

The Curricula of Education in the Islamic legacy

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Abstract

This article deals with the curricula of Islamic education in the Abbasid period in its different periods. These curricula adopted an educational philosophy that aims to achieve the higher goals of Islam (Maqasid al-Islam) that focuses on the status of the human being and his role in building and development the Earth. These curricula have worked on internalization of the student's moral side during the foundation stage and teaching him different sciences in the advanced educational stages. This means connecting science with morals, where science is in harmony with the human goals and not contradictory to or isolated from them. Their goal is to prepare the pupil to be a moral and rational human being. These curricula employ different methods that suit the stage of education. The methods of teaching at the elementary school aimed to strengthen the pupil's "memory" and developing his thinking through gaining him the methods of question, dialogue and debate.

Key Words: Curricula, Education, Islam, Teaching, Islamic School.

• Introduction

This article deals with the curricula of Islamic education in the Abbasid period through its different stages in that period, and analyzes these curricula depending on criticism and comparison between various attitudes regarding this issue. Besides, the article attempts to reveal and clarify the philosophy of education that stand behind these curricula.

The role of Islamic education is to actualize the Islamic philosophy through the programs that are taught in the different teaching systems, "it aspires to construct the human being toward achievement of the human values,

the role of education to link between reality and values, it means reconciliation between theory and practice, saying or word and doing."¹

This philosophy aspires to achieve the highest degree of happiness in man's life and afterlife. This happiness is fulfilled as long as the human being fulfils his role that God assigned to him, which is the building and developing of the Earth materially and morally. This means rehabilitation the human being scientifically and morally so that he will be able to do his job as a successor to God on his Earth. "The more overarching concept of tarbiyah refers to moral education, from a root word related to accumulation. Acquiring knowledge, ethics, and a moral worldview is a foundation for achieving what the Qur'an requires of every human being — to enjoin what is good, and prevent what is evil."²

This connection between God and Man or Life and Afterlife is a fundamental component in Islamic philosophy. Hence, the education system serves this philosophy, and these curricula are concerned with moral education and sciences that contribute to the happiness of the human being in his life, which is represented in the mental, natural and law sciences and other things. The role of the *elementary education* was to educate the child and bring him up on good virtues and moral values through the Holy Koran and the Prophetic Sunna, which are the moral principle on which other sciences are based and which is the moral authority of science, which means the constant connection between morals and science.

¹ Sobhi Rayan, "Islamic Philosophy of Education", International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 19 [Special Issue – October 2012], p. 155.

² Susan L. Douglass, Munir A. Shaikh, "Defining Islamic Education: Differentiation and Applications", Comparative Education, v7 n1 p5-18 Dec 2004, p.15.

In terms of Sharia, this philosophy was known in Islam by the name of Maqasid al-Sharia (Goals of the Islamic Law), which include: Preservation of religion), preservation of the soul (nafs), preservation the intellect ('aql), preservation the lineage/ progeny (nasl), and preservation of the property (mal). "Their system of theosophy, which unfolded from the Quranic revelation, combined all of these together in a world view that guided them in all their cultural and intellectual activities."³

Achievement of these goals requires a constant development of the moral, legal, intellectual, hygienic, social, political and economic curricula. The preservation of these goals is subject to the progress of sciences through which the Maqasid are achieved. In other words, negligence of these sciences means negligence of Maqasid al-Shari'a.

Consequently, the Moslems were careful to preserve the appropriate education in order to preserve the Maqasid through the different educational institutes: al-Kuttab, the Mosques, the Schools, Houses of Learning Knowledge, and Dur al-Hikma (Houses of Wisdom). Each of these institutes had a clear role that reflects this philosophy and works on achieving its goals.

- **The Curricula of the Educational Institutes**

- a. **Education in the Elementary Stage**

The Moslems' interest in education started in the period of the Prophecy and al-Khulapha al-Rashidun (The Rightly-Guided Caliphs), when the idea of establishing al-Katatib started to crystalize and spread later in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. The Elementary Period is the period of early elementary

³Charles Michael Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1990, p. 68

teaching, upbringing and discipline. It includes teaching the Holy Koran, reading, writing and calligraphy, the basics of grammar (Nahw), poetry, mathematics, shooting sports and swimming. These curricula combine morals and intellect and aims to build the human being morally and intellectually.

We notice that the education curricula in al-Kuttab focused on learning the Holy Koran and the Arabic language. The Moslems connected between learning Arabic and the development of thought and good virtues. Caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab said: "Learn Arabic because develops the intellect and increases the sense of honour."⁴

Ibn Taymiyya pointed out the importance of Arabic and its educational influence. "I know that being accustomed to the language affects the intellect, morals, and religion in a strongly clear way; it also affects in one's resemblance to the period of Sadr al-Islam of the Sahaba (Companions and followers of the Prophet); their resemblance increases one's intellect, religion and morals"⁵. This relationship also appears between the language and morals through the literary and poetic texts that call to moral virtues. "Anyone who carefully examines the Arabic language and its branches finds out that it is a deep vehicle of moral education and abandonment of behavioral vices, and caring to it means caring to morals and behavior; taking care of it means taking care of moral education because it has a great effective impact in spreading moral

⁴Ibn al-Jawzi, Abd al-Rahman binAli bin Muhammad bin Ali, *Manaqib Amir al-Mu'minin Omar bin al-Khattab*. Edited by Hili Muhammad Ismael. Beirut. Dar Ibn Khaldoun, 1996, p. 192.

⁵ Ibn Taymiya , *Iqtidha' al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*. Nasser bin Abd al-Karim al-'Aqel. Riyadh. Maktabat al-Rushd. Vol. 1. 1996, p. 469.

virtues, which can be clarified at the global branching rather than particular branching⁶".

