

Islamic Pedagogy in the Age of Modernity: Exploring Theories of Knowledge, Learning, and Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Islamic pedagogy highlights teaching with a clear understanding of educational values and perspectives based on the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic tradition. It offers a holistic approach to education that emphasizes the whole person's physical, intellectual, moral, social, cultural, and spiritual welfare. This paper explores the concepts of knowledge (epistemology), learning, and teaching in Islamic education, drawing from classical sources and the practices of early and contemporary Islamic schools. This research is exploratory and descriptive, employing qualitative methods. Through an extensive literature review, the study found the significance and execution of the comprehensive approach of Islamic pedagogy to be necessary in the age of modernity, usually characterized by scientific, technological, socioeconomic, and academic changes. An inter-relationship should be established between traditional Islamic educational techniques and modern pedagogical methodologies due to their potential to enlighten and enrich one another in academic settings. The findings indicate that Islamic educational values can improve modern pedagogical practices by focusing on integral progress, fostering morality, and commitment to lifelong learning. The potential of technology and digital learning tools in contemporary Islamic pedagogy is examined, suggesting that teachers adapt traditional knowledge to the twenty-first-century scholastic world.

Introduction

Pedagogy is the science of teaching or the art of educating children. It can be defined as “the art or profession of teaching,” “preparatory training or instruction,” or “the proper application of teaching strategies.”¹ Islamic pedagogy is not merely a teaching method, but a comprehensive thought of education that includes obtaining knowledge, rectifying character, and ensuring a moral, intellectual, and spiritual symmetry. The rapid change in global educational settings in the 21st century has put forward challenges and potential for integrating multiple pedagogical traditions. Islamic pedagogy—a valued educational framework derived from the Qur'an, ḥadīth, and centuries of scholarly interpretation—has enormous ideas and techniques to offer in this modern era. From the Islamic point of view, the root of knowledge is divine, and humans are just discovering, pondering over, analyzing, and perceiving information through various methods. Islam advocates for continuous learning to enhance the individual and the society and, most significantly, to strengthen belief in the Almighty. This article aims to describe the concepts of knowledge, learning, and teaching in Islamic pedagogy and examine their adaptability to contemporary education patterns. The paper explores that knowledge, in Islamic studies, is not only an intellectual pursuit but a spiritual journey for personal and societal betterment. It emphasizes the balanced approach to education that nurtures the learner's intellect and ethical dimensions. Islamic pedagogy also highlights the significance of seeking knowledge lifelong and the teachers' role as supervisors and moral exemplars. This research employed qualitative methods through an extensive review of primary sources, such as the Qur'an and Hadith. Secondary sources, including relevant books, academic papers, research articles, and case studies, are also utilized to explore the modern

connections of Islamic pedagogical theories. The descriptive nature of this research helps to explore the multi-dimensional concepts of knowledge, learning, and teaching in Islam, drawing relations between traditional teachings and contemporary practices, and highlighting the potential for Islamization of secular educational methods in the age of modernity.

Concepts of Knowledge in Islam

Definition of Knowledge and Its Status in Islam

Morphologically, the word 'Knowledge' is synonymous with the Arabic word 'ilm (علم) that is derived from the letters 'ayn (ع), lam (ل), and mim (م), which refers to know. Al-'ilm is understanding something in its actual reality.² It is the firm, particular belief that aligns with reality, or it is a characteristic that requires a distinction that does not allow for contradiction, or it is the formation of the image of something in the mind.³

Knowledge is superior to ignorance (jahl), supposition (dhan), and doubt (shakk). The first revealed five verses of al-Qur'an encompass the theme of knowledge.⁴ Initially, man possessed no knowledge but is now endowed with it and has begun comprehending the situation's reality. Knowledge is, in essence, a journey towards enlightenment and consciousness.⁵ Since belief in Truth is fundamental to religion, "knowing" must be prioritized in all aspects, including the proclamation of faith that one is divinely instructed to 'know.' Allah says, "فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ" - Therefore, know clearly that there is no god deserving of worship but Allah.⁶ Knowledge differentiates among people; knowledgeable persons are compatible with guidance and more honorable than others. Allah declares this in the form of a question, "قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا" - Say, (O Prophet,) 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only the people of understanding are receptive to the advice."⁷

The Holistic Nature of Knowledge

In Islam, knowledge is regarded as comprehensive, encompassing both the sciences of the material realm and the sciences of the spiritual realm. This comprehensive approach is seen in traditional and contemporary Islamic schools, encompassing courses such as religion, law, philosophy, natural sciences, mathematics, and poetry. A harmonious education encompassing both spiritual and worldly understanding is desired. Students are urged to cultivate several facets of their personality beyond the cerebral.

