

Islamic Perspective of Adult Education: An Overview

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Abstract

This article demonstrates the Islamic Perspective of adult education. Apparently, adult education is based on the concept of lifelong & continuing education. The 21st century has acknowledged it as an agent of overall development of an individual and the society as well. The history of Islam reveals that it started with the first revelation on the Holy Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH). The Qur'an and Sunnah emphasize on seeking knowledge without any age or gender restrictions. The example of Ashab-e-Suffah (who were adults) provides established concrete grounds to adult education to be followed by the Muslim Ummah. The Ashab-e-Suffah used to gather at a place called the Suffah in the mosque of the Prophet (PBUH) (Masjid-e-Nabvi) to seek the knowledge of Islam and life skills according to the principles of the Islam and Islamic Values. After some days living here and learning from the Prophet (PBUH) directly; they went back, practiced and taught the same to those who were unable to come to the Suffah. This practice promoted Islam in far lung areas of the deserted Arab. Obviously, it can be said that adult education is based on the philosophy of Islamic Education even in modern world.

Keywords: Adult Education, Aşhāb-e-Şuffah, Lifelong Education, Knowledge, Life Skills.

Introduction:

Education is a lifelong and social process continuing from cradle to grave.⁽¹⁾ It enables individuals to live a peaceful and productive life in the society. An individual starts getting education informally from the parents and environment since his/her birth. The new borne baby starts weeping and after sometime become silent meaning that s/he has learnt how to live in the new environment. This type of learning is referred to as informal learning –the product of informal education. Informal education takes place in the society, environment and surroundings resulting in attitude and behavior formation and reflects the personality of an individual. After reaching school age when a child gets into school and learns set curricula under the guidance of a teacher for achieving predetermined learning goals and objectives; it is called formal education. It results in formal learning and is measured as learning achievement in terms of marks and grades. It is imparted in formal schools, colleges and universities.

As education is a lifelong process and does not stop at any age or stage of learning, therefore, the education of individuals in adulthood or educating adults is called adult education. Adult education is regarded as necessary as schooling because in adulthood an individual becomes self-motivated, self-directed and self-regulated in

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¹ Hussain, Irshad, *A study of problems faced by distance education tutors in Bahawalpur region*. An unpublished M.Phil Thesis, (Islamabad: Allama Iqbal Open University, 1999).

his/her studies^{(2), (3), (4)} It is a form of lifelong and continuous process of education which aims at developing capacities of adults and transforming their potential into skills and attitude on which their later life is built^{(5), (6)}. UNESCO⁽⁷⁾ presented a comprehensive but elaborative definition of adult education. It “...denotes the entire body of organized educational process whatever the content, level and method (whether formal or otherwise), whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities, as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop his or her abilities and reach their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviours in twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.” This definition stresses on content as well as the areas of education according to needs of adults –professional, technical or general education. It also denotes the methods of imparting adult education which may be formal or non-formal. Usually, adults have some experience of and/ about life. They would have faced different problems in different situations requiring appropriate solutions. They have urge to seek solution through education. Therefore, they appear to be logical and objective oriented in getting education either formally or using some other method(s).

Adult education helps adults to adjust in the society by equipping them with (life) skills, knowledge and competencies which are required for living their future life.⁽⁸⁾ And by preparing them embrace innovations and using technologies.⁽⁹⁾ Mostly, the programmes of adult education are skill oriented and based on market driven activities. Therefore, adult education consists of need-based programmes to cater the needs of adults in the society. These may be skill-oriented and income generating programmes and/ or courses which usually are needed by the adults.

Significance of Adult Education in Islam:

Islam is a revealed religion and complete code of conduct which provides guidance to the human being in all aspects of life. Preaching and educating people is the nucleus of Islamic teachings. In Islam getting education and seeking knowledge is mandatory for all Muslims –men and women. Islam grants a significant status to adult education. The first revelation on the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at the age of forty years confirms it. It reveals the reality that adulthood is mature age and one can decide logically with a blend of vision and wisdom. Allah Almighty revealed his Message –the Holy Qur’an on His Messenger (PBUH). There is a lesson/ Hikmat for all of the Muslims to get education even during their mature age –adulthood. Islam has much

² Merriam, Sharan, B. and Caffarella, Rosemary, S., *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991).

