Al-Ghazali's Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education

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Abstract

The Constitution of Pakistan (1973) and our various educational policies have given clear direction on aims of our education system, which should be based on Islamic principles. However, since independence, Pakistan is still unable to devise a system of education, the aims of which are derived from Qur'an and Sunnah as mandated by the constitution. As such a dire need is felt to understand the aims and objectives education from our ideological perspective. It has been generally agreed that Al-Ghazali's thoughts comply with the Qur'anic principles, he is well accepted by vast strata of Muslims in Pakistan and appreciated by west as well. Accordingly, this qualitative study explored educational aims and objectives from Al-Ghazali's thoughts and philosophy, using content analysis of various writings of and on Al-Ghazali. Based on this research, we can conclude that the aim of Islamic education should be associated with the aim of a person's life. Based on this fundamental assumption and guideline provided by Al-Ghazali, we can develop aims and objectives of Islamic education as directed in the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali, educational philosophy, Islamic education, objectives of Islamic education.

Introduction

Education is one of the key instruments used for aligning young minds to a nation's ideology. In school, which being the first institution where formal education is imparted, the youth is passed through a curriculum meticulously designed to achieve certain objectives as laid down to achieve the state's educational

objectives (Althusser, 1971). These schools, as a normal process, take in a big mass of youth, churn them through the prevalent educational curriculum for around ten to twelve years and prepare them for either higher education or vocational pursuits. From Pakistan's perspective, national educational goals should be derived from the supreme constituting document, which is the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), whereby the government is required to take steps to facilitate Muslims of Pakistan to live their lives in accordance with Islam, both individually as well as collectively.

The basic institution for children's education is school. In Pakistan, schools can be broadly categorized into public schools, private schools and *madaris*. Curriculum of both private and public schools is governed by various national and international Educational Boards. *Madrasah* system follows a very different model in comparison to schools, which focuses on Islamic jurisprudence. On the other hand, over the last thirty-five years, we can see a growth in a new segment of schools in private sector, which are known as 'Islamic Schools'. These Islamic schools have essentially adopted the conventional school structure, adopted from the western world (Ali, 2011). It is felt that an extensive research is required to define actual aims and objectives of education from our ideological perspective. This aspect of education is greatly lacking and we see the aims and objectives of contemporary education aligned with the western secular ideology. A need is felt to understand what the aims and objectives of Islamic education should be therefore, the present research will explore conceptions about aims and objectives as derived from the thoughts and philosophy of Al-Ghazali.

Statement of the Research Problem

Even after more than thirty-five years of initiation of private Islamic schools phenomenon, these schools are still in a state of confusion as to what Islamic pedagogy should be, and what are the aims and objectives of education system based on Islamic ideology.

Research Question

What are the aims and objectives of Islamic education at school level in the light of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah as articulated by Al-Ghazali?

Literature Review

Any ideological nation or group will train its members around its own ideological objectives and not around the objectives of others' ideology (Ali, 2011). Similarly, Mawdudi, (2000) opines that a state, especially an ideological state, cannot survive unless it provides training to the future administrators according to its ideology; therefore, education is a matter of crucial importance for this state. Education system of a nation thus has to be developed around its own ideological objectives. Ali (2011) highlights that aims of Islamic education should be derived from the Qur'an, which states that the objective for the creation of man is to worship Allah (Al-Dhariyat: 56). It is therefore adamant that Muslims should devise and design their own educational system according to Islamic aims and objectives.

It is noted by several Muslim scholars that many aspects of Al-Ghazali's guidance on teaching and learning are still valid (Alkanderi, 2001; Nofal, 1993). Likewise, researchers generally agree that Al-Ghazali's thoughts comply with the Qur'anic principles. He is well accepted by a majority of strata of Muslims in Pakistan and appreciated by the west as well (Nadvi, 1971; Nofal, 1993). His guidance can be directly applied to the education system of not only Islamic world, but also to the rest of the world (Abul-Quasem, 1978; Gil'adi, 1992; Nofal, 1993; Sherif, 1975). Since he is recognized as the religious authority of his era, he is known as the *proof of Islam* (Hujjat al-Islam) (Sherif, 1975). Zwemer (1920) called Al-Ghazali "The greatest of all Moslems" (p. 11) since the days of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Watt believed that Al-Ghazali is by no means unworthy of that dignity (Al-Ghazali, 1952). Scholars have compared Al-Ghazali with a number of great western thinkers such as Descartes, Thomas Aquinas, Kant and Eckhart (El-Shinqiti, 2012). He is also equated with modern thinkers like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey (Arani, Kakia, Moazani, 2014). M'Bow in 1986 reported that Al-Ghazali's importance is not confined to the Muslim world, for Al-Ghazali was the first Arab author whose works were translated into Latin in Medieval Europe. In addition, he was introduced to the west through his book *Maqasid al-Falasifah* (The Aims of the Philosophers).