Conversely, Western cultures predominantly emphasize knowledge acquisition as a secular and utilitarian pursuit. Theories such as 'behaviorism' and 'constructivism' emphasize cognitive and developmental processes, frequently separating knowledge from its ethical and spiritual ramifications. Behaviorism is the study of behavior by organisms, systems, or artificial entities concerning their environment. Learning results from interaction between stimulus (what is provided by the teacher) and response (what is produced by the students), with a person considered to have learned something if they show changes in their behavior.⁸

Constructivism emphasizes that people learn independently and acquire knowledge to fulfill their needs. It encourages active engagement and collaboration with peer learners in the education process to boost skills, knowledge, and competence. In this theory, active construction through experiences and interactions is more important than information transmission.⁹ Contemporary theories of pedagogy, which are not based on religious principles, prioritize critical thinking about worldly matters and promote student-centered learning. However, they often conceptualize knowledge as a construct of the learner, rather than as a divinely appointed entity that necessitates humility and moral responsibility in its pursuit.

This differentiation is essential for comprehending how Islamic pedagogy provides a more comprehensive and integrative perspective on education. Integrating Islamic and Western epistemological frameworks may yield advantageous outcomes. By merging Islamic principles of knowledge as a sacred, moral endeavor with contemporary notions of active, student-centered learning, educators could offer a more holistic educational experience that fosters intellectual growth while concurrently cultivating the student's character and ethical comprehension.

Concepts of Learning in Islamic Pedagogy

Learning is comprised of several key concepts, including *Ta'allum* (تَعَلُّم), *Mutāla'ah* (مُطَالَعَة), *Istifādah* (اِسْتِفَادَة), *Tafakkur* (تَفَكُّر), *Tadabbur* (تَدَبُّر), and *I'tibār* (اِعْتِبَار) etc. Among these, *Ta'allum* is the most used term.

Motivation and Obligation of Learning

The quest for knowledge is esteemed in Islam, with countless ḥadīths underscoring its significance for personal and spiritual growth. In a particular statement, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) emphasizes the celestial gratitude for individuals who seek knowledge. The Prophet (ﷺ) stated: "Whoever embarks on a journey in pursuit of knowledge, Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, will facilitate for him a path to Paradise."¹⁰ This motivation puts the learners forward in the journey of study.

Islam emphasizes the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge across generations; correspondingly, attaining a specific level of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "The seeking of knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim."¹¹ What is the extent of knowledge that must be acquired? Regarding this obligatory knowledge, al-Munāwī mentioned the statement of al-Qāḍī, "that which one cannot do without learning, such as knowing the Creator, the Prophethood of His Messengers, and how to perform prayer, and similar matters, learning it is an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*)."¹² However, the knowledge seeker does not limit themselves to merely obtaining fundamental knowledge. The Prophet (ﷺ) stated, "Two insatiable types will never attain satisfaction: the seeker of knowledge and the seeker of worldly affairs."¹³ This ḥadīth indicates that individuals with a never-ending thirst for knowledge are perpetually restless with their current acquisitions. They choose to pursue the path of knowledge for the entirety of their lives.

Learning through Questioning

The Islamic knowledge acquisition system is not passive; it actively involves both the seeker and the educator. The significance of posing questions in the quest for knowledge is appreciated. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Knowledge is a treasure, and its key is questioning. So, ask, may Allah have mercy on you, for in it four will be rewarded: the inquirer, the teacher, the listener, and the one who loves them."¹⁴ He also said, "It is not appropriate for the scholar to remain silent about his knowledge, nor is it appropriate for the ignorant to remain quiet about his ignorance."¹⁵ Allah, Glorified and Exalted, said: ﴿فَسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾ – "So ask the people of knowledge if you do not know."¹⁶ Questioning is an essential tool for learning, emphasizing the spiritual and intellectual growth, further strengthening the bonds of knowledge within the community.