³ Rashid, Muhammad, *Educational technology*, (Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 2001).

⁴ Hussain, Irshad, *A study of emerging technologies and their impact on teaching learning process*. An unpublished PhD Thesis, (Islamabad: Allama Iqbal Open University, 2005).

⁵ Rashid, Muhammad, *Adult education in comparative perspective*. (Islamabad: Allama Iqbal Open University, 2003).

⁶ Op. cit, Hussain, 1999.

⁷ UNESCO, *Records of the general conference, Nineteenth Session*. (Nairobi: 1976), Vol. 1. (Paris: UNESCO, 1977).

⁸ Rashid, Muhammad, *Trends and issues in distance education*. (Islamabad: Allama Iqbal Open University, 2002).

⁹ Op. cit, Hussain, 2005.

emphasized on getting education and made it mandatory for all Muslim –men and women without restrictions of age and gender; caste and creed. The first revelation on the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) indicates the significance of education particularly, the adult education by stating the word “*Iqr’a*”, in Arabic which means ‘read’ and it stresses on ‘learning’, ‘investigating and exploring’ and ‘seeking knowledge for ‘enlightenment’ in the life. It asserts and presents reading or seeking knowledge as a means to coming closer to the Allah Almighty.

In this regard the Holy Qur’an says,

"Read! In the Name of your Lord who has created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not"⁽¹⁰⁾

All of the Muslims believe in Oneness of the Allah Almighty who has created human beings and all other creatures. He has ranked the human being over all other creatures because of having knowledge. Knowledge makes an individual (man or woman) to know himself as well the Creator –The Allah Almighty. Allah has ordered Muslims to seek knowledge. It strengthens their faith and belief. The Holy Qur’an emphasizes repeatedly on getting education –knowledge. It is a source of guidance and enlightenment for the Muslims –all men and women, children and adults, and as well as the older and oldest one. Therefore, all of the Muslims must pray to Allah Almighty to increase their knowledge to know themselves and their Creator –the Allah. The Holy Qur’an teaches Muslims a beautiful pray and says, *"My Lord! Increase me in knowledge"*⁽¹¹⁾ It means that all Muslims must be keeping on praying to Allah Almighty for increasing their knowledge. Seeking knowledge is essential for all Muslims and it is a straight path to the faith in order to become true believers. This fact is explained in the Holy Qur’an,

"Allah grants wisdom to whom He pleases and to whom wisdom is granted indeed he receives an overflowing benefit"⁽¹²⁾ *"Those truly fear God, among His Servants, who have knowledge: for God is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving"*⁽¹³⁾

It demonstrates that getting education and knowledge makes one to differentiate between the right and wrong path, good and bad deeds, virtues and sins. It makes one God fearing and beneficial to the humanity.

Similarly, there is a clear difference between those who have acquired knowledge and those who have not. Those having knowledge are ranked over those having not. The Holy Qur’an say, *"Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endowed with understanding that receive admonition"*⁽¹⁴⁾

The tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) also emphasized on seeking knowledge for the Muslims [all men, women, children and adults]. It is evident from the Hadith of the

¹⁰ Al-Qur’ān, Al-Alaq:1-5

¹¹ Al-Qur’ān, Ta-Ha:114

¹² Al-Qur’ān, Al-Baqarah:269

¹³ Al-Qur’ān, Faṭir:28

¹⁴ Al-Qur’ān, Az-Zumar:9

Holy Prophet (PBUH), *"When a man dies, his acts come to an end, but three, recurring charity, or knowledge (by which people) benefit, or a pious son, who prays for him (the deceased)"*⁽¹⁵⁾ Obviously one can say that educating and getting education which is beneficial for the human being is a lasting deed and benefits one even after his/her death.

The above discussion demonstrates that knowledge brings all Muslims (particularly those adults who believe and seek guidance) closer to Allah Almighty and that's why seeking knowledge and getting education is obligatory on every Muslim regardless of age, gender, caste and creed.