These curricula consist of the Koran, Arabic and philosophy of Islamic teachings that seek to prepare the moral and rational intellectual person. Therefore, these curricula constitute the essence of the elementary education, which is the stage of foundation and formation of the intellect and the moral character of the person.

These curricula made learning 'morals' through religious sciences precede learning mental sciences and this means the 'formation' of the mind 'morally' as the Koran is considered a source of moral values and the significance of the language lies in understanding the Koran and expanding of the intellectual perception in mental sciences. The language is the vehicle of thought and the more expansive it is the more expansive the thoughts are.

Ibn Arabi describes the educational curricula in his time in the elementary and intermediate periods, when he started studying the Holy Koran and learning it by heart. When he completed it, his father appointed three teachers to teach him: the first to teach him the 'readings' of the Koran, the second to teach him Arabic and the third to teach him arithmetic or 'number' and their connection to astronomy. Ibn Arabi mentions that he was not sixteen years old when he was perfect at ten letters of the Holy Koran and what is connected to its Tajweed/elocution, which includes the rules that govern the pronunciation during recitation of the Koran. Besides, by that age, he managed to acquire a good deal of Arabic and a lot of arithmetic issues and religious duties in addition to Euclid's book and some astronomy.

⁶ Al-Hazimi, *Al-Athar al-Tarbawiya li Dirasat al-Lugha al-'Arabiya*. Al-Madina al-Munawara. Al-Kami'a al-Islamiya, 2003, p. 504.

Those teachers were coming successively to teach him from the morning prayer till the afternoon anything, each one what he is specialized in ⁷.

Ibn Arabi's career represents a model for the teaching curricula in its elementary and intermediate stages, which do not separate the moral issue from science and knowledge. Moral values are the root from which other sciences and fields of knowledge branch, and it is possible to say that the educational process succeeded in integrating mortals with science.

Education in the elementary stage aims to educate the child on good virtues. "When the child's limbs become strong, and his tongue becomes able to talk clearly, and his mind becomes ready to be dictated and his hearing becomes aware of the sounds, he can start learning the Koran; the Alphabet can be drawn to him, and the landmarks of religion can dictate him; the child has to be able to tell Rajaz poetry, and then the Qassida (poem) because telling the Rajaz is easier and its learning by heart is more possible because the lines are shorter and their rhythm is lighter and, above all; it starts with what has been said in poetry about the advantage of literature and praise of science, and dispraise of ignorance, and the shame of silliness, and what has been said about dutifulness and honor to the parents, doing favor, hospitality, and other things of honorable morals"⁸.

The Elementary Stage starts at an early age; "if the child is weaned, his disciplined and his morals should be tamed"because learning good morals ⁹ at an early age and accustoming the child to good behavior leads him to utmost degree of happiness. "He who accustoms his son to good manners and good

⁷ Issa, Muhammad Abd al-Hamid, *Tarikh al-Ta'lim fi al-Andalus*. Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1982, p. 450.

⁸ Ibn Sina, *al-Siyasa*. Al-Maktaba al-Shamila, vol.1, 2010, p. 102.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101

deeds and kind behavior at an early age, will win virtue and get love, honor and achieve happiness."¹⁰

Education included all classes of society and it was not limited to the rich people, but included the poor and the needy; "the orphans had a (traditional Islamic) school in the town which has a large charity (waqf) from which the teacher would take something to them so that they could dress, which is one of the prides of people in these towns."¹¹

Al-Ghazali emphasized the approach that was adopted in the Kuttab, "I know that what I have mentioned regarding Faith should be given to the child at the beginning of his growth so that he will be able to remember it well as its meaning starts to reveal itself in his adulthood step by step; so, start with him with 'memorizing then understanding and then thinking and believing and finally ascertainment; that is what happens to the child without proof ; God's favor onto the man's heart is that His explanation at the beginning of his belief does not need a proof or evidence" ¹².

It is clear here that the application of the educational curriculum in the Elementary Stage depends on learning by heart and reception, rather than by understanding and intellectual proof. Despite al-Ghazali's realization of the weakness of this method, he insists that it is true, "Yes, the belief that takes place as a result of imitation is not free of some kind of weakness in the beginning, which means that it can be removed by its opposite if, and if it is given to him, it should be strengthened and established in the soul of the child

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*. Beirut: Dar Beirut li al-Tiba'a wa al-Nashr, 2010, p. 245.

¹² Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*. Beirut: Dar al-Fiker, Vol., 1986, 1, p. 94.

and the common man in order that it becomes established and does not collapse¹³ .

Al-Ghazali believes that the way to understanding does not depend in this stage on intellectual and logical evidence but on transmission (naqliya) from the Koran and Prophetic Sunna. "The way to strengthen and confirm it is not in teaching the child the skill of argument or debate (kalam), but in recitation of the Koran, reading the Hadith (Tradition) and its meanings; he should engage himself in the jobs of worshipping; his belief gradually settles more with the evidence that he hears from the Koran and its proofs and the clues that he receives from the witnesses Hadith and their advantages, and the lights of faiths and their functions that shine on him, and what comes to his mind from his observations of the pious people and sitting with them"¹⁴

We notice that the education curricula during the stage of Kuttab schools was uniformed from the point of view of their goals, which are: the moral foundation of the learner and preparation for the reception of theoretical and experimental intellectual sciences.

This approach gathered the Moslem scholars despite the differences in their scientific specializations and their epistemological and ideological principles, which appears in the arguments of philosopher physician Ibn Sina's and the Sufi jurisprudent, Ghazali.

