

Nature and Domain of Islamic Education

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Abstract: There are three attitudes toward the Islamic education. In the first attitude, the Islamic education is considered as a descriptive system which can be achieved through studying the works of Islamic scholars. In the second attitude, it is an inferential system based on which replies can be provided for all educational problems using the religious texts. In the third attitude, the Islamic education is considered as an inferential-institutional system in which some problems and discussions related to education are extracted from the Islamic texts and some other items are obtained based on empirical methods and religious presuppositions. With a short glance at nature and history of the Islamic education as an academic discipline, this writing tries to survey its research methods and its achievements. (Bagheri, Khosro, 2000)

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1. Introduction

The Islamic education is different from what is customary in the current educational sciences. The cause is that the contemporary educational sciences, being in the domain of empirical sciences, have diverged from the religions and ideologies and have sought for rendering an empirical knowledge. Even in the domain of aims and achievements of education, this independence from religions and ideologies continues because investigation of such affairs is dominantly done in the field of the philosophy of education. (Ashraf, Ali, 1977-1989)

However in our land and also in some Islamic countries, because of influence and dominance of Islam on thought and life of the people, talking of the relation between Islam and education is of great importance. In a way parallel to formation of the educational sciences in the contemporary history, there has also been an attempt to organize the old heritage of Islamic thought and culture, so that a system of educational sciences can be formed based on this great heritage, as a response to the educational needs of the countries. Talking of the Islamic educational more or less implies confronting such a challenge.

With a glance at the nature and history of the Islamic education as an academic discipline, this writing tries to survey its research methods and achievements. (Bagheri, Khosro, 2000)

2. Definition

To define the Islamic education as an academic discipline it can be said that the Islamic education implies a thinking system directly or indirectly originating from the Islamic texts and it

contains knowledge of the phenomena and the existing relations in education domain, their favorite forms and the way of changing them.

Clarification of the definition involves explanation of some basic concepts which are used in the field. First, the Islamic education is considered a «thinking system» because it implies some kind of knowledge: knowledge of what goes on or must go on the practical domain of education. (Rafeyi, Behruz, 1999)

The second and third concepts are «direct and indirect» origination of this knowledge from «the Islamic religious texts». The latter concept, i.e. the Islamic religious texts means the formal Islamic texts including the Quran and religious speeches (Hadis). It is worth mentioning that the practical living way of religious leaders has generally been mentioned among the religious speeches and texts.

But what is meant by «direct and indirect»? This concept can be assumed with two meanings. In the first meaning, «direct» implies that some issues are extracted from the Quran and Hadis and «indirect» refers to the issues existing in the Islamic culture and Muslim scholars' works and they are described «indirect» because they are more or less inspired by the formal Islamic texts. (Javadi Amoli, Abdollah, 1993)

The second meaning of the word «direct» is based on a religious presupposition and refers to the fact that the Islamic religious texts contain replies to all questions. This kind of comprehensive study of religion is expressed with different degrees of strength. So you can talk of the two strong and weak forms in this kind of study of religion. In the strong form, the comprehensive study of religion implies that replies to all general and specific questions related to different

fields including education exist in the religious texts and if some details of affairs have not been mentioned in the Islamic texts, there are principles which can be used as a basis for bifurcation. Bifurcation means an attempt to go from the principles or general rules to the details in a way that those principles can cover the specific affairs. Conversely, it can be said that it involves putting the specific affairs under the coverage of one or a few principles.

In the weak form of comprehensive study of religion, an «option zone» is assumed in which the jurisconsult can determine the commandment for some affairs. The «option zone» is related to the allowable affairs. In other words, the behaviors and cases existing in this zone are covered by canon commandments because they are considered religiously allowable, however the jurisconsult, with the permission which he has from the god and with regard to the interests of the society, can make these allowable affairs necessitous or unlawful when necessary. Regarding this point, the option zone is both under the commandment of both the canon and the jurisconsult. (Sadr, Mohammad-Bagher, 1979)

The word «indirect» is based on a different religious presupposition and shows that the Islamic religious texts is not responsible for answering all the questions but in a selective way they cover the problems related to different fields. In other words, in some fields the general and subsidiary problems have been noted and replied but in others just the general and essential problems have been noted. In some fields, there have been just some references and some fields have not been referred to.

Regarding the points, the meaning of «indirect» refers to the fact that the knowledge of Islamic education is a result of expansion of general discussions mentioned in the religious texts. One kind of these expansion cases can be paving the way for empirical researches in the field of education based on the general and essential teachings of Islam on human.

The fourth concept is the phenomena and existing relations in the practical domain of education. This concept includes the collection of phenomena and the relations among them in the domain of education. For example, teacher and student are two phenomena in the domain and one of the relations between them is teaching. Obviously the defective forms of the affairs are also covered implicationally by this concept.