Educating and Adult Education for Prosperity and Betterment of the Society:

All of the Muslims are accountable for their deeds. According to the teachings of Islam all Muslims who hold some position (formal or informal) and the responsibility of stewardship are accountable for their role. They are ordered to serve the human beings related to them without any discrimination; and according to the principles of social justice based on teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah/ traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It leads to equality and creates peace and harmony in the society. It is an instrumental force to eliminate biases and inequality from the society. Social justice stems in protection of basic human rights. It is a great human value and comes only having knowledge and education as ordered by the Holy Qur'an and *hadiths* of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Therefore, adult education blended with vision and wisdom, and contemporary trends and innovations appears to be in line with realization of Islam and Islamic values and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Allah Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an, *"....and help one another in goodness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and aggression; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah"*⁽¹⁶⁾

It affirms the significance of using vision with wisdom and getting education and knowledge for the Muslims. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized on the education for the betterment of society. He (PBUH) desired for Muslims to acquire education and knowledge for fulfilling their respective duties and roles of serving the humanity. The Muslims should get education and seek knowledge which is beneficial to others. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *"....if anyone acquires knowledge of things by which Allah's good pleasure is sought, but acquires it only to get some worldly advantage, he*

¹⁵ Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*: Book 12, Hadith 4005

¹⁶ Al-Qur'an, Al-Mā'idah:2

will not experience the arf, i.e. the odour, of Paradise”⁽¹⁷⁾. In Islam the objective of getting education and acquiring knowledge is to please the Allah Almighty by benefitting the mankind through such education and knowledge. The education and knowledge which is harmful to the mankind is forbidden in Islam. Therefore, it is necessary for the Muslims to get education in the fields and disciplines meant for prosperity and betterment of the mankind. It is demonstrated that seeking knowledge for the service of mankind is sacred duty of the Muslims.

The path of education and knowledge is one of the paths leading closer to Allah Almighty and “*one who dies in search of knowledge is regarded as Martyr*”. According to Qur’an *a Martyr never dies but s/he is alive forever⁽¹⁸⁾*. It is a highest rank to be near to Allah Almighty and shows the significance of education and knowledge.

The Holy Qur’an and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) granted a significant status to adult education which is reflected by different examples during the early age of Islam. It makes Muslims to fulfill their all responsibilities properly and adequately in their lives. It would be right to say that Islam propagated and spread over the world through teaching and preaching the adults –the adult education.

Ashab-e-Suffah and Adult Education:

The traditional system of Muslim Education stems in teachings of the Holy Qur’an, and practices and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Islamic history reveals that adult education started with the advent of Islam when the Prophet (PBUH) started preaching; and later on after migration to Madina it became a normal practice. HIS (PBUH) companions used to come to Madina and gathered in Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) –the Masjid-e-Nabwi to learn the Holy Qur’an and principles of Islam, and traditions of the Prophet (PBUH). Suffah was a place in the Mosque of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) where these companions gathered and learned directly from the Prophet (PBUH). These companions (*SAHABEES*) are known as Ashab-e-Suffah. The *SUFFAH* is declared to be the first University of the Muslim Ummah to impart knowledge to the believers. The believers came from far off areas of the Arab and

¹⁷ Abu Hurayrah, *Translation of Sunan Abu Dawud: Knowledge (Kitab Al-Ilm)*, Book 25, Number 3656. [Available at: <http://www.biharanjuman.org/hadith/sunan-abu-dawud-english.pdf> (Accessed on August 10, 2016)]

¹⁸ Al-Qur’ān, Al-Baqarah:154

they remained in the company of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to seek guidance and learn Islamic values and practices of life. The number of Ashab-e-Suffah had been increasing and decreasing from time to time. After learning Holy Qur'an, and fundamental beliefs of Islam and traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) directly by HIM (PBUH) they went back and taught the same to those who could not come to the *Suffah*. In those days it was a popular method of learning and preaching to spread Islam.

The Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon were the curricula offered to the Ashab-e-Suffah. Teaching was based on andragogy and its basic principles; whereas, functional approach of modern adult education became the main tool of teaching to *Ashab-e-Suffah*. Similarly, oral (lecture) method, demonstration, question answer, learning by doing, cooperative and group activities, and enquiry methods of teaching and learning were used.

