

MODIFICATION OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION CONTENT IN PURSUANCE OF RELEVANCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

BY

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Abstract

Education in all regions or religions undergoes different transitions and changes ranging from ancient, tradition, medieval, modern and even postmodern period. Each stage is underlined with pros and cons, strength and weakness. Islamic education also does not evade transition. It passes four different stages of reformation and restructuring: traditional, modern (or liberalist), reformist and revivalist. Traditional method being the base and fundamental stage of the process offers undeniable foundation for all other stages. Starting with rote learning, then to textbook method, its prime aim is to produce a holistic man-educated and religious. However, different gaps have been identified as the weaknesses or shortcomings of traditional method of education. Being a teacher-centered approach and overdependence on rote learning are some of identified weaknesses of the approach. To break through the liberalists later sought for alternative or modern method which built Muslim education only on the contemporary western thought and worldview. The method as novel as it is only succeeded in de-islamizing the educated class of society and led to weakness and retrogression of Muslim ummah. Then combining the two world view (Islamic and western) in Muslim education through eclectic or Islamization was finally adopted as a way forward. This paper therefore critically examines the strengths and weakness of all the approaches and provides recommendations on how Islamic education content can march the need of the contemporary society.

Key words: Muslim education, Islamization, Traditional, Eclectic, Muslim Ummah

Education in all regions or religions undergoes different transitions and changes ranging from ancient, tradition, medieval, modern and postmodern. Each stage is underlined with pros and cons, strength and weakness. Islamic education also does not evade transition. It passes four different stages of reformation and restructuring: traditional, modern (or liberalist), reformist and revivalist. Traditional method being the base and fundamental stage of the process offers undeniable foundation for all other stages. Starting with rote learning, then to textbook method, its prime aim is to produce a holistic man-educated and religious. Kitaji and Niggata-ken (1990) considers aim of Islamic traditional method of education as to bring up an Islamic man through a process of encouraging him to obtain knowledge. Sidek (2013) maintains that Islamic history proves clearly that traditionalism contributed substantially in preserving the identity of Islam and Muslims. However, different gaps have been identified as the weaknesses or shortcomings of traditional method of education. It is regarded as teacher-centered approach. Overdependence on rote learning, failure to utilize classical semantics, interpretation of Islamic teachings literally, closing of creativity (ijtihad) are all other parts of identified weaknesses of traditional method of Islamization. However, in Islamic thought, traditional or traditionalism does not necessarily signify something negative or backward. Islamic history proves clearly that traditionalism contributed substantially in preserving the identity of Islam (Sidek 2013).

Nevertheless, with these shortcomings, the general traditional method of education cannot fulfill the needs and demands of Muslim *Ummah*. This then spun another method of education which is referred to as alternative or modern method. According to Sidiki (2013) the second trend considers contemporary western thought and its worldview, its concept and existence of life and man, to be universal, without it a modern culture cannot be built. It assumes that *ummah* can only achieve development in education, economy, and politics only if she purges herself out of traditionalism. This method westernization (modernization\liberalism) however only succeeded in de-islamizing the

educated class of society and additionally caused weakness and retrogression (Islamization 1989). The reason being that, educational programmes were tailored along western values and Muslims ideology and consciousness were molded into the caricature of the West. Those who completed their self-Westernization stood out more oddly against their Muslim environment and background. The integrity of Islamic culture and the unity of the Islamic style of life were shattered in their own persons, in their thought and actions, in their homes and families. Western social institutions and customs were introduced into their lives in excess and with impertinence. Instead of raising themselves from their debasement to the heights of virtue and societal efficacy envisaged for them by Islam, Muslim men and women began to hanker after the manifestations of Western decadence: gradual nudity and immorality of dress and make-up (*tabarruj*), economic independence aimed at individualistic license, egotistic pursuit of pleasure, and avoidance of duties imposed by family relationships. (Islamization 1989) With the failure of these approaches, there was an advocate for eclectic approach to solve the educational malaise of the ummah. Taha Jabir Al-Awani (1989) advocates this eclectic model as an appropriate and effective method for overcoming the crack between traditional and modern strategies of Islamic education.

