HISTORY, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Islam has, from its inception, placed a high premium on education and has enjoyed a long and rich intellectual tradition. Knowledge ('ilm) occupies a significant position within Islam, as evidenced by the more than 800 references to it in Islam's most revered book, the Quran. The importance of education is repeatedly emphasized in the Quran with frequent injunctions, such as "God will exalt those of you who believe and those who have knowledge to high degrees" (58:11), "O my Lord! Increase me in knowledge" (20:114). Such verses provide a forceful stimulus for the Islamic community to strive for education and learning.

Islamic education is uniquely different from other types of educational theory and practice largely because of the all-encompassing influence of the Quran. The Quran serves as a comprehensive blueprint for both the individual and society and as the primary source of knowledge. The advent of the Quran in the seventh century was quite revolutionary for the predominantly illiterate Arabian society. Arab society had enjoyed a rich oral tradition, but the Quran was considered the word of God and needed to be organically interacted with by means of reading and reciting its words. Hence, reading and writing for the purpose of accessing the blessings of the Quran was an aspiration for most Muslims. Thus, education in Islam unequivocally derived its origins from a symbiotic relationship with religious instruction.

History of Islamic Education

Thus, in this way, Islamic education began. Pious and learned Muslims (mu' allim or mudarris), dedicated to making the teachings of the Quran more accessible to the Islamic community, taught the faithful in what came to be known as the kuttāb (plural, katātīb). The kuttāb could be located in a variety of venues: mosques, private homes, shops, tents, or even out in the open. Historians are uncertain as to when the katātīb were first established, but with the widespread desire of the faithful to study the Quran, katātīb could be found in virtually every part of the Islamic empire by the middle of the eighth century. The kuttāb served a vital social function as the only vehicle for formal public instruction for primary-age children and continued so until Western models of education were introduced in the modern period. Even at present, it has exhibited remarkable durability and continues to be an important means of religious instruction in many Islamic countries.

The curriculum of the kuttāb was primarily directed to young children, beginning as early as age four, and was centered on Quranic studies and on religious obligations such as ritual ablutions, fasting, and prayer. The focus during the early history of Islam on the education of youth reflected the belief that raising children with correct principles was a holy obligation for parents and society. As Abdul Tibawi wrote in 1972, the mind of the child was believed to be "like a white clean paper, once anything is written on it, right or wrong, it will be difficult to erase it or superimpose new writing upon it" (p. 38).

Memorization of the Quran was central to the curriculum of the kuttāb, but little or no attempt was made to analyze and discuss the meaning of the text. Once students had memorized the greater part of the Quran, they could advance to higher stages of education, with increased complexity of instruction. Western analysts of the kuttāb system usually criticize two areas of its pedagogy: the limited range of subjects taught and the exclusive reliance on memorization. The contemporary kuttāb system still emphasizes memorization and recitation as important means of learning. The value placed on memorization during students' early religious training directly influences their approaches to learning when they enter formal education offered by the modern state. A common frustration of modern

educators in the Islamic world is that while their students can memorize copious volumes of notes and textbook pages, they often lack competence in critical analysis and independent thinking.

During the golden age of the Islamic empire (usually defined as a period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries), when western Europe was intellectually backward and stagnant, Islamic scholarship flourished with an impressive openness to the rational sciences, art, and even literature. It was during this period that the Islamic world made most of its contributions to the scientific and artistic world. Ironically, Islamic scholars preserved much of the knowledge of the Greeks that had been prohibited by the Christian world. Other outstanding contributions were made in areas of chemistry, botany, physics, mineralogy, mathematics, and astronomy, as many Muslim thinkers regarded scientific truths as tools for accessing religious truth.

Gradually the open and vigorous spirit of enquiry and individual judgment (ijtihād) that characterized the golden age gave way to a more insular, unquestioning acceptance of the traditional corpus of authoritative knowledge. Much of what was written after the thirteenth century lacked originality, and it consisted mostly of commentaries on existing canonical works without adding any substantive new ideas. The lethal combination of lack of enquiry and foreign invasion beginning in the thirteenth century served to dim Islam's preeminence in both the artistic and scientific worlds.

Despite its glorious legacy of earlier periods, the Islamic world seemed unable to respond either culturally or educationally to the onslaught of Western advancement by the eighteenth century. One of the most damaging aspects of European colonialism was the deterioration of indigenous cultural norms through secularism. With its veneration of human reason over divine revelation and its insistence on separation of religion and state, secularism is anathema to Islam, in which all aspects of life, spiritual or temporal, are interrelated as a harmonious whole. At the same time, Western institutions of education, with their pronounced secular/religious dichotomy, were infused into Muslim countries in order to produce functionaries to feed the bureaucratic and administrative needs of the state. The early modernizers did not fully realize the extent to which secularized education fundamentally conflicted with Islamic thought and traditional lifestyle. Religious education was to remain a separate and personal responsibility, having no place in public education. If Muslim students desired religious training, they could supplement their existing education with moral instruction in traditional religious schools–the kuttāb. As a consequence, the two differing education systems evolved independently with little or no official interface.

Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education

The Arabic language has three terms for education, representing the various dimensions of the educational process as perceived by Islam. The most widely used word for education in a formal sense is ta'līm, from the root 'alima (to know, to be aware, to perceive, to learn), which is used to denote knowledge being sought or imparted through instruction and teaching. Tarbiyah, from the root raba (to increase, to grow, to rear), implies a state of spiritual and ethical nurturing in accordance with the will of God. Ta'dīb, from the root aduba (to be cultured, refined, well-mannered), suggests a person's development of sound social behavior. What is meant by sound requires a deeper understanding of the Islamic conception of the human being.

Education in the context of Islam is regarded as a process that involves the complete person, including the rational, spiritual, and social dimensions. As noted by Syed Muhammad al-Naquib al-Attas in 1979, the comprehensive and integrated approach to education in Islam is directed toward the "balanced

growth of the total personality through training Man's spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses, such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality" (p. 158). In Islamic educational theory, knowledge is gained in order to actualize and perfect all dimensions of the human being. From an Islamic perspective the highest and most useful model of perfection is the prophet Muhammad, and the goal of Islamic education is that people be able to live as he lived. Seyyed Hossein Nasr wrote in 1984 that while education does prepare humankind for happiness in this life, "its ultimate goal is the abode of permanence and all education points to the permanent world of eternity" (p. 7). To ascertain truth by reason alone is restrictive, according to Islam, because spiritual and temporal reality are two sides of the same sphere. Many Muslim educationists argue that favoring reason at the expense of spirituality interferes with balanced growth. Exclusive training of the intellect, for example, is inadequate in developing and refining elements of love, kindness, compassion, and selflessness, which have an altogether spiritual ambiance and can be engaged only by processes of spiritual training.

Education in Islam is twofold: acquiring intellectual knowledge (through the application of reason and logic) and developing spiritual knowledge (derived from divine revelation and spiritual experience). According to the worldview of Islam, provision in education must be made equally for both. Acquiring knowledge in Islam is not intended as an end but as a means to stimulate a more elevated moral and spiritual consciousness, leading to faith and righteous action.