Education during the era of Al-Ghazali was not considered as a separate subject hence, we may not be able to find a systematic record of educational philosophy in any single book or work of Al-Ghazali, though he has written extensively on education (Gunher, 2006). This research aimed at pulling together

those portions of Al-Ghazali's work, which comprise his philosophy of education and present them in such a manner as to be accessible and relevant to the educationists.

Methodology

This was a qualitative research using content analysis of Al Ghazali's literary and philosophical works to explore his educational directives to derive aims and objectives of education from Islamic perspective. Some of his famous books, which have been translated in English and Urdu were reviewed critically, especially his famous books Al-Ahya Ul Uloom Uddin (Revival of the Religious Sciences), Munqidh Min Al-Dhalal (Deliverance from Error) and Ayyuhal Walad (O' Students - Letter to a Disciple). Apart from these, relevant books, research articles and dissertations were also read to understand the philosophy from multiple dimensions.

The content analysis of Al Ghazali's literary and philosophical work was done using thematic analysis, where the themes were derived after the literature review. Both English as well as Urdu translations of his work were referred to for a better and in depth understanding. The analysis was continuously monitored by an expert.

Al-Ghazali's Philosophy of Education

Education was not a separate discipline at the time of Al-Ghazali, accordingly, though Al-Ghazali has written extensively on education, one will not find a systematic record of his educational philosophy in any single book or work (Gunher, 2006). The significant work in the field of Educational Philosophy by Al-Ghazali is a few of the forty books that make up Al-Ahya ul Uloom Uddin (Revival of the Religious Sciences). Other related work includes Ayyuhal Walad [O' Students - Letter to a Disciple], Meezan al-Amal [The Criteria of Action] and Al-Munqidh Min al-Dhalal [Deliverance from Error].

What is Education?

Going through his various writings, we can draw a meaning of education from Al-Ghazali's perspective. Alavi explains it as an interaction between a teacher and a student, which proceeds gradually, developmentally and continuously throughout the student's life, the purpose of which is to cultivate harmoniously

and conclusively all that God has created in the student for his or her happiness and spiritual benefit (Alavi, 2007, p. 312). Al-Ghazali sees education as a skill or technique, instead of a science in itself.

Perception of God, world and life. The concept of God and His relationship with mankind is the main premise of Al-Ghazali's philosophy of education. Al-Ghazali segregates this worldly life from the life after death. He considers this worldly life as temporary and the life hereafter as permanent. God is not only the creator of the universe and of its attributes and laws, but He is also the cause of every event in the world, be it huge or small, past, present or future.

Concept and classifications of knowledge. (Al-Ghazali, 1962)*.* Amongst the characteristics of a man, Al-Ghazali considers awareness and knowledge as the most important. He highlights that knowledge is derived from two sources; the senses and the logics, but he considers both of these sources as weak sources which will result in a man to know only the materialistic aspects of the world in which he lives. On the other hand, divine revelation enables him to learn more about the life after death, which he considers as eternal life. In Al-Ghazali's view, true knowledge is the knowledge of God, His books, His prophets, His creation, including the kingdoms of earth and heavens. It also includes the knowledge of *Shariah* as revealed by His Prophet. He classifies disciplines such as arithmetic, medicine, etc., as techniques and believed that true knowledge can only be achieved if the self has been nurtured through teachings the Holy Qur'an. The more one comprehends such knowledge, the better he knows God and the closer he comes to Him. Al-Ghazali has several classifications of the knowledge, based on following:

Nature.
1. Theoretical (pertaining to religion and theology)
2. Practical (pertaining to politics, ethics and family affairs)

Origin.
1. Revealed knowledge (pertaining to unity of God, morality, customs, exegesis).
2. Rational knowledge (pertaining to natural sciences, mathematics, etc.)
3. In Al-Ghazali's opinion, there is no contradiction between the revealed

knowledge and the rational knowledge. He considers both sciences as complementing one another.