Muslim education in the past

Began in Makkah where the Prophet received revelation from Allah, the Mighty, the first five verses revealed centered on reading signaling importance of education. The five verses: “Recite in the name of your Lord Who created, created mankind from a blood clot; Recite, for your Lord is the most Noble, the One Who taught by means of the eternal pen (of revelation); Who taught mankind what it did not know” (96: 1-5). Without doubt, the verses directed Muslims to pursue learning. After this revelation Almighty Allah unceasingly continued to reveal the glorious Quran, verse after verse and surah after surah. The subject matter of the revelation contains different subjects and fields. The glorious Quran elaborately discusses concept of embryology which was never known to the desert Arab. Other subjects and areas of discourse in the holy Quran include astronomy, zoology, economy, mathematics, literature etc. Hence, Muslims through Quran are to get inclined to spiritual edifice as well as face the challenge of making Quran a reality by studying its practicability and delve more into its discourse. Thus, through Quran the education of Muslims starting from Makkah was comprehensive without segregating between courses: scientific, humanity or art subjects or between gender: male and female. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) disseminated the message either in form of preaching or *Halaqah* to the Muslims in the mosques. He encouraged Muslims to continue pursuing knowledge as a way to be more enlightening and enlivening to the reality of the challenge and concept of the holy Quran. This Makkah education was not different from Medinah, it both covered all fields of life and this continued for complete twenty-three years till the Prophet answered the eternal call of his Lord.

The inheritors-the four Caliphs

The *khulafah* after the Prophet (peace be upon him) continued to flourish the divine knowledge that the Prophet had strongly laid its foundation. Almighty Allah has rightly put forward challenge of searching for knowledge in all fields before Muslims for proper understanding of the Quranic message. Hence, during the time of *khulafah rashidun* i.e Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali, educating Muslim ummah is one of their priorities. Apart from learning of the glorious Quran, memorization of lyric poem and extra curriculum activities such as swimming, throwing arrow, riding were introduced and added into the educational system. This period known as republican period also witnessed tremendous liberation of cities which gave more development and extension to educational system.

The golden age Umayyad Era (661-750 AD):

Islam spread to other lands which differed in culture and language from Arabs. Since the motto of Islam for Muslim is to seek knowledge anywhere they find it, Muslims began to expand their educational programme at this period. However, due to the political turmoil of the time, the expansion only covered some fields of study. Educational syllabus was enlarged to incorporate more subjects such as grammar, history, geography and law (Ahmad, *et al.*,

2012). The curriculum then contained religious sciences, basic study of foreign languages, Hadith and jurisprudence, Arabic grammar and literature (Hashim & Langgulung, 2008).

Abbasids Period (750-1258): The period of this Arab dynasty was referred to as the golden age of Muslim education and learning. The method of education was more developed during this period than the previous time. There was expansion of curriculum of education and it was extended to cover liberal studies which included elements of science. Regarding children education, they used to start their informal education at home. Nonetheless, their formal or primary education began when they are six years old. Children regardless of gender were taught together at the local elementary or primary school, mosque and *maktab* as well. At the very initial period children were required to learn the process of reading and memorizing the *Qur'an*. Besides this, higher education was also significant during this period. Ahmad, et al (2012) maintains that the most remarkable contribution of this period was the increasing number of institutions of higher learning. Apart from this there were libraries such as *Bayt at-Hikmah* or the House of Wisdom which served as repertoire of knowledge for the Muslims. Hence, a well-balanced curriculum was offered to Muslim in this period. Ibnu Khaldun, the great scholar of this period categorized the content of curriculum during the time into two *Ulum Naqliya* and *Ulum 'Aqliya*. *Ulum Naqliya* refers to traditional or transmitted sciences, based on revelation and *Ulum 'Aqliya* indicates philosophical or intellectual sciences based on observation and deduction (Ahmad, et al.,2012)

However, the curriculum and methodology of teaching at this period seems narrow and focus on rote learning at the elementary level but very wide and comprehensive in the advance. What led to the expansion of curriculum in this golden period was that Islam has spread its tentacle to non-Arab regions such as Persian and India. Since Muslims are permitted by their religion to learn all beneficial knowledge, they started learning other fields of study such as philosophy, logic, metaphysics, and astronomy. This then led to widening of the scope of curriculum to cover the study of science in the form of medicine, chemistry, physics etc. However, this did not go without having great influence on Islam and Muslims' ideology. Afridi et al (2007) maintain that during this period Muslims came under the influence of Greek literature and philosophy and Arabs became acquainted with the Indian sciences, particularly medicine and astronomy. Exposure of Arabs to world outside their domain revolutionised their outlook towards different spheres of life. This development reached its zenith during the time of Calipha Mamun, son of Harun Rashid. In order to satisfy intellectual appetite of Muslims, he dispatched agents to every country in which he suspected the existence of Greek manuscripts. He founded a special academy for translators. He gave employment to countless translators who put the Greek classics into Arabic. In all this work he employed Muslims, Christians and Jews alike (Afridi, et al 2007).