Both of them support the dedication of the Elementary Stage to the education of children on moral values. This is an approach that aims to create a homogenous society in its values, but this homogeneity does not nullify the cultural and epistemological multiplicity within society, and the existence of

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

common values might create a moral space that allows, and even encourages acceptance of the other different one.

On the other hand, Abu Bakr al-'Arabi criticizes the curricula of education in Andalus saying: " Judge Abu Bakr Ibn al-Arabi adopted in the book of his journey a strange way in regarding the direction of education, and reversed the order, preceding Arabic and poetry to all sciences, following in that the approach of the people of Andalus. He said: "Because poetry is Diwan of the Arabs, he calls for giving it precedence, and giving precedence to Arabic in teaching as a necessity is a corruption to the language; then he moves to arithmetic and trains himself till understands the rules, then he moves to studying the Koran, which becomes possible to him with that introduction", then he says: "it is a great ignorance of the people of our country that the child should take the Book of God at the beginning of his life; he reads something that he does not understand, and focuses onto something that is less important than something that concerns him more." He added that "then he would look into the principles of religion and principles of jurisprudence and then polemics and then Hadith and its sciences". However, he warned against mixing two subjects in education, unless the learner is able to do that according to his quality of understanding and activity."¹⁵

Ibn Arabi's criticism of the adopted curricula and the methods of their teaching in that period stems from his belief in the importance of understanding and its precedence to memorization and learning by heart. He sees that ordering the curricula in a gradual way should be proportionate with the intellectual abilities of the learner. Besides, his precedence of Arabic to the Koran and other sciences indicates his awareness of the relationship between the language and developing the child's thinking and understanding. By that, he seeks to

¹⁵ Ibid.

develop the intellectual abilities in the child to understand sciences and absorbing them, because there is no value for memorization without understanding. It is noticed that Ibn Arabi does not see any value for memorization and learning by heart even among the major scholars; "I have not seen an imam who knows the Koran by heart, or a jurisprudent who knows it by heart except two people, and this is to show that the important thing is to know its essence not its letters, which is against God's commandment.¹⁶

It is clear that Ibn Arabi's objection was not directed at the education curricula themselves but he suggested preceding certain subjects and delaying others in harmony with the intellectual development of the learner. He believes in the importance of the prevailing curricula and their educational role in establishing the common moral values of the Islamic nation, but he criticizes the methods of memorization, learning by heart and dictation of the curricula.

Ibn Khaldoun agrees with Ibn Arabi and says, "This is what al-Qadhi (judge) pointed out, Aby Bakr, God rest his soul, and this is a good approach, I swear, but the traditions do not help in applying them and they control the conditions, and he directed what the traditions were specialized in including: preceding the study of the Koran, in preference of God's blessings or rewards, and for fear of the crazy diseases of keeping away of the youth from learning it, and consequently, the child will lose the Koran lessons, and as long as he is in quarantine, he will be subject to the ruling law... but if certainty and belief in continuing his search of education and acceptance of learning take place, the approach that al-Qadhi mentioned will be the best that the people of Mashreq and Maghreb adopted. But God, praise His name, rules what he wants, and no

¹⁶ Ibn al-'Arabi, *Ahkam al-Quran*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutuib al-'Ilmiya, vol. 4, 2003, p. 349

one can prevent His decision."¹⁷ Despite Ibn Khaldoun's acceptance to Ibn Arabi's opinion, he accounts for the employment of the prevailing curricula and attributes that to the adopted and followed traditions that support the method of memorization and learning by heart out of fear that the child is likely to neglect these curricula, especially the Holy Koran, when he grows up.

Haji Khalifa's attitude was clear and decisive through his distinction between memorization and scientific aptitude, "memorization is different from scientific aptitude, and he whose interest is in learning by heart more than his interest in achievement by aptitude, does not reach any achievement through his free treatment in science. Therefore, you see that the one who achieves something by memorization and by heart, does not do anything artistically, and his faculty is limited to his knowledge in his science when he negotiates or debates. He who thinks that the intended thing by the word "faculty" is only the "scientific faculty" must be mistaken. What is meant is the faculty of inference, deduction, and the fastness of movement from the indicating to the indicated things and from the *lazim* (concomitant) to the *malzoom* (the accompanied) and vice versa. If he combines the faculty of recalling to it... that would be a praised thing. Then he said): al-Razi transmitted from the sages: memorizing and understanding do not go together in perfection, because understanding needs more wetness in the brain, and memorization invites more dryness, and joining between them equally is habitually impossible."¹⁸ al-Zarnouji also prefers 'comprehension' to 'memorization'; "it was said that

¹⁷ Ibn Khaldoun, *Al-Muqadima*. Beirut: Dar al-Qalam. 1981, p. 540.

¹⁸ Al-Zarnouji, Burhan al-Islam, Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tariq al-Ta'lim. Edited by Marwan Qabbani. Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1981, p. 102.

memorizing two letters is better than hearing two deafening sounds, and understanding two letters is better than memorizing two lines."¹⁹

It is noticed that there are two different schools: the prevailing and dominating school, which adopts the method of memorization and dictation, claiming that this method strengthens one's memory and the childhood period is the most appropriate to preserve the elementary method, which is considered to be the foundation on which all the other branches of knowledge are based in later stages. "I know that teaching children the Koran, the slogan of religion, was taken by Ahl al-Milla (the followers of the Islamic religion) and applied it in all their lands because belief in it and its faith through the verses of the Koran and some traditions of Hadith precede other things to settle in the hearts.

