component" which is allegedly value-free and as such can be imported freely? Could a transplant of the whole Western educational experiment be made without due rgard to the risk of it not taking up root?

What is "Islamic Education"? Why is it understood as different from "modern education" in Muslim countries? Why is the insistence to stress the fact that it is "Islamic" when that is a foregone conclusion – and why should it be offered in separate traditional institutes and be composed only of theoretical religious sciences? Why does the reference to it always carry with it an exclusively religious character, and a connotation of the past, as though it has no continuing value and no function with regard to current issues and mundane affairs? These and other questions bother those who are concerned with the future of formal education in Muslim countries. While current state policies in these countries have tried to link up education with development and modernization, its indigenous core as an indispensable "civilizational determinant" was relatively neglected – a thing which reduced its effect as a tool for stability and medium for change. The ends and the broad aims which the statesmen talked about were not achieved because education had seriously to be used first as an element conductive to cultural cohesion and a means to national determination. That was not achieved.

The truth of the matter is that there are in fact two types of education which are offered simultaneously in Muslim countries – the one secular, recent and modern, founded originally in most cases by Western colonizers, and as such not really bound by the ideology of Islam[1], though comprising appendixed religious sciences, and the other religious in so far as it is comprised mainly of information about the religion of Islam. The first type forms the main stream of the educational system in any one Muslim country and is conspicuously encouraged since more public expenditure is spent on it. The other type forms a minor stream and though of late it received more attention in some Muslim countries[2], it is still not as dominant and quality-wise not as good as the first type. Also it is limited in scope since it is comprised only of theoretical studies and does not cover the exact sciences[3].

Without going into the historical reasons which precipitated such an odd situation, it will be only fair and logical to say the following: like the situation in other cul-

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1. The reference here is to the modern schools, founded originally by colonialist European powers who multiplied them until their total number became greater than the number of the traditional ones.
2. Such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Arab Gulf States.
3. A notable exception here is the University of Al-Jami Al-Azhar in Egypt.

tures, the individuals in Muslim societies should have been introduced to the quality of Islamic life through a process of an education which reflects and is responsive to their ideals. such an educationa will be Islamic even if it is not so explicitly described and even if it addressed itself mainly to solving material problems and concentrated at times on mundane affairs. In this case "Islamic education" or "the modern type of education offered to Muslims" may be characterized as the type of education which is based on the ideology of Islam and is the sum total of the educational and guidance policies, formal and informal, that are directly related to the ideal of Islamizing society and training the individuals and groups in the right fields with a view to facilitating development both material and immaterial [3, p. 22]. In other words "Islamic education" will not be only the teaching of the Koran and related religious sciences. Nor will it be just "the history of Muslim education" or "the history of Muslim educational thought." Rather it may be appreciated as a type of education which is composed of two parts: the one metaphysical, relating to the immaterial nature of the ideology of Islam itself which is fundamentally a belief in the unseen; and other part purely scientific, relating to the physical environment in which the muslim lives.

Definition or Criteria for "Islamic Education"

As a result of Western cultural influences which affected the Muslim countries, the concept of "Islamic education" is not very clearly demarcated in the minds of many educated Muslims. These are "educated" by Western standards but they are not steeped in Islamic culture. They do not effectively uphold the ideals of Islam and do not live practically up to them. While the scientific aspect of education is stressed by them, its philosophic side is played down[4]. Hence the need to arrive – if possible – at a precise definition of "Islamic education."

It may not be easy to define "Islamic education." However, several workers in the field have attempted to do just that thing. For instance, Muhib Aldin Abu Salih has defined Islamic education as "the rearing and formation of an ideal. Muslim individual whose life is brought to bear on the Islamic ideal in his different bodily, intellectual and moral sides; the content and methods of his education being closely bound by the ideology of Islam."[5, p. 5]. More shortly Abu Salih defines Islamic education as "the rearing and preparation of the Muslim for his earthly and immortal life"[5, p. 6]. Dr. Saied Ismaiel defines it as "those interrelated ideas and concepts which are systematized in one intellectual scheme itself based on an Islamic ideological and moral framework. Such ideas, intellectual and moral, are ideologically bound and are passed to the Muslim learner through strategies and methods of instruction which cause him in the end to behave in an Islamic way."[5, p. 6]. Abd al Rahman Al-Nahlawi defines "Islamic education" as a group of practical and verbal actions inspired by knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunna and based on them in matters