The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained the concepts in an elaborative way with examples from the real life and physical world for better understanding of the followers. He (PBUH) also used to answer the questions of His followers. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) presented the Islamic concepts to believers according their level of understanding and mental capacity. They were taught the basic concepts of Islam and Islamic Values. They were taught life skills to live a peaceful life according the principles of the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet (PBUH). The new concepts were explained through demonstration and activities what we say andragogy in the modern world –the art and science of teaching adults. Forgiveness and affection were the essence of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The main focus of the Teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) was on the character building and attitude formation. Similarly, He (PBUH) taught how to fulfill the rights of other human being (Haqooq-ul-Ibad), animal rights (Haqooqs of animals), dealing in trades of goods, and developing and maintaining good relationships with neighbors and even with non-believers. There are different examples in the Holy Life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which provide guidance to the human beings to live a balanced life for the success of this and afterword world.

Later on the Muslim Khalifas and rulers adopted the same tradition of education during their respective regimes by blending with the then modern concepts but in the light of the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This practice

remained for centuries and the Muslims used to get inspiration and spiritual guidance from the SEERAT (*the life practices*) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This system of education was so successful that Hisham Nashabe⁽¹⁹⁾ recommended it for modern world by asserting;

"in recent years, due mainly to the special attention that education is receiving at the national and international levels, and as a result of the growing dissatisfaction with the ability of modern educational methods and institutions to cope, either qualitatively or quantitatively, with the educational situation and needs of the world today, some scholars have begun to study the basic educational concepts and practices of past civilizations with the intention of rendering a service to scholarship, and also with the hope of finding some inspiration which could be of value for the renovation of modern education".

In modern age which is regarded as the age of innovations and inventions^{(20), (21)}, the Islamic system of education has its own status and place amongst the various systems of education implemented in the world. It accommodates all individuals of the society without any material or monetary benefits and discrimination. Nonetheless, it provides food and accommodation to the knowledge seekers (students or/ learners) free of cost. It is a non-formal system of education particularly crafted for adults and children to benefitting them equally. No system of education still can compete this voluntarily run system of education. The curriculum consists of religious (Qur'an and Hadith) as well as modern subjects like computer and information technology blended with medicine/ Hikmat and other income generating skills. It makes the graduates (Ulama) capable of earning their livelihood in a respectable way. Philosophy, logic and modern languages along with other allied subjects are offered to the graduates. Character building and personality development are specially taken care of along with social learning, etiquettes

¹⁹ Hisham Nashabe, *Muslim educational institutions: a general survey followed by a monographic study of al-Madrasah al-Mustansiriyah in Baghdad*, (Beirut: Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association, Institute of Islamic Studies, 1989).

²⁰ Op. cit, Hussain, 2005.

²¹ Hussain, Irshad, and Sultan, Sartwat, *Learning by Doing: Learning by Doing: Outcomes of Teaching a Research Course through Group Activities*. In Proceedings of the Annual International Conference on Computer Science Education: Innovation & Technology (CSEIT) 2010. Published and Organized by the Global Science and Technology Forum (GSTF), (Singapore –December 6-7, 2010).

and development of communication skills. According to Badawi⁽²²⁾ “Muslim educators unanimously agree that the purpose of education is not to cram the pupil's minds with facts but to prepare them for a life of purity and sincerity. The total commitment to character building based on the ideals of Islamic ethnics is the highest goal of Islamic Education”.

Conclusion:

Adult education has appeared as an established norm for educating adults. It started with the advent of Islam and all of the followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) were adults during the early days of the Islam. Likewise, Ashab-e-Suffah were also adults who used to come to the Masjid-e-Nabwi for seeking guidance and knowledge of Islam from the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). There they learned the knowledge of Islam and life skills according to the principles of the Islam and Islamic Values. Understanding and mental level of the followers were considered during preaching and teaching. Similarly, demonstration, learning by doing and activities were the main methods of teaching; which is known as andragogy in the modern world today. Therefore, one may say that adult education even in the 21st century's modern world is based on the philosophy of Islamic Education system.

²² Badawi, Abd ar-Rahman, (ed.), *Kitab al- Akhlaq*. (Kuwait: 1979).