Thus, the Koran became the origin of education on which the faculties are established. The reason for that is that teaching at zero stage settles more strongly, and it is the root and basis for what comes later because the preceding to the heart becomes a foundation for the faculties. The condition of what is built later becomes like the foundation and its styles.

Their methods of teaching Koran to children differed according to their differences according to their considerations of the faculties that grow from education.²⁰

The critical school of the prevailing methods of teaching depends on the idea that 'understanding' contributes to the development of the learner's skills of thinking and acquisition of thinking strategies that help him to gain knowledge through depending on independent thinking. The appearance of this

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibn Kahldoun, p. 538.

school indicates the development of educational thought regarding the reformation of the pedagogical process and raising it to higher levels.

It is possible to say that the Kuttab is the stage of moral education and elementary teaching, which aim to formulate the child's mind morally, first, and, secondly, to prepare him for reception and acquisition of sciences and scientific knowledge. Therefore, the interest was directed in this stage to empower the pupil and build him on stable foundations that represent basic principles for following sciences and future life experiences. These principles were based originally on religious teachings as sources of morals, mental sciences, and physical education.

b. The Mosque as an Institute of Education and Teaching

Since the period of the Prophet, the Mosque performed different religious and secular functions. "The mosques are places for imams and councils for the Umma (nation); the Prophet, God's blessings and peace be upon him, established his blessed mosque upon piety; in it there are prayers, reading the Koran, teaching sciences, speeches, politics, granting banners and brigades, appointing emirs, appointing corporals to the soldiers; and there, the Moslems meet with him to discuss issues of their religion and their life."²¹

The Science Councils/ Majalis al-'Ilm were varied in the Mosque and included the Holy Koran, interpretation, Hadith, jurisprudence, biographies, news, literature, poetry and Kalam (polemics). This period is considered a continuation of the period of Kuttab and the difference between them is in the level of teaching and age of the learner.

²¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmou'at al-Fatawa*. Al-Maktaba al-Shamila, 1995, Vol. 5, p. 118.:
On: <http://shamela.ws/browse.php/book-9690#page-2027>

"The circles of learning / Halaqat al-Ilm that have most learners were the circles of Muatakallimun/ Polemicists/ Speakers and jurists. Because of their numerous debates, the learners repeatedly visited them for watching and for learning. With regard to the jurists, knowledge of jurisprudence was a means to reach the positions of *hisba* (supervision of the market), police, law, and sometimes, *wilaya* (governorate), the learners were holding pens and paper for writing and in front of them there were inkstands; and they were coming to some circles in hundreds." ²²

Teaching and learning at Mosques embodies the Islamic philosophy that integrates between the spiritual moral aspects and secular aspects of daily life. Administrative and judicial positions that the graduates of the circles of the mosque occupied were actually general public positions (al-Masadq) that represent the connection or positions of connection (wasl) between the theoretical and the practical. Jurisprudence, for example, as an Islamic rule that is applied in real practical life was not separate from its moral dimension, but it was a fulfilment of its moral representation and is connected to it.

The religious text, specifically the Koranic text, represent the fixed moral example to which the human intellectual efforts (ijtihadat) seek to rise, through making effort to apply it in real life as much as they can.

The Mosques at that time were similar to free universities; the students used to come to anyone they liked to hear without any condition; some of them learned jurisprudence or Kalam (debate/ polemics) or Prophet's traditions (Hadith) or interpretation or language of grammar of poetry; many of them were taking something from a certain Sheikh and then move to another sheikh

²² Dhef, Shawqi, *Tarikh al-'Adab al-'Arabi fi al-'Assr al-'Abbasi al-'Thani*. 2nd edition. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'aref, 1973, p. 118.

and another circle. It seems that the scholars of grammar and language were receiving their wages from their pupils according to their qualifications." ²³

There were various circles of learning in the large mosques such as al-Masjid al-Nabawi and Masjid al-Basra and others. Abu Hanifa's Majlis (Council) in Basra Mosque was known of teaching jurisprudence, kalam (polemics), and debate (munazara). "Abu Hanifa's method in his teaching session was similar to a study rather than a presentation of a lecture to his pupils. A student would come to him with a certain question, and he would present it to the circle and debate with them on its ruling; each one would give his opinion and they might oppose him in his measurements - as it was transmitted from Imam Muhammad- and might oppose him in his ijtihad/ personal opinion and might argue with him loudly; after they think about it from all its sides, he would express his opinion that this discussion would produce, which would be the best; the others would accept his opinion and agree with him. The discussion in this way is education to the teacher and the pupil together."²⁴

We can conclude from this that teaching/ learning in mosques went beyond the method of memorization and dictation into the method of dialogue and debate, which are based on two fundamental pillars: claim and objection. The speaker and the listener make effort to prove his opinion or his statement or argument with evidence, and mental proofs. "Originally the term munazara was synonymous with such terms as munaqasha (argument), munazaa

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Abu Zahra, *Abu Hanifa- Hayatuhu wa Assroho wa Ara'u'oho al-Fiqhiyya*. Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1947, p. 87.

(struggle), and muhawara (dialogue). But with the development of dialectic it came to be used scholastically in the sense of disputation."²⁵

There is no doubt that dialogue is one of the highest methods and most beneficial in the teaching process because it opens its horizons and enriches its possibilities, in addition to the freedom of expression of one's opinion and growth of critical and creative thinking that are based on the method of question and objection. The Moslems realized the importance of the style of 'dialogue' in education and its advantage over other styles. Al-Zarnouji says: the learning-seeker must practice deliberation, debate, and dialogue. Deliberation, debate and dialogue are kinds of consultation, and consultation is conducted in order to infer the correct thing. The benefit of debate and dialogue is stronger from the benefit of repetition. A dialogue of an hour is better than repetition of a month, if it is done with a fair person with a sound temper²⁶.