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4. For a discussion of the philosophic side and ethical basis at education see [4].

to do with faith."[5, p. 7]. Dr. Al-Nahlawi further defines "Islamic education" as the willful verbal and practical actions directed by a human being upon another with the intention of helping him to mature in his different sides and to direct and systematize his various powers so that he can participate in the activities directed to the realization of the ideals of Islam"[5, p. 8]. A further definition supported by Dr. Mugdad Yalgin is to this effect: "Islamic education is an independent educational system which has its distinct basic aspects, objectives and methods, all inspired by the fundamental philosophic principles of Islam" [6, p. 24][5].

Criticism

The definitions of Islamic education cited above may have been coined by their authors very early, for the concept of "Islamic education" is not yet very clear. Indeed, as referred to earlier, it is largely misconceived by several "educated" Muslims who are culturally alienated from the values of Islam [1, p. 25]. Abu Salih might have had that in mind when he "insisted" that the content and methods of "Islamic education" must be closely bound by the "ideal of Islam." But in so doing he overlooked the scientific aspect of such methods and content which may be neutral. The same mistake is repeated by Saied Ismaeil when he appreciates it as "an intellectual and moral state ideologically-bound and arrived at through strategies and methods of instruction which prepare the learner in the end to behave in an Islamic way"[5, p. 6]. Though the element of religion-bound morality is very important in "Islamic education," it is not the only "one element" and part of Islamic education, namely the scientific part, may be value-free.

Al-Nahlawi's definition is more complicated. It sets out very clearly the ideal of Islamizing the society as the ultimate aim of Islamic education. The various strategies used are directed to the ideal of helping the Muslim learner "to systematize his various powers so that he can participate in the activities directed to the realization of the "ideals of Islam"[5, p. 7]. The ideals of Islam" of course do not relate only to Muslim society but have "special" particular application in a society of Muslims. The latter are not referred to explicity by Al-Nahlawi in his definition.

Al-Nahlawi further derives six corollaries from his definition [5, p. 7]. Thus he deduces that Islamic education is:

(1) Closely related to the content of the texts of the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and the intellectual research based on them.

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5.   From the First World Conference on Muslim Education held at King Abdul Aziz University, 12-20 Rabi' al-Thāni A.H. 1397: "The ultimate aim of Muslim education is the realization of complete submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large" [7, p. 16].

(2) That it is an active interaction between two parties (teacher and learner), the former influencing and guiding the latter.

(3) That it is in most cases a goal-oriented activity, though it can sometimes take place without a full intention.

(4) That it is comprehensive – covering the individual's growth in the various sides: spiritual, biological, intellectual, psychological and social.

(5) That it is continuous or life-long, covering the individual's life-span from birth to death.

(6) That it is directed to the aim of enabling the individual to carry on the various activities which are conducive to the building of the Islamic society and Islamic civilization.

Al-Nahlawi's deductions cited above are in fact commonplace. They are more or less characteristics or "features" of Islamic education which are enumerated by many workers in the field [8, p. 35]. The problem with "his" features of Islamic education is that they are not really "Islamic" except the first one – that is they can apply to any other education. One would have expected from a discussion made by way of enlarging on a definition of Islamic education to get what can be referred to as really distinguishing features – that is separating Islamic education and clarifying it.

The definition offered by Dr. Mugdad Yalgin is not really quite different from Al Nahalwi's. It stresses the fact that "Islamic education" is independent in its philosophic underprinning – that means it does not originate from a human envisagement of what man is up to. But while this is true, it is not quite clear why the organizer of Islamic education should not be inspired by the achievement of others in the field of making use of purely rationally determined techniques and methods of education in another culture if they are neutral to moral Islamic ends.