Effects.
1. Cursed knowledge (such as black magic or fortune telling, which Al-Ghazali considers as useless knowledge both in this life and the life hereafter)

2. Right knowledge (which is related to the soul of a human being)

Purpose.
1. Knowledge of transactions (relating to actions, behaviour and conduct of one human with another)

2. Knowledge of unveiling (relating to discover the apprehension of the reality and reality of things)

Aims of Education

Principle aim of education. As discussed above, Al-Ghazali considers getting eternal salvation as the greatest achievement of man (Al-Ghazali, 1962). Nofal (1993) articulates Al-Ghazali's aim of education as ''To cultivate man so that he abides by the teachings of religion and is hence assured salvation and happiness in the eternal life hereafter'' (p. 5) and this is only possible with the proper knowledge of acts of worship (Al-Ghazali, 1962). As such, the foundation of salvation and happiness is the knowledge as Al-Ghazali states that of all works it (seeking of knowledge) the most excellent (Al-Ghazali, 1962, p. 19). The fruit of knowledge in the hereafter for a person is his nearness to Allah, where he will be closer to Him even than the angles.

Other aims. Al-Ghazali has also mentioned the development of other aspects of human life through education, which should be the other aims of education; however, he asserts that these aims should support the main aim of education. The other aims of education are drawn from the writings of Al-Ghazali (Abu-Sway, 1996; Al-Ghazali, 1962; MacDonald, 1899; Watts, 1963, Al-Ghazali, 1963a). These are summarised below:

Character formation. Al-Ghazali realizes the significance of childhood age in character building. He elaborates that a good childhood will give youngsters a good

character and help them to carry on with an honourable life and a bad childhood will ruin their character. Once character is lost it will be difficult to redevelop it. Education is not limited to training the minds only and pouring information into it, but it involves all aspects; religious, moral, intellectual and physical personality of the learner.

Brightening the heart. Al-Ghazali considers the heart as a spiritual subtlety (Al-Ghazali, 1963a) connected to the physical heart; and this spiritual subtlety is the core of man, which learns, comprehends, and knows. Al-Ghazali asserts that the process of education should result in cleansing the heart, as a result of which the 'light of knowledge' will brighten his heart (Al-Ghazali, 1962).

Moral development. Al-Ghazali assures that youngsters' moral development is one of the fundamental objectives of education. He gives an example of a garden to explain to explain the processes of moral education; before planting flowers, the ground must be cleared of weeds. Similarly, teachers must purify the students' soul by removing from it filthy thoughts and immoral deeds before teaching moral goodness and then all acts should be carried out for the sake of God (Al-Ghazali, 2005). Al-Ghazali views the role of various people as important in influencing the moral development of a child, especially the parents, peers and teachers (Al-Ghazali, 1962).

Earning a livelihood. In order to achieve the primary goal, human being has to fulfil all the obligations, which include feeding himself and his family, which is also a requirement of *Shariah*. Accordingly, man should learn certain art or get certain amount of knowledge which would help him achieving the said goal.

Societal development. Al-Ghazali has also emphasized that apart from individual's responsibilities of self, Allah has entrusted him responsibilities pertaining to the society's development as well. He refers such responsibility as *Farz-e-Kifaya*, for example, a society needs doctors to keep people healthy, who will be in a better position to fulfil their responsibilities towards Allah.

Planned Objectives

For Al-Ghazali, the above mentioned aims of education can be achieved through objectives related to multidimensional areas which are to be worked upon

concurrently. Accordingly, his objectives can be broadly categorized into guidance pertaining to the role of parents, role of teachers, role of students, curriculum and environment. These are elaborated below:

Role of parents. Al-Ghazali views the role of parents as significant because a child interacts with his parents more than any other person and influence the child the most. Accordingly, Al-Ghazali emphasises the responsibility of parents to develop all aspects of a child's initial education. These aspects include language, cultural traditions, religious and moral beliefs. A child is influenced by his parents for good, as well as for evil. Accordingly, parents are admired if their child develops a good character and held responsible if their child develops unacceptable traits. (Al-Ghazali, 1962).

Role of teachers. When a student starts seeking knowledge from his teacher, Al-Ghazali emphasises that the role and impact of the teacher is more important than parents (Al-Ghazali, 1962). Al-Ghazali asserts that the educator's own life must be filled with the qualities which he instructs to youngsters to attain. Children have strong tendency of impersonation and they will probably gain from what the teacher does instead of from what he says (Al-Ghazali, 2005). Al-Ghazali (1962) in his master piece Al-Ahya Ul Uloom Uddin book 1 titled Book of Knowledge distinguishes the following eight standards of behaviour for teachers, the main themes of which are:

1. The teachers should be sympathetic towards students and they should treat them as their own children.

2. The teachers must follow the noble example of the life of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) and teach for giving knowledge only and not for seeking praise or fee.