Studying all these fields of knowledge enabled Islam to produce great scholars of international status such as: Kindi, Farabi, ibn Sina, Ghazzali, ibn Rushd, ibn Aytam etc. The cons of the enlarged curriculum were that it led to the spring of some heretic movements who instead of relying on genuine intellectual source of knowledge of Islam, they became engrossed in philosophy and alien ideologies. Movements such as Murijites, Qadrites, Jabrites rose to make a dichotomy of free will and predestination. It was in this period that the ummah witnessed emergence of Mutazila who claimed that 'the speech of Allah Most High is created, invented, and brought into being'. Likewise, Ashariyah who made wrong interpretation of the corporeal terms applied to God, such as hands, face and sitting on the throne. All these heretic movements based their arguments on the wrong interpretation of the philosophical ideas of the subjects.

Ulamah rose to the challenge

Orthodox scholars began to warn Muslims from pursuing some subjects which to them have negative effect on their ideology. Thus, they made dichotomy to the field of study. Imam Gazali quoted by Khalil (1926) classified subjects that he considered injurious to faith as '*ulum madhmumah*' (condemned studies). Physics and philosophy were parts of these subjects and Imam warned youth from learning such subjects. Imam Qadi Abu Yusuff also gave verdict that: He who studies the stars is not free from infidelity. Ibnu Khalidun also accused philosophy of having a detrimental influence on religion. He said '*al-falsafah dararuha fi din kathir*' meaning philosophy is more dangerous to religion. Thus, classification and dualism of knowledge into two sprang. Apart from bifurcating knowledge, *Ulamah* also

closed door of *ijtihad* and declared that the *Shariah* was perfect in its present state as developed by the work of the ancestors.

Strengths of Islamic traditional methodologies in education

Traditional methodology vehemently bases its methodology and content on the perceived authentic source of knowledge, though with many weaknesses regarding its efficiency and effectiveness in solving the contemporary issues and problem of Muslims and *ummah* in general. Yet there are many identifiable strengths of this methodology. According to Sidek (2013) in the Islamic religion, traditional and traditionalism do not necessarily signify something negative or backward. Islamic history proves clearly that traditionalism contributed substantially in preserving the identity of Islam and Muslims. Some of the strength of Islamic traditional methodologies in education includes:

(a) Creating Proper education for Muslims

It is beyond doubt that traditionalists have contributed substantially in educating Muslims in the past and brought continuity to this day. Traditional method provides methodology and materials for the Muslim thought. Abu Sulayman (1993:63) said: Classical Muslim methodology provides not only the research method for the Muslim thought but also its source materials.

(b)Prevention of Islamic faith and ideology

Traditional methodology has helped to safeguard ideology of the *ummah*. Khalil (1926) asserts that it is necessary to understand that *ulamah* at this period tried to safe the faith of people and as well maintain their submission to the religious authority which was very necessary for their steadfastness in the religion at that precarious time.

(c)Combating heresy and liberalism with scholasticism

It may be added that the Arabs also found it necessary to resort to scholasticism in order to combat heresy and liberalism. For this purpose, *ilm al kalam* (the science of words), *ilm al-jadal* (diaclectics) and *al-munazarah* (the disputation) were added to the curriculum. These branches played a great part in Arabic *madrasas* and the science of disputation with the finest half-splitting argumentation became very popular (Khalil1926)

Weaknesses of Islamic traditional methodologies in education

The infiltration of alien thought in the ideology of Muslims and the subsequent invasion of Mongol and crusaders which disintegrate Muslims into a number of states, ideological camps and subject them under self-centered and manipulative rulers compelled Muslim *ulamah* to take more drastic effort and string step to protect religion. They subsequently adopt holistic traditional in addressing the problem. However, the method has many weaknesses and limitations in solving *ummah* problem. Al-Faruqi (1982) identifies four shortcomings (1) It restricts the meaning of significant terms such as *fiqh*, *faqih*, *ijtihad* and *mujtahid*, (2) It separates *wahy* (revelation) and *aql* (reason), (3) It also separates Islamic thought and action finally (4) It creates cultural and religious dualism.