The truth of the matter is that it may not be easy to "coin" a definition which covers the various aspects of the notion of "Islamic education." A strategy somewhat like that which has been employed by R.S. Peters in his discussion of the concept of (Western) education may be useful [9, p. 1].

To use Ryle's phrase, the logical geography of the concept of "Islamic education" may not have been mapped yet,[10, p. 9] in which case a definition would not be possible. Something like a "criterion" or criteria may be more helpful since it can at least tell us what "Islamic education" is and is not. This job may be easier than what it looks at first sight since the very definiteness of the ideology of Islam on which Islamic education bears helps in that regard.

But still the position is not very simple because part of what goes for "Islamic education" must fulfill the requirements of reason and rigorous scientific scrutiny.

Obviously the first criterion which "Islamic education" must satisfy is that it should be "Islamic." This criterion is not as loose as Peter's first criterion which he assigns to education in the West [11, p. 9]. It is "tight" because the necessity for congruence between the body of "Islamic education" and its "Islamic springs" is required by divine criteria and made obligatory on the organizer. Only the Qur'an, in this regard, determines what is "Islamic" and not the impressions of the people. People may disagree about what is "worthwhile," but Allah tells them and categorises finally for them "what is Islamic" and "what is not Islamic." Thus in Surat Al-Anaam Allah Almighty says:

"Say: 'I do not follow your caprices, or else I had gone astray, and would not be of the right-guided".

"Say: 'I stand upon a clear sign from my Lord and you have cried lies to it. Not with me is that you seek to hasten; the judgement is God's alone. He relates the truth, and He is the best of deciders" [12, 6:57].

This first criterion of Islamic education is indeed "vital," because it alone separates "Islamic Education" from any other type of education and ties it up closely with the philosophic ideal and the Islamic ideology which the Muslims cling to and hold up dearly. This means that it represents the philosophic component which any education must have and which must actually be the nucleus round which auxiliary components such as scientific contents and methods are set to revolve [4, p. 86].

In every sense this first criterion of "Islamic education" is "worthwhile" since Islam is considered by Muslims as far more than that. But any analogy with Peter's analysis [11, p. 9] shows that the first two criteria, which correspond to one another here and there, do in fact in both cases set aside a "distinct" field of education and mark it as value-loaded.

The second criterion of Islamic education follows from the first one. Since Islamic education is "Islamic" and centers round the philosophic ideal of Islam, it follows that it relates, at least in a major part, to the immaterial aspect of life. It therefore addresses itself in part to the appreciation of immaterial phenomena and attempts through religious experience to incorporate them into a more complete understanding of life. This criterion of Islamic education extends its scope to cover the whole preparation of the Muslim individual for an immortal life as well as catering for his spiritual needs in this life. The challenge here is the need for the development of a distinct type of a method of research by which immaterial phenomena can

be studied. So far the dependence in this field was on religious experience which is not accessible to all because it by-passes the physical senses.

The third criterion of Islamic education is that as far as its content relates to the world of matter surrounding the Muslim individual, it is scientifically based. As such it is open-ended. Whatever is proven by the scientific method is accepted here, but that which is not proven will be rejected. In this case it will not be enough to say that the motive of the educator is an Islamic one or that he aims to advance the cause of Islam if he did not follow the correct scientific procedure when studying a physical phenomenon. The way by which he arrives at a conclusion in such a study must first satisfy the requirements of scientific experimentation, otherwise his conclusions will be faulty. In this way the results of scientific investigations in the fields of the sciences bordering on education such as psychology and sociology will be independent of the Islamic ideal underlying Islamic education in so far as the phenomenon studied is a material one and the method of investigation is scientific.

Science in Islamic education will not necessarily be bound by the philosophic ideal of Islam, but will be independent of it in so far as it (science) relates to the study of material phenomena.

Thus the decision how to build an Islamic school at the lowest cost possible will not be a philosophic or an "Islamic" one, but "how to locate it" may not envolve purely rationally-determined criteria.