Ibn Khaldoun attributes bad teaching in al-Maghreb to the teaching methods that rely on memorization, dictation and unemployment of the methods of debate and dialogue. He connects between the methods of teaching and development of sciences and attributes the underdevelopment of sciences to the method of memorization and ignorance of the method of dialogue and discussion. "Fez and the rest of the cities of al-Maghreb remained void of the sense of science since the extinction of learning in Qordoba and Qayrawan.

²⁵George Makdisi, *The rise of colleges: institutions of learning in Islam and the West*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981, p. 110.

²⁶ Al-Zarnouji, Burhan al-Islam, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tariq al-Ta'lim*, 1981, p. 103.

The bridge of education between them was not connected, and therefore, it was impossible for them to get the faculty/ability and skill in sciences. The shortest ways of this faculty is untying the tongue by dialogue and debate on scientific issues, and this makes it close and helps it to achieve its goal. We find the science-seeker among them, after he has spent many years of his life sitting in the learning councils, silent and does not negotiate and his interest is in memorization more than necessary, and as a result, he gains nothing of his learning and science, and when someone achieves what he achieves, you notice that his faculty/ ability is incapable and lacks knowledge if he negotiates or debates or teaches. His incapability is caused by the 'bad method of his teaching' and absence of his supporter.

Maybe their memorization is better than the memorization of others and their belief that memorization **is** the scientific faculty (talent), but it is not so. What confirms this in Maghreb is that the specific period of the pupils at school is sixteen years and in Tunisia it is five years".²⁷

This criticism of methods of teaching is a qualitative feat in the educational critical theory. Awareness of the problematics of education prepares the way for finding the suitable solutions and is a necessary condition for reformation of teaching and developing of sciences. Ibn Khaldoun is not satisfied with definition of the problem but introduces solutions to develop education that depend on dialogue and critical thinking.

As it is seen, the role of the Mosque in education and teaching was central in spreading science and education, and its role was not limited to the worshipping aspects only, but it was an educational and teaching center that integrated the religious with the secular issues, and thus, it was a place for

²⁷ Ibn Khaldoun, *Al-Muqadima*, 1981, p. 432

worshipping and science. "The mosque-related and madrassah systems ignored the subject matter of the foreign sciences out of hand, while adopting their intellectual methodologies of logic and dialectic."²⁸

c. Spread of Schools and Institutionalization of Education

After the development of sciences and expansion of knowledge, teaching moved from mosques to schools, which spread in various Islamic cities such as: Al-Madrassa al-Bayhaqiya in Nisabour, which was named after al-Bayhaqi (d. 450 h.), the Sa'diya School, which was built by Nasr ibn Sabaktakin, a third school in Naisabour, which was built by Abu Sa'd Ismael bin Ali bin al-Muthni al-Istrabadhi, the Sufi preacher, and a fourth school in Naisabour also, which was built by Ishaq al-Isfarayini (d.418 h.)²⁹.

Ibn Jubayr mentioned in his book *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr* that he counted about thirty schools in Baghdad³⁰, about twenty in Damascus, which was at that time under the rule of Saladdin al-Ayubi³¹ and counted in Musul six or more schools, one of which was in Hums.³² "The course of study consisted of four undergraduate years, after the basic literary studies of the elementary-secondary schools, specializing in the religious law, and ten or more graduate years, leading to a licence to teach."³³

²⁸ Charles Michael Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1990, p. 121.

²⁹ Al-Sabki, Taj al-Din, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iya al-Kubra, al-Tabaqa al-Rabi'a*, 2nd edition. Hajar li al-Tiba'a wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1992, p. 314.

³⁰ Ibn Jubayr 2010, p. 205.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

³³ George Makdisi, "Baghdad, Bologna, and Scholasticism", in *Centres of Learning*, ed, Jan Williem Drijvers and A.A. MacDONALD, 1995, p. 144.

The Islamic schools emerged in their organized form in the second half of the fifth century and spread from al-Mashreq to al-Maghreb and fulfilled their message in developing and flourishing of education in the Islamic world. Besides, they had their obvious role in activating literatures and sciences and contributed sincerely to the unification of the Islamic thought and preservation of the cultural heritage and introduced great services to the human culture.

The Nizamiyya Schools, which were built by the Seljuk Vizir, Nizam al-Mulk (d.485 h/1092 AD), became famous in the 11th century. These schools adopted teaching curricula that included the Koran, al-Sira al-Nabawiyya / the Prophetic Biography, the Shafi'i Jurisprudence, Principles of Jurisprudence, and Arabic language and its literatures.

The teaching curricula of Al-Mustansiriyya School, which was established in 1227 AD included religious, linguistic and mental sciences. The period of time of learning was ten years and included: "The rest of religious denominations of Moslems, principles of jurisprudence in its it branches collective ones, science of duties, traditions of the Prophet, knowledge of halal and haram/ permitted and prohibited; arithmetic and areas, medicine, advantages of animals, keeping one's health, and Tacuim al-Abdan/ maintenance of health/ body"³⁴.

It was the first Islamic University that combined jurisprudence schools (Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali) in "one school"³⁵. Each of the previous jurisprudence schools were specific to one doctrine of these four religious doctrines.

³⁴ Al-Irbali , Abd al-Rahman Sonbut Qanito, *Khulasat al-Dhahab al-Masbouk*. Baghdad. Maktabat al-Mutjanna, 1885, p. 211.

³⁵ Ma'rouf, Naji, *Tarikh al-Mustansiriya*. Baghdad: Matba'at al-'Ani, 1959, p. 1.