Traveling for Learning

In Islam, pursuing knowledge and traveling to acquire wisdom from diverse scholars is admirable. Since the early periods of Islam, intellectual individuals have traveled to remote and distant areas to gain knowledge. A notable instance is narrated by the Companion Jābir ibn 'Abdillāh (ؓ), who traveled a month-long distance to acquire a singular ḥadīth face to face from its transmitter. He said:

A ḥadīth reached me from a man who heard it directly from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. So, I bought a camel, tied my luggage firmly, and traveled for a month until I reached him in al-Shām (Greater Syria). I found that he was 'Abdullāh ibn Unays. I told the doorkeeper: "Tell him, Jābir is at the door." He said, "Ibn 'Abdillāh?" I replied, "Yes." He came out dragging his garment (out of haste), embraced me, and I embraced him.¹⁷

This story describes the early Muslims' effort, eagerness, and sacrifices in pursuing authentic knowledge. It provides an exemplary ideal for contemporary knowledge seekers, suggesting that the quest for learning often necessitates patience, sacrifice, and diligent labor.

Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning involves individuals assuming initiative and accountability for their educational pursuits. Learners are at liberty to choose objectives and determine what constitutes valuable

knowledge. Self-directed learning can occur both within and beyond conventional academic institutions. Teachers should act as facilitators of learning rather than mere transmitters of information.¹⁸ Self-directed learning is a learner-centered methodology that acknowledges individual variations and promotes learner accountability in the educational process. It fosters constructive engagement and facilitates learning from students' experiences and diverse academic resources. Islamic pedagogy promotes an active role for the learner. *Taddabur* (تَدَبُّر) and *Tafakkur* (تَفَكُّر) are two critical Arabic terms related to contemplation, reflection, and deep thought. *Taddabur* is a deeper form of reflection aimed at understanding and extracting wisdom, often in a spiritual or religious context. At the same time, *Tafakkur* refers to intellectual reflection and pondering, which can be applied to various aspects of life. Allah says, “وَسَخَّرَ لَكُم مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا مِنْهُ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ” - He has subjugated for you everything in the sky and the earth on His own. Surely, there are indications for those who ponder.”¹⁹ The Qur’ān invites individuals to reflect and seek knowledge independently, e.g., “Read in the name of your Lord who created.”²⁰ Islamic education encourages learners to take personal responsibility for their learning journey. In another verse, Allah instructed, “وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا” - And say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge.’²¹ This verse reflects the individual’s active role in seeking knowledge. It signifies the personal initiative to request and seek more understanding from Allah.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is a process of education that emphasizes initiatives of cooperation, group discussions, questioning, and debates for problem-solving and fostering intellectual growth. The Qur’ān and ḥadīth underscore the importance of *shūra* (consultation) and collective decision-making, reinforcing that knowledge (*‘ilm*) is not solely an individual pursuit but a communal activity. As stated in the Qur’ān: “وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ” - And consult them in the matter.”²² the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "The believer to the believer is like a building, each part of it supports the other." And he interlaced his fingers.”²³ He said, “Whenever a group of people gather in one of the houses of Allah, reciting the Book of Allah and studying it among themselves, tranquility descends upon them, mercy covers them, the angels surround them, and Allah mentions them to those who are with Him.”²⁴ Therefore, teachers encourage group discussions, teamwork, and cooperative learning, enabling students to learn from one another, exchange ideas, and contribute to each other’s development, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility.

Teaching Theories in Islamic Pedagogy

Teaching is identified by several terms in Islamic pedagogy like *Ta’līm* (تَعْلِيم), *Tadrīs* (تَدْرِيس), *Imlā’* (إِمْلَاء), *Irshād* (إِرْشَاد), *Wa‘z* (وَعْظ), *Nasīḥah* (نَصِيحَة) etc., and the term *Ta’līm* is widely used.

Teaching with Ta’dīb and Tarbiyah

Islamic pedagogy treats the teacher as a source of knowledge and a moral and spiritual guide for students to build their ethical and intellectual basis. Consequently, educators must have the qualities of humility, patience, honesty, integrity, and wisdom. The principle of teaching with *Ta’dīb* (تَأْدِيب) and *Tarbiyah* (تَرْبِيَة) is crucial in Islamic pedagogy. *Ta’dīb* denotes teaching the issues related to *‘Ādāb* (آداب-etiquette). *Tarbiyah* means the comprehensive nurturing of the child, encompassing intellectual, emotional, and moral development. These two concepts together highlight the holistic approach to teaching in Islam. Since teachers are expected to convey knowledge with wisdom and exemplify virtuous character, they must be aware of their character and behavior, acknowledging that their actions profoundly impact their students. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “I was only sent as a teacher.”²⁵ He further said, “I was only sent to perfect good character.”²⁶ Islamic teaching mechanisms involve guiding students to gain knowledge and live a peaceful life according to Islamic principles and values.