Modern Education and Islamic Culture

In the criteria discussed above the stress is laid on the " philosophic aspect" of Islamic education. Here attention is called to its function as a "means" to bring about and realize the "end of life" in a Muslim society. Thus the Muslim, in a Muslim society, is or "should be" introduced to the quality of "Islamic life" through a process of Islamic education. If this and that is done – if education is governed by the criteria mentioned and if the Muslim individual is allowed to be steeped in it, then "Islamic education" will be something else other than the current partial training restricted to religious institutions. It will be no less than the whole modern education, formal and informal, theoretical and practical, spiritual and material. Indeed, on the basis of these criteria, Islamic education will be characterized as the type of education which is directly based on the ideology of Islam and will comprise the sum total of the educational and guidance policies directed to the ideal of Islamizing the society and modernizing it.

Thus it shall not be merely "the teaching of the Qur'an" or just "the history" of Muslim education in the Middle Ages." Rather it will be appreciated, as referred to

earlier, as a type of education which is composed of two parts: the one part metaphysical, relating to the immaterial nature of the ideology of Islam itself, which is fundamentally a belief in the unseen, and the other part purely scientific, relating to the physical environment in which the Muslim lives.

Sources of Islamic Education

The sources of Islamic education when it is ideologically bound by Islam are indicated by the distinct parts from which it is composed. The source for the metaphysical part is the Holy Qur'an and the authenticated Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad [13, p. 7]). Thus values in Islamic education are absolute. They are derived from the "general Islamic values" which are found in the Qur'an and illustrated by the virtuous sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad. As such they are considered as final and unchangeable. Though the Qur'an contains some scientific references, its content is fundamentally moral and has a practical ethical value. The Prophet stressed that he was sent "to complete and consolidate the good and the virtuous" [14, p. 43] and to relieve the human moral conscience. Since the end of life in Islam is the worship of Allah [12, 51:56] which consists mainly in abiding by His absolute moral rules, active moral knowledge in Islam is above intellectual and purely scientific knowledge, though the latter is considered as important and encouraged. Actually the material knowledge gained through the application of a rational sensual approach to experience is imperfect, liable to be wrong and open to change. As such it is not perfect or final.

As Ornstein put it: it is incomplete to argue that all knowledge is exclusively rational or sensual [15, -. 6]. The fragmentation and imperfection of material knowledge by necessity place it within the sphere of the universality of spiritual knowledge and make it subservient to it. Thus the principles of revealed spiritual knowledge found in the Qur'an or "general philosophic principles," which outline a general envisagement of life in Islam, do in fact, circumscribe material knowledge and determine whether it shall be selected for or omitted from programmes of public instruction.

Given this, it can then be said that a primary source of "Islamic education" which is fundamentally moral in character, is the inspired moral knowledge found in the Qur'an and the authenticated Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.

Another source of Islamic education is the ever-increasing accumulation of pure scientific knowledge gained through the application of the human mind and sensual powers on the material environment surrounding man. In Islam rational-sensual experience is welcomed as a compliment to the fundamental spiritual experience precipitated by the action of faith.

The Impact of Islamic Education

The impact of Islamic education on the individual and society is far reaching. In Islam the individual who received a solid Islamic education, is a person whose character and frame of mind was moulded and set in a form harmonious with the general direction of the Islamic envisagement as regards the nature and direction of life. He is alert to another configuration of reality beyond the physcial one, and his life is balanced between his physical necessities and spiritual needs. He is helped to develop his soul through a medium of Islamic education which exposes him to the light of Allah. As a result the whole of his life is transformed. Seriousness, responsibility and accountability shall be only obvious external traits among the varied attributes of such a remarkable person. The depth of his character shall hold indiminishable treasures of rare personal qualities. Sympathy, empathy, self-denial, unconditional giving, patience, activity, determination and inflexible will, shall be but a few of what he is capable of.

As to the impact of Islamic education on society, it shall help to realize such social values as justice, equality, social peace and freedom for the various groups within the broad framework of Islam. Thus the individual in Islam is taught to be just in his relation with all people and even with animals and things.[6] Definite legal and economic institutions are set up to secure the actual carrying out of the ideals of equality and social justice. Not only is the individual formally taught these values, but the Islamic culture in which he is steeped does in fact stress them.