Though the teaching curricula included the religious and mental schools, the jurisprudence had the major share because jurisprudence constitutes the practical application of the theoretic principles of Islam, and since jurisprudence was a secular science that deals with daily life issues, it required knowledge of mental sciences such as arithmetic and logic. "The materials contained in the taliqa also provided the background information needed for oral disputation-another form of instruction in the law colleges. The oral disputation took the model of a formalized debate, dependent on rules of logic and rhetoric, in which an individual defended a thesis-in this case. Particular stance or decision in jurisprudence-against challengers who would try to discredit his logic and argumentation."³⁶

Engagement in religious sciences in general is a kind of formula that consists of two sides: the first is the fixed religious text and the other is the human mind. The two sides are not compatible or equal, which means that the mind is not allowed to go beyond the religious text and it has to adapt itself to it and not to contradict it. The task of the mind is to deduce the theoretic and practical rulings from the text. Hence, the development of the mental tools is very important.

Since the major part of the text is general and not separate, especially what is connected to the real life, it offers the mind several possibilities and different versions for all the religious values. It also makes the religious text accept constant development and be in harmony with the development of the mind and vice versa, because stagnation of the mind negatively affects the text and makes it rigid.

³⁶ Charles Michael Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1990, p. 44.

Thus, the role of the school was to activate this dialectic between the text and the mind. The school took care to develop the tools of the mind through teaching mental sciences. This integration between the religious and the mental produced a philosophical and theological product and methods and tools of inference and deduction of legal rulings, daily life transactions in economics, politics and sociology and other aspects of life.

- **The Stage of Specialization at Houses of Learning and Houses of Wisdom**

The Moslems were exposed to new sciences after the expansion of the Islamic state when the translation movement started to translate various sciences to Arabic in the Umayyad period and reached its top during the Abbasid period. There was a need to establish new institutes for teaching the mental sciences which differ from the religious and transmitted sciences that were taught in mosques and schools.

"Besides the mosques, other institutes developed where new sciences, which were called 'foreign', prospered. These institutes included libraries that were called "Khazanat al-Adab' (Safe of Literature) and 'Dar al-Kutub' (House of Books), or 'Dar al-'Ilm" (House of Learning), and 'Dar al-Hikma' (House of Wisdom). Besides these institutes, it is worthwhile adding private houses where intellectual debates were taking place, called Majalis/ Councils, which included scholars in all fields and without any condition³⁷ .

Enrollment in Houses of Learning and Houses of Wisdom takes place after completion of the two stages of Kuttab and Circles in Mosques. At the Houses of Learning and Houses of Wisdom, the students study in two systems: a system of lectures and a system of dialogue, debate and discussion, where the student

³⁷ Maqdisi, George, *Al-Islam al-Hanbali*. Beirut: al-Shabaka al-'Arabiyya li al-Abhath wa al-Nashr, 2017, p. 64

learns philosophical sciences, medical sciences, mathematics, astronomy, natural sciences, geography and music. "The curriculum of Muslim education at that time reminds us in its extensive and intensive nature of curricular programs of modern advanced systems of education, particularly on higher levels of education."³⁸

The instructor lectures in some higher sciences in halls and large rooms, and the assistant helps the lecturer. He meets the group of students and explains to them the difficult things that they did not understand in the lecture and discusses the material with them. The teacher or the Sheikh are the ultimate authority in the subject of teaching. The students move from one circle to another and deal in each one a branch of science. The uniforms of the graduates and scholars ('ulama) was a black turban ('amama) of pallium, which was necessary for the instructors and jurisprudents in order to distinguish them from others.

If the graduate from Dar al-Hikma finishes one branch of studies, his teacher grants him a certificate that certifies that he has mastered that science and if he is one of the distinguished students, the certificate mentions that he is certified to teach that subject.³⁹

The Moslems' interest in foreign sciences that are different from religious sciences undoubtedly indicates openness onto the Other and an attempt of building bridges with other cultures and knowing their methods. "I know that what I mentioned regarding understanding the facts cannot be achieved except by intensive research, and intensive research can be achieved by intensive reading and acquaintance with all the opinions and sayings and looking through

³⁸ Mehdi Nakosteen, *History of Islamic Origins of Western Education*, Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 1964, p. 52.

³⁹ Atalla, Khadher Ahmad, *Beit al-Hikma fi Assr al-Abbassiyin*. 1st ed. Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1989, p. 140.

the characteristics of things and hearing the argument of every protester, considering it, and looking for and watching other religions, faiths, doctrines, choices differences of people and reading their books, and if any of the ignorant dispraises what we have mentioned, he disobeys his God. He told us, the Great and Almighty, in His revealed book, the sayings of the different ones among the people of disbelief, who argue that the world is still, and the people who believe in a dual God and trinity God and infidels, describing all that to show us, God Almighty, their corrupt sayings."⁴⁰

From this perspective, we see that Ibn Hazm, in his well-known work called *al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal*, defends teaching and learning philosophy and logic, saying: Philosophy is the truth and its fruit; the purpose intended in its learning is nothing but self-reformation... and this is the same purpose in Sharia, and there is no disagreement on this between any of the 'ulama of philosophy and any of 'ulama of Sharia...except someone who claims to belong to philosophy, and he denies Sharia because he is ignorant of the truth the meanings of philosophy and his remoteness from understanding its objective and meaning."⁴¹

Ibn Hazm tries here to reconcile between Philosophy and Sharia through their 'unity of purpose', which is 'Self-Reformation,' but Ibn Hazm does not deal with the means that lead to this goal. Sharia introduces transmitted sciences (Naqli) for self-reform, while Philosophy depends on Mental sciences (Aqli). If we accept that Philosophy and Sharia agree on the indication of virtuous soul, does that agreement include the tools of achieving that goal? I think that Ibn

⁴⁰ Ibn Hazm, *Al-Taqrīb li Had al-Mantiq wa al-Madkhal Ilayhi bi al-Alfaz al-'Ammiyya wa al-Amthila al-Fiqhiyya*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2002, p. 183.