Gradualism in Teaching

The Islamic pedagogy prefers the method of gradual teaching, which ensures that learners are not overwhelmed and can absorb the learning at a speed suited to their understanding. The Prophet (ﷺ) was mindful of gradual progress in teaching. He would present the most important matters first, followed by the less important ones. He would teach step by step, little by little, so that it would be easier to comprehend and more firmly retained in the heart, both in terms of memorization and understanding.²⁷ The companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) would recite ten verses from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), and they would not proceed to the next ten until they had learned the knowledge and practice contained in the first ones.²⁸ The gradual implementation of a pedagogical approach in Islamic education is crucial due to its enduring efficacy. Its beneficial function is that it remains persistently integrated into people's lives. Knowledge acquired in a single step is swiftly forgotten.

Interactive Teaching through Dialogue and Questioning

The exchange of questions and answers is an effective pedagogical method that encourages critical thinking and reflection. This technique removes boredom from the listener and helps them retain what they hear, as they see it clearly in front of their eyes, as in the hadith of Jibril when he asked about Islam, Iman (faith), and Ihsan (excellence). In the last part of this hadith, the Prophet (ﷺ) said to Umar: "O Umar, do you know who the questioner is?" I replied, "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said, "This is Jibril who came to teach you your religion."²⁹ One of the benefits of this hadith is that it shows that if someone attends a scholar's gathering and knows that the people present need a question that no one is asking, they should ask the question themselves so that the answer can benefit everyone. It also shows that a scholar should be kind to the questioner, bringing them closer so they can ask without fear or hesitation. Additionally, the questioner should ask respectfully and gently.³⁰ This hadith indicates that Jibril's appearance and his conversation with the Prophet (ﷺ) were for the noble purpose of teaching, which was done in a way that extended over several days.

Integration of Digital Learning Tools

The incorporation of digital learning tools in Islamic education has accelerated in recent years, propelled by technological breakthroughs and evolving student preferences. Online systems like Zoom, Google Classroom, and specialized Islamic education websites have become effective alternatives.³¹ These tools provide many elements that enhance interactive learning, such as video conferencing, discussion boards, and multimedia resources. The application of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR), can enhance the educational experience of students.³² Survey results revealed that 75% of young Muslims favored online learning platforms for accessibility and the opportunity to interact with varied content.³³

Teaching through Visualization and Observation

Observation was considered a significant method for teaching and learning, particularly in contemporary research and instructional strategies. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) instructed his followers to observe him to acquire various religious and social abilities, enabling them to conduct these practices optimally in the future.³⁴ He said, "Pray as you observe me praying."³⁵ Jābir (r) said: "We were sitting with the Prophet (ﷺ), and he drew a line in front of him. He then said, 'This is the path of Allah.' He then drew two lines to the right and two lines to the left, saying, 'These are the paths of Shayṭān.'³⁶ This method of teaching and learning by visualization and observation is vital in contemporary pedagogical approaches, highlighting the significance of directly witnessing and emulating the teacher's actions to understand and implement the teaching.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation methodologies in Islamic pedagogy embody Islamic principles grounded in the spiritual discipline of self-assessment (muḥāsabah). In a spiritual context, muḥāsabah refers to cultivating the ego through internal self-criticism to remove any obstacles hindering its advancement towards purity.³⁷ The objective of muḥāsabah, from a pedagogical

point of view, is to identify the weakness of the learner so that he can improve later. Achieving this quality is significantly reliant on teacher-led muḥāsabah. Teachers and administrators can utilize this idea to devise innovative assessment assignments, class tests, quizzes, model tests, periodical exams, and final exams to promote students' commitment to self-development.

Conclusion

Islam offers a highly potential pedagogical framework for coping with modernity, which is marked by multifarious technological features. Islamic pedagogy's holistic approach, integrating acquired knowledge with divine guidance, makes the educational process more sustainable for building a humanitarian nation. Motivations for learning and the importance of collaborative and self-directed learning are significant as they align with contemporary pedagogical objectives of fostering independent, positive, and critical thinkers who can contribute fruitfully to humanity. When adapted to the contemporary context, the principles of Islamic pedagogy can redress the challenges faced by existing education systems, such as the high reliance on digital tools, the essential need for interactive teaching techniques, and the importance of moral development. By integrating these guidelines with modern technologies and pedagogical concepts, teachers can provide a more comprehensive educational experience that promotes intellectual skills and ethical growth to build a peaceful and sustainable world.

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