3. The teachers should adopt progressive methodology whereby, they should make students learn gradually by mastering one stage and then proceeding to the next.

4. The teachers should also encourage students to leave bad habits in a suggestive manner and compassionately, rather than aggressively and embarrassingly.

5. The teachers should respect all sciences, including those that they are not

teaching and should not derogate them.

6. The teachers should ensure that the knowledge being imparted to the students is not very difficult for them. The teachers should also ensure that the students enjoy learning continuously.

7. Al-Ghazali (1962) proposes that individual attention should be given to the students, especially the weak ones. He asserts that the teachers should ensure that only things which are clear and suitable to the students' limited understanding should be taught to them.

8. The teachers should practice and teach what they know and not allow their work and behaviour to contradict their words, because knowledge is comprehended through mind, while it works through the eyes.

Role of students. Al-Ghazali considers student's own efforts and behaviour as equally important as teachers' and parents'. Accordingly, he has given guidance to students as well. Following are the codes of ethics for students, which are compiled in his book '*Al-Ahya Ul Uloom Uddin*' book one 'book of knowledge' (Al-Ghazali, 1962):

1. The students should purify their spirit by freeing themselves of bad habits and other spiritual maladies. Thereafter they will become a vessel where knowledge can be stored.

2. The students must separate themselves as much as possible from their connection with the worldly affairs, as these ties will pull them away from the focus on seeking knowledge.

3. The students should not consider themselves superior to their teachers and should accept the knowledge and learning provided by them. The students should accept advice of their teachers and trust the guidance received.

4. The students should ignore the opinions in contradiction to their thoughts in their selected field and focus on mastering the one and only praiseworthy way as guided by the teachers.

5. Serious students should get knowledge of all branches of science, because all types of knowledge are related and linked to each other.

6. The students should set study priority according to the importance of the

relevant discipline in their life.

7. The students should adopt progressive strategy whereby they must not start new branch unless they master the existing branch.

8. The students should understand how to judge the nature of knowledge. This judgement requires looking from two aspects: the nobility of its fruit and authenticity of its principles.

9. The primary goal of the students should be the attainment of virtues and his final goal should be to get closer to God rather than being ostentatious in society.

10. The students should understand the relationship between different branches of knowledge and that the ultimate goal of all knowledge should be getting closer to Allah. This will enable them to give appropriate attention and weightage to each branch.

According to Al-Ghazali, a person will always be a student till his death (Al-Ghazali, 2005). Thus, he also gives guidance to the students who have completed their curriculum and entered the practical life. In his book *Ayyuhal Walad,* Ghazali (2005) gives eight guidelines in this regard:

1. Students should avoid religious debates and arguments as much as possible as they result in more evil than good. Al-Ghazali warns studentss to refrain from preaching which they themselves have not practised.

2. Al-Ghazali precautions students not to even greet any king, or influential person, or any ruler and stay away from their company and gatherings. Al-Ghazali thinks even looking at them has many evils, especially diverting him away from God.

3. Al-Ghazali warns students not to accept any benefit or gift from the rulers, even if the source of that gift is *Halal* (legal/permissible). Al-Ghazali highlights that this acceptance of benefits or gifts will result in producing sycophancy, partiality for them (rulers) and complicity in their tyranny in the hearts of the receiver of such benefits.

4. Every student should act by keeping his relationship with Allah in mind; and for this Al-Ghazali gives simile of a relationship which a servant has with his master. Accordingly, he should do all the things that a master likes

his servant to do for him and refrain from all the things that he likes his servant to refrain from.

5. Al-Ghazali highlighted that students, while interacting with others, should treat the others in a manner that he (students) would wish himself to be dealt with by them.

6. He advices his students not to discontinue their connection with the literature, as this is a continuous source of increase in knowledge. However, such knowledge should result in brightening the heart and purging the ego.

7. Al-Ghazali discouraged the piling of resources and prohibits his students not to stock the 'world's produce' for more than one year.

Broad guidance on curriculum. In Al-Ghazali's era, curriculum of education was not strictly defined (Abu-sway, 1996), but it was flexible allowing students to choose the subjects they aim to study. Since Al-Ghazali did not consider aims of education as different from the aim of life, he essentially suggested a curriculum for student's whole life (Alkanderi, 2001; Watts, 1963). The curriculum suggested by Al-Ghazali can be viewed from two aspects: content point of view, and methodology point of view.