Overall Aim

The overall aim of "Islamic education" is the gradual formation of the true Muslim individual and genuine "Muslim society" who worship Allah all the time, fear Him and abide by His rules.[7] This follows from recognizing the Qur'an as the main source of Islamic education and appreciating it (Islamic education) as relevant to both the spiritual and temporal life of the Muslim and responsive to both his material and immaterial needs. The overall aim of Islamic education is thus linked to an appreciation of a whole list of concerns and all types of problems which might confront the Muslim as a member of the human family. It comprises a necessary preparation of the Muslim individual and society to find answers to material and immaterial problems as well as preparing them to respond in a positive way to the challenge

6. In a tradition of the Prophet of Islam related on the authority of Muslim the Messenger of Allah is reported to have said, "Allah has ordered perfection or improvement of performance upon anything, so if one of you slaughtered an animal, he should do that in the best way possible."

7. This is in line with the first recommendation of the First World Conference on Muslim education, held at King Abdul Aziz University, 12-20 Rabi' al-Thāni A.H. 1397, which was as follows: "The altimate aim of Muslim education is the realization of complete submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large" [7, p. 16].

of the cumulative need for the promotion of the physical and psychological conditions of living. It also comprises a basic concern to be truthful to Allah and dedicated to His pleasure in all walks of life.

The import of all this is that preparing the Muslim individual to be a real believer in Allah and a genuine follower of His Prophet, does not contradict requiring him to master the physical or human sciences in which he is specialized, or to be equipped with the various techniques indispensable to someone who is steeped in the modern art of living [16]. In fact his "Islamic education" which is "ideal-oriented" require him all the more to do that and ensures success here, because the ideal which guides his activity does not only cause him to be active and adventurous but also original and insightful in his suggestions. Thus the person who is a product of an "Islamic education" of this sort can do the work of a pioneer who helps with providing geographical knowledge of an undiscovered area by putting up signposts. Only when he does that will he be regarded as one who is able to "extend the frontier of knowledge."

Summary

In this paper some views and thoughts about the nature of "Islamic education" were discussed. It was stressed that "Islamic education" should not be considered merely as "the teaching of religious sciences" or "the history of Islamic education," but as a special type of general modern education which is oriented to Islamic ideals and at the same time comprises the necessary components of scientific knowledge needed for solving material problems and improving physical conditions of living. As such it was appreciated as a type of education which is composed of two parts which are really fully integrated: the one part is metaphysical, relating to the metaphysical ideology of Islam itself which is fundamentally a belief in the unseen; and the other part purely scientific, relating to the physical environment in which the Muslim lives.

Some definitions of "Islamic education" suggested by current Muslim uniters were analysed and discussed. In an effort to determine the concept of "Islamic education" and to clarify it further, some criteria for it were suggested by the writer,

The most important of these was derived from the appreciation of "Islamic education" as basically an instrument for the application of "Islamic faith" to the Muslim individual and society, bringing them to a closer state of proper worship of Allah which is the end of life in Islam. In the light of these criteria the impact of Islamic education on the individual and society and its overall aim were discussed.

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التربية الإسلامية : نحو نظرة أشمل

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ملخص البحث . حاول الكـاتب في هذا البحث أن يتجـاوز الوضع القائم للأساس النظري للتعليم الحديث في البلاد المسلمة ــ حيث إنه يفتقر إلى الأصالة الثقافية والانتماء الحضاري ــ إلى تصور لأساس نظري له، أكثر شمولا بحيث يستطيع أن يؤدي دورا متوازنا من ناحيتي تعميق الجذور الثقافية، وفتح الباب للتطور المادي والامتزاج الحضاري في المجالات العلمية البحتة.

ناقش الباحث فكرة «التعليم الإسلامي» مستعملا في ذلك المنهج الفسلفي التحليلي، كما ناقش بعض التعريفات الحديثة «للتعليم الإسلامي»، وحاول أن يقدم بعض المقاييس التي يمكن أن تضبط هذه الفكرة.