⁴¹ Ibn Hazm, *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, Vol. 2, 1929, p. 79.

Hazm believed in the possibility of agreement on the tools, too, as long as the objective (goal) is the same one.

Regarding Logic, Ibn Hazm is the one who knows its value most. We see that he openly decides that "the books that Aristotle collected on Hudud al-Kalam... all of them are complete and sound, limiting books that tell about monotheism (Oneness of God), the Great and Almighty, and his power. The books are greatly beneficial in criticizing all sciences, and the greatness of the book is in the issue of Hudud (boundaries). For example, by the issues of Sharia (legal rulings), it is possible to know how to reach 'inference'; to understand the meanings of words according to their context; how to distinguish the *specific* from the *general* and the summarized from the interpreted; how to introduce the introductions and produce results; what can be necessarily correct constantly or what can be correct once and incorrect another time or incorrect all the time; how to put boundaries (hudud) to the one who deviated from them, and thus, became deviator from his origin; how to know the clue to the discourse; the clue to investigation and induction, and other things that the reasoning jurisprudent cannot give them up for himself and for his sect⁴².

In addition to the need of sciences in general to Logic, Ibn Hazm tries to establish the Legal (Sharia) rulings on Logic, or, in other words, he tries to rationalize the Sharia. If Logic plays a main role in deducing Shari rulings, learning Logic becomes a Shar'i (legal) order and part of it.

Ibn Rushd, too, sees the importance of Logic as an introduction to all sciences, and since the skill of Logic is known now, it is appropriate that students start learning it, on condition that after it is learned, the student should turn to learning arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, optics, and at the end,

⁴² Ibid., p. 77.

mechanics and finally, natural physics and finally metaphysics.⁴³ Thus, learning Logic becomes a foundation on which other sciences are established because all sciences are in need of Logic as it is the tool that immunize the mind against errors.

Al-Ghazali also sees importance to learning philosophy despite his objection to it and criticism to it. He also criticizes Moslem scholars who do not know Logic: "When I finished studying 'Ilm al-Kalam/ polemics, I started learning philosophy, and knew with certainty that no one can see the corruption of a kind of science if he does not know everything about that science till he becomes equal to the most knowledgeable person in the principles of that science.

I have never seen anyone of the Moslem scholars ('ulama) who turned his effort and cared to that, and there is not much of their polemics (mutakallimin) in the books of the polemicists (speakers) except for a few complicated and incoherent words that are clearly contradictory and corrupt, and no ordinary ignorant person can be deceived by them, let alone those who claim to know the facts of sciences. I realized that rejecting the doctrine before understanding it and knowing its essence first is like throwing an arrow blindly; and therefore, I started seriously achieving that science from the books by extensive reading and without help from any assistance of a teacher and a scholar, and learned it in my free time of teaching."⁴⁴

Although al-Ghazali refuses philosophy, he considers Logic as an introduction to all sciences. Actually, he does not trust a science that is not established on Logic because of the role of Logic in reaching correct rulings and

⁴³ Ibn Rushd, *Talkhis al-Siyasa*. Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 1998, p.168.

⁴⁴ al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqiz min al-Dhalal*. Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat al-Hilal, 1993, p. 30.

results in every science. "It is an introduction to all sciences, and the one who does not master it has no trust in his knowledge."⁴⁵

It is noticed that the teaching curricula in the stages of Higher Education moves more towards 'specialization' in a certain science. Without specialization, the learner can rarely succeed in mastering any science due to the large distribution of the mind and its distraction in his attempt to move from one science in order to understand another one. Thus, both sciences become closed to him and hard to understand, and consequently, he ends up with failure in both of them.

If the mind is dedicated to learning what it is specialized in, probably, it will be more qualified to achieve it."⁴⁶

It is known that scientific specialization is one of the main reasons for the progress of science. It is a movement from encyclopedic learning that characterized traditional learning, to specialization, which characterizes modern learning. "Decrease books for memorization and increase books for learning. If you want to be a scientist, aim at a certain art of science, and if you want to be a writer, take the best thing of all things."⁴⁷ If the road to scientific creativity is conditioned by specialization, the literary creativity requires knowledge in different arts because science is different from art. The former depends on mind and experience, while the latter depends on imagination and feeling.

It is possible to say that Islamic education adopted the experimental method, namely, the movement from the concrete to the abstract, and from the partial to

⁴⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfai Usul al-Fiqh*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Ibn Khaldoun (1981). *Al-Muqaddima*, p. 534.

⁴⁷ Al-Qurtobi, Abu Omar, *Jami' al-Bayan wa Fadhlulu*. Ed. By Mas'ad Abd al-Hamid Muhammad al-Sa'dani. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000, p. 177.

the total because the learner, "in the beginning, is unable to understand collectively, but understands in a small quantity and by approximation, summarization and concrete examples; then his preparations increase gradually and little by little, by being involved with the issues of that art and its repetition to him."⁴⁸ Thus, learning by experimentation and concrete examples is the appropriate method for teaching the curricular in the stages of the elementary school because the child in this stage possesses the concrete perception only and the mental perception is not mature yet.