Advent of westernization

In getting way out of the weakness and limitation of traditional approach, modernist or western approach emerges in which it sees absorbing and adopting all western values and ideology as a way forward for the *ummah*. This approach however adds nothing than injury to the pain of *ummah*, like in the case of Turkey where all Islamic values were outrightly uprooted and replaced with the western values and cultures. Westernization only succeeded in de-Islamizing the educated class of society and, additionally, caused weakness and retrogression (Islamization 1989). Hence, there is a call for integration or eclectic approach as a solution to this malaise.

Process of Eclectic Approach

Taha Jabir (1989) defines eclectic approach as a process of selecting both from traditional and contemporary what is most sound and useful. He reinstates that integrating the two approaches to form intellectual structure will promote the basis for achieving the wholeness and holistic nature of knowledge. He also sees it as effective method for overcoming the crack between traditional and modern strategies of Islamic education. The process is a way of adding Islamic world view to all fields of study which is termed islamization. The process of islamization of knowledge in the Muslim world took earnest step with the First World Conference on Muslims Education held in Makkah 1977. After the meeting recommendation to establish four international universities in four countries namely Malaysia, Islamabad, Kampala and Niger were made. However only International Islamic university, Malaysia, International Islamic university, Islamabad, Pakistan could take off to carry out the noble mission with the former taking a lead.

Tremendous achievements have been made in this process. Rosnani (2013) identifies five achievements of Islamization in IIUM

- i. Recognition of Islamization as core vision and mission of the institution
- ii. ability of IIUM to attract quality Muslim scholars from Malaysia and abroad.
- iii. Incursion of Islamization in the curriculum of all programmes
- iv. All outputs or graduates of IIUM have greater impacts in their workplaces in different countries.
- v. IIUM has generated a lot of research and publications on the conceptualization of IOK.

Towards twenty first century

Despite these achievements, in this twenty first century, there is need for these universities with noble mission to develop way of measuring their achievement in term of quality and efficiency within themselves rather than trailing the 'ghost' of western quality evaluation which has different agenda. The school curriculum should include moral or character education which should be taken by all students regardless of course of study. The school curriculum should be expanded more to cater for vocational study so that the students can be job makers rather than course seekers. The world at this point in time needs people with both critical and creative skills; the course of study should therefore take care of this aspect as well. Employment and promotion of staff should be considering moral and spiritual aspect of a staff and how a staff serves as a role model for student should also be a criterion. In general, the contemporary society does not recognise graduates with no soft skills, so for those pursuing Islamic education to live comfortably in the diverse and interconnected world and contribute significantly to the national development, Islamic education curriculum should at the end producer:

- a) Innovators, problem solvers, team players, collaborators, critical, creative and entrepreneurial students who disregard solo mentality
- b) Graduates who can easily adapt to the changing world, exhibition self-discipline rather than extreme compliance and conformability
- c) Graduates who through the soft skills gained in the school can establish personal business rather than depending on the white-collar job for living
- d) Graduates who can infer, assess, syntesice, engage in critical discourse rather than students who only succeed in rote learning
- e) Graduates who can navigate in the world of digital technology literacy and excell in bringing out the beneficial aspects of it for the betterment of the world
- f) Graduates who can exhibit multiple intelligences rather than single traditional notion of intelligence
- g) Graduates who have a strong sense of right and wrong
- h) Graduates who possess leadership skills and are ready to lead the world as the ambassador of Almighty Allah.
- i) Graduates who are discerning in judgment, thinks independently and critically, and communicate effectively.
- j) Graduates who question, reflect, persevere, behave responsibly and take responsibility for their own living and willing to make the world a better place

- k) Graduates who have a strong sense of civic responsibility, are informed about the nation and are active player in the world.

Conclusion

The major contribution to the growth and development of a nation is education. The worthwhile education is the one embedded with value laden and that is holistic in nature. Muslim nations should not fall into the same pit of the past by bifurcating knowledge. All beneficial knowledge belongs to Muslim. Imam Said Nursi in Risalah Nur (2009) suggests for Muslim ummah to merge all three facets of education that has been disjointed: revelation, science and spiritualism. Therefore, we should suit the curriculum of our Arabic schools, Islamic schools, Islamic colleges and Islamic universities to meet all these three components in order to withstand the contemporary needs in the twenty first century.

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