Content point of view. From content point of view Al-Ghazali divided his curriculum into two parts;

*   Obligatory (*Farz-e-Ain*) as the mandatory curriculum. This includes the doctrine of the Qur'an, logic and hygiene. The purpose of mandatory curriculum is to teach students how to live their lives as individuals as well as members of the Islamic society.

*   Optional (*Farz-e-Kifaya*) which is considered as compulsory, that is, as a society someone must be doing it, which is not obligatory (*farz*) on every person.

The aim of Farz-e-Ain is to develop behavioural aspects in students. Farz-e-Kifaya on the other hand, is concerned with the economic and social aspects of society. Accordingly, he suggests starting with the essential knowledge: the Qur'an, followed by Sunnah, then Tafsir and then other sciences. With respect to subjects,

Al-Ghazali divides the knowledge into six classifications: arithmetic, rationale, regular sciences, mysticism, governmental issues and morals. Arithmetic, rationale and the regular sciences don't conflict with religion.

Methodology point of view. With regard to the use of methodology to impart knowledge, Al-Ghazali's suggestions include:

Effect of societal environment. Al-Ghazali gives importance to the environment in which learning takes place. The environment includes values, politics and economics of the society around an institution, which impacts the curriculum offered by the institution and vice versa (Schubert, 1986). Before entering an institution, it is the child's parents who play the main role models (Al-Ghazali, 1962). After entering institutions, the most important role player is the teacher (Al-Ghazali, 1962).

Understanding child psychology. Al-Ghazali signifies that if teachers wants to have a maximum impact on children's moral development, they should be aware of how children's motivation and interests change during the course of their lives (Al-Ghazali, 1962).

Relaxed mental state through co-curricular activities. Al-Ghazali highlights that children need time to relax through recreations and different exercises to ease the fatigue of their study (Al-Ghazali, 1962). As such he recommends that a student must be given reasonable time to play games (Al-Ghazali, 1962).

Discouraging mere memorization. Teaching must be a slow yet dynamic procedure, including incitement and inspirations. Al-Ghazali highlights that educating students must be connected to real life circumstances. Teachers should avoid giving abstract examples (Al-Ghazali, 1962).

Discussion

As a nation, the aim of education should be derived from the constitution. However, since independence, Pakistan is still a passive receptor of secular pedagogical paradigms imported from the west. On the other hand, over the last thirty-five years, a new segment of schools is emerging, which known as 'Private Islamic Schools'. However, the educational interventions and applications of the tools of education by these schools are basically adopted from western framework

of education (Ali, 2011). These objectives and applications include the school structure, education delivery framework and style, the curriculum, the focus on English language, the uniformity in dressing and the assessment methodology. The school structure is fundamentally on factory model, where the human resource is being prepared for the countrys' job market and economic requirements (Gatto, 2005; Robinson, 2010). This schooling system is the invention of the West and is not more than two hundred years old (Robinson, 2010). Whereas, the Islamic principles as articulated by Al-Ghazali, were formulated quite inclusively fourteen hundred years ago. And soon after, the Muslims developed an educational methodology which resulted in an intellectual revolution resulting in more than a thousand years of leadership in all aspects of life by the Muslims.

As has been mentioned earlier, Al Ghazali looks at education from a holistic perspective and defines in detail the aims and objectives of education and the function and responsibilities of the teacher as well as the students in acquiring education. It is observed that Al Ghazali stood for the passionate seeking of learning from the students' side, coupled with the passion of facilitating learning from the teachers' side. This excludes the concept of imposing forced knowledge and learning from the institutions' side as is the present day practise. He discouraged rote learning as is being practiced today in the Madaris and many schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Islamic education should be clear in its objectives, which essentially should be linked with the objective of life. Accordingly, all activities should be developed around these aims and objectives and not contrary to it. The purpose of education should basically be to create a realization and to facilitate to achieve the purpose of life, which is submission to Allah, as Allah says I did not create the Jinns and the human beings except for the purpose that they should worship Me (Qur'an: 51:56). Al-Ghazali asserts that education as a process that must lead human beings towards the consciousness of the Creator in order to obey His commands. Muslims need a different model independent of the western influence, based on fundamental assumptions of Muslim about his life. For this, I would strongly recommend further research on the model that results in achieving the aims of Islamic education.

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