The fifth concept is «the favorite forms» of the phenomena and the relations. This concept includes the aims and norms toward which the phenomena and relations should move.

The sixth and last concept is «the way of changing» the phenomena and relations and giving them a favorite form. This concept includes the principles and methods of education. In other words the way of changing

includes the rules of general procedures (principles) and details (method) for changing.

3. Three Attitudes toward the Islamic education

Based on what was mentioned before, we can say that the Islamic education as a thinking system in the practical domain of education can have at least three attitudes which do not necessarily come together:

1. The Islamic education as a descriptive system: In this case the Islamic education is achieved by studying the works of the Islamic scientists. As these works have generally organized and written by the authors themselves, the aim can be achieved through a more or less simple description of the works and sometimes through subsidiary analysis and classification.

2. The Islamic education as an inferential system: in this view, replies can be found for all educational problems in the Islamic religious texts. Some kind of comprehensive study of religion is a presupposition for this attitude. Accordingly, regarding the educational problems, replies can be found indirectly from the Islamic texts. In the strong form of this attitude, it is assumed that replies to all small and big problems of education exist in the Islamic texts and they should be achieved through surveying the texts and if some replies do not exist directly, they can be found through defining the point that to which principle the problem or the behavior belongs. In the weak form of the attitude, some cases which at the first step are reckoned religiously allowable, may receive a commandment by the jurisconsultant as being necessitous or forbidden.

3. The Islamic education as an inferential-constitutional system: In this view, because some problems and discussions related to the education have mentioned the Islamic texts, the extraction and inference of these issues represent the inferential aspect of the attitude however some issues have not been paid attention in the Islamic texts and their replies can not be found through bifurcation because these issues are of explorative kind. In other words, it includes clarification of an external entity not expression of a jurisconsultant's commandment on a certain case or behavior. For example these problems can be considered: What mechanism do learning and learning defects occur with? Replying such questions requires establishment of knowledge on the phenomena. Here we confront an empirical science but presuppositions of this empirical science can be obtained from the Islamic texts. These presuppositions including the characteristics of the subject (human) and the studying method are among those inferential issues. However, reliance on these presuppositions and suggesting hypotheses and testing them and achieving the new findings relate to the constitutional aspect of the attitude.

4. History

Some courses and steps have been mentioned for the Islamic education including the following classification: The first course covers the first half of the first Hejri century and was accompanied by emergence and development of literacy in the form of reading and writing the Quran sentences. The second course which consists of two sections (50-350 and 351-600) includes the familiarity with sciences and technics of other nations. The third course which lasted from the 7th century (Attack of Mongols) to the 13th century was a recession period for the Islamic education. The fourth course covering the 13th and 14th centuries includes contact of the Islamic education with increasing changes of new education.

This classification refers more to the practical procedure of the Islamic education than to the Islamic education as a branch of knowledge. The history of the Islamic education in this meaning can be date back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries, regarding the works like «rites of the learners» by Mohammad Ebn Sahnun (Death in 256). Afterwards, the opinions of scholars in the field of ethics, philosophy and theosophy like Farabi, Ebn Maskuyeh, Avicenna, Ghazzali and Mowlavi Rumi can be considered as chains of the Islamic thought in the field of education. (Sharifi, Hadi, 1977)

But if you consider the Islamic education as a distinct academic discipline, its history will be reckoned contemporary. Since about half a century ago, some Muslim thinkers like Mohammad Ghotb have started writing in the field of the Islamic education. But a turning point was the establishment of a global congress of the Islamic countries including Iran in Mecca in 1997. In this congress, about 330 Muslim scientists took part and studied the hard situation of education in the Islamic countries and the necessity for compiling the Islamic thoughts on the education. Since then four other congresses have been established and they have paid attention to more practical and more technical issues of education. The second congress was in Islamabad, Pakistan, in 1980 titled «Teacher education» and the fifth one was in Rabita, Morocco, for evaluating the previous congresses.

In Iran after the Islamic revolution, the Islamic education was formally established as an academic discipline at the Teacher Training University at MA level in 1990.

5. Research Methods

Based on the nature or the identity of the Islamic education, the research methods will be different. Parallel to the mentioned attitudes toward the Islamic education, there are different research methods in this field.

If you assume the first attitude, i. e. the Islamic education as a descriptive system, the appropriate

research method will be the method of description and content analysis. Accordingly, the researcher seeks for rendering a description of education through studying their written works. When such works have been organized well, a simple description will be suitable. Otherwise it is necessary to analyze the content of different works of a scholar and classify them based on the issues and discussions of education in an attempt to describe his viewpoint in this field.