The teaching curricula of higher education was characterized by the philosophical critical question, which aims to examine the studied issue from all its aspects till it is sure of its truth. He takes the approach of 'doubt' a method of research and does not accept anything as for granted; he accepts it after finding evidence and proof. He does not acknowledge and give in to the existing thing or situation, but he aims to achieve what it must be, and this indicates rethinking of the existing thing.

Ibn al-Haitham clarifies his method of scientific research and his critical style in revealing facts; "God did not prevent scientists from error and did not protect their work from inability or fault, and if they were not so, the scientist will not disagree on anything, and their opinions will not differ on the facts of things, and the existence will be unlike that. The right-seeker is not the one who looks in the books of the ancient ones, the one who smoothly follows his temper in his good intention; the knowledge-seeker is the accusing one who accuses because of his doubt in them; the one who pauses to think about what he thinks about them; the one who follows evidence and proof, and does not follow the sayings of the person who is specifically afflicted in his being with all kinds of defects and incompleteness.

⁴⁸ Ibn Kahloun, *al-Muqaddima*, 1981, p. 534.

It is necessary for the researcher in the science books, if his goal is knowledge of facts, to make himself a rival to anything that he looks into and to move his thought into its main body and all its margins, and argue with it from all its aspects and directions and accuses himself when he argues with it; he should not be prejudiced against it or be passive towards it, and should not be tolerant with it; if he takes this way, the facts are revealed to him, and the neglect or semi-neglect that probably occurred in the words of the previous researcher might appear to him.⁴⁹

Criticism is not directed only at the text, which is his main task, but also at the critic himself so that he will also criticize his own criticism. The importance of the role of criticism is that it plays two roles: rethinking within the boundaries of the text, and practicing the same critical tool on the critic himself. So, the role of criticism is not limited to revealing the flaws of the text in an aim to correct and assess it, but also to reveal the flaws of the critic himself to save him from them so that he will be objective, impartial and honest in his criticism.

Among the characteristics of the Houses of Learning and the Houses of Wisdom is their absorption of all the social and religious classes. They were characterized by multiculturalism that joined the different ones in one place to study, research and debate. This indicates that they provided freedom of thought and belief, which is fundamental for every scientific flourish and prosperity. Among the samples of this multiculturalism is what we read in the following quotation: "Khalaf al-Muthanna said: We witnessed ten people in Basra gather in a council (majlis), who were incomparable in their knowledge and intelligence, who are: al-Khalil bin Ahmad the grammarian, who was a Sunni, and al-Himyari the poet, who was a Shiite, and Salih bin Abd al-Quddous, who

⁴⁹ Ibn al-Haitham, *Al-Shukuk 'ala Batlimus*. Ed. By Abd al-Hamid Sabra wa Nabil al-Shihabi. Cairo: Matba'at Dar al-Kutub, 1971, p. 4.

was an atheist who believed in dualism, and Sufian bin Mujashi', who was a Safawi Khariji, and Bashar bin Burd, who was a dissolute, wanton Sho'ubi; Hammad 'Ajrād, who was an atheistic Sho'ubi, and Ibn Ras al-Jalout the poet, who was a Jewish, and Ibn Nazeer the Polemist (mutakallim), who was a Christian, and Omar bin al-Mu'ayyad, who was a Magi, and Ibn Sinan al-Harrani the poet, who was a Sabi',... all these were gathering to recite poetry, exchange news, converse in a friendly atmosphere; you cannot know from them that they have so much difference in their religions and denominations."⁵⁰

• Summary and Conclusions

The study concludes that education among the Moslems was characterized by its independence of the State, and was closer to society and its needs, which indicate that the political influence on the education system was weak. The educational institute was private and belonged to scholars in a private way and in their personal or religious and scientific belonging. The sidedness of education to the social, cultural condition and its independence of the political dominance contributed to the provision of knowledge and education to the different classes of people or even free learning. It also provided for the learner the freedom to choose the kind of science that he desires to study.

However, despite the independence of learning, we notice that the education curricula were nearly unified in all the Islamic schools in the Islamic State, especially in the stages of the Kuttāb and Maṣḥid, which were two stages that were concerned with the moral establishment of the learner, which was based on the Koran, Sunna and Wisdom. The teaching curricula were unanimously agreed on by all the Moslems. The curricula at the higher stages of education at schools

⁵⁰ Al-Siba'i, Mustafa, *Min Rawā'ī Hadharatīna*. Damascus: Dar al-Warraq li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'. al-Maktab al-Islami, 1999.

and Houses of Learning and Houses of Wisdom differed according to the scientific specialization of each of these institutes.

The methods of teaching and their tools in the Kuttab depended on memorization and dictation that aimed to expand and develop the memory of the child, but in the advanced stages at the Mosques, schools, Houses of Learning, and Houses of Wisdom, they depended on the method of 'lecture' 'discussion' and 'debate', which guaranteed the freedom of expression, objection and criticism.

These strategies sought to develop independent creative thought and polishing the independent critical personality. It is possible to say that the Islamic philosophy, which integrates the religious moral authority and mental sciences encouraged the provision of the convenient atmosphere to develop the different sciences as an achievement of its goals. Besides, the independence of education and its being free of the domination of one authority, and provision of multiplicity of different and competitive teaching institutes established centers for free expression, criticism, and the right to be different.

Besides, the philosophical question was strongly present in the Islamic teaching curricula through its role in arousing the critical thinking and creating means and mechanisms of thought that had a significant role in developing the religious and mental sciences alike. In conclusion, the philosophy of Islamic education is based on the mental and religious dialectic and accepts the difference and pluralism and refuses human unilateralism because it contradicts with God's Oneness.