Regarding the second attitude, i.e. the Islamic education as an inferential system, the research method will be juridical and expository inference, which has long been used by the jurisconsultants and expositors. In this method using some rules and measures, scholars' try to reach commandments based on the religious texts and make decisions for different situations. For example «appearance rationality» is a rule implying that the appearance of the discourse mentioned in the religious text own validity and the meaning which is achieved based on the appearance is notable (however it is not always the word appearance but it may be the specific kinds of appearance like a customary one). Such rules provide the possibility for inferring the canon commandments or understanding the religious texts. (Kuhn, Thomas, 1970)

Using this method as the research method in the Islamic education means that the researchers, in order to find the answers to the educational questions with the aid of the mentioned principles and rules, will study the religious texts. However in the two forms of this attitude there will be some differences in the method. In the first form, the answer or the issue itself is sought for in the religious texts and when necessary, the researcher tries to relate the subsidiary aspects to the general principles and then determine the commandment. In the second form, he involves in the social facts of the time in determining the commandment.

Finally, regarding the third attitude, i.e. the Islamic education as an inferential-constitutional system, the research method will have two dimensions. In the first dimension, the expository and inferential method is used for understanding the religious texts and extracting issues as presuppositions of the empirical research (as well as the issues extracted from the religious texts in the field of education system contents like the aims or principles). In the second dimension, it is necessary to use the methods of empirical research for establishing and providing new sciences in the field of education. Achievement to hypotheses inspired by the mentioned presuppositions about the educational phenomena will not be possible without following the external evidences. The empirical method has been used in the broad sense of the word, i.e. surveying the external evidences for or against the hypothesis. So what has been mentioned as a opposition between the

qualitative and quantitative methods can not represent here because both kinds are subsections of the empirical method in a broad sense.(Ezzati, Abolfazl,1977)

6. Relationship with other educational sciences

The kind of relationship of the Islamic education with other educational sciences depends on which attitude we are considering from among the three mentioned ones.

If the first attitude, i.e. the Islamic education as a descriptive system is assumed, its place will be in the history and philosophy of education field. In other words, studying the Muslim thinkers' works gives the Islamic education discipline historic and philosophic color, so it must be in line with other historical and philosophical views.

When the second attitude, i.e. the Islamic education as an inferential system is assumed, its relation with other educational disciplines is of kind of independence and peculiarity. In other words, in this view the Islamic education does not need the contemporary educational sciences because the answer to every question can be found in the religious texts and in addition there is no doubt on the correctness of the answers but what is achieved in the educational sciences can be false. Peculiarity originates from this point: the speech whose truth is definite will be different from the speech whose being false is always possible.

This kind of relation is observed in the first form of this attitude but in the second form, i.e. belief in the option zone, a relation of the kind of complementary can exist. In other words, those cases which are in the option zone and in the first step are considered allowable, after the jurisconsultant gets information on the achievements of the educational sciences, may receive the commandment of necessitous or unlawful. As the achievements of the educational sciences help the jurisconsultant in specification of the appropriate aspects, there is a complementary relationship here.

Finally, in the third attitude, i.e. the education as an inferential-constitutional system, the relation will be a paradigmatic competition relation. When the Islamic education, with emphasis on the presuppositions achieved from the Islamic texts, goes toward the empirical research, its relation with the contemporary educational sciences will be like the relation between two scientific theories which exist in two different domains. According to Thomas Kuhn, there is an essential competition between the two theories related to two scientific paradigms in such a way that the experiences of a paradigm when are located in another paradigm, will need a different exposition appropriate to the new paradigm. So in this attitude the Islamic education will hold such a relation with the educational sciences. In other words, the findings and experiences

in other educational disciplines in the framework of the Islamic paradigm should be interpreted with regard to its specific concepts. This relation will create a dynamic competition between the Islamic education and the educational sciences which will result in the development in the Islamic education.(Mesbah, Mohammad-Taghi,1968)

Just another point should be referred to and it is that incommensurability of the scientific paradigms according to Kuhn needs a review. This review is necessary because the incommensurability relation leaves no place for the overlap of scientific theories. This kind of relation puts the scientific attempt under the threat of relativism because every paradigm does a meaningful and valid activity just in its own framework and this prohibits dialogue between different theories of the scientific paradigms. Kuhn considers the benefit of these theories in solving the problems as a measure to select or reject them. However regarding the internal frameworks of the scientific paradigms he does not believe in a relation and overlap between them. The necessary review in this review is that the possibility of overlap will not be rejected rather this possibility should be reckoned that some things in common and overlaps in the methodology domain may emerge with the findings.

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