

# Revisiting Al-Ghazali's Pedagogy: A Conceptual Analysis of His Educational Principles

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## INTRODUCTION

Al Ghazali represents the Islamic leaders with great influence in the progress of education in the world. Education is vital to human life today, most specifically in the era of globalization where there are rapid changes in values and structures related to humans. Sheikh & Ali, (2019) contends that life without education is impossible. That, education is a necessity in these changing times. Imam Al Ghazali, apart from being a scholar, gives his view on education. From his perspective, education is an interaction between the teacher and student which continues to grow gradually, developmentally to build a harmonious and conclusive relationship with God for spiritual benefit and happiness. Al Ghazali's philosophy cuts across the Islamic thinking on education where he inclines towards a reconciliation and integration of intellectual schools. He combines legal, philosophical and mystical thinking.

In Al Ghazali's opinion, education does not have to require the student to obey the teacher under any condition, but is obligated to obey if it does not conflict with the commands of Allah. He also requires teachers to always follow the commands because they are to set examples. Actually, according to Al Ghazali, education should prioritize various matters that are fully realized and integrated because the concept of education is connected to Islamic teachings and traditions that uphold the principles of education. In the world of human education, imam Al Ghazali plays a critical role. this paper therefore examines the concepts of education in Al Ghazali's opinion and his principles. His view on education expresses his thinking as it favors continuity and stability over change and innovation.

This article focuses on the principles of education as articulated by Al-Ghazali. It is a synthesis of the theory of education that builds the moral, intellectual, behavioral and physical aspect of an individual. Through the Islamic thinking analyzed, Al Ghazali presents an integration of aspects to develop the concept of education in the Islamic concept. The ideas in this article are well brought out to enhance the understanding of the philosophy of education by Al Ghazali. The presentation of pedagogic techniques in a school set up help in achieving the main purpose of education and integrated roles of teachers help in bringing up a morally upright and helpful individual.

## PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATION

### The concept of Knowledge

To start with, Al Ghazali mentions that knowledge and awareness are the most important virtues of man. He teaches that education was necessary to allow man to follow the laws of Allah. That man would isolate himself from evil and rely on God. According to him, religious sciences are more superior to other forms of sciences. The ultimate knowledge in Al Ghazali's opinion is to know God. This should serve happiness to man. The knowledge of God is seen as the only true knowledge. Knowledge is classified severally based on nature, origin., effects and purpose.

Nature; Theoretical- pertains theology and religion

Practical- pertains politics ethics and family issues

Origin; Revealed- talks of morals and customs

Rational- deals with natural science

Effects; Cursed- relating to black magic

Right – relates to the soul of man

Purpose; Knowledge of transactions – pertains actions, behavior and conduct

Knowledge of unveiling- discovering the comprehension of reality of things.

Al Ghazali asserts that the more one understands the knowledge of God, the more one is near to God. The fruit of knowledge draws us closer to Allah. As such, education plays a major role in gaining knowledge and comprehending the existence of Allah. In his book of knowledge, (Al Ghazali, 1962) the role of students is to purify their spirits by staying free of bad habits. To become a vessel of knowledge, they ought to be free of evil. They ought to stay away from worldly affairs.

Additionally, students should never consider themselves superior to their teachers instead they should believe the knowledge passed to them. They should trust the counselling of their teachers. Since all branches of knowledge complement each other, they also should get knowledge of all scientific approaches. The only primary goal is to attain virtues and get near to God. Knowledge is practical and in turn requires humans to comprehend the ultimate aim of knowledge. To understand the difference between evil and good (Lone, 2017). Teaching is an art and comprises of all types of knowledge and skills. The skills should be functional and effective in practice. Through this concept, the proficiency of learning is addressed through the aim of embracing the right habits rather than just passing information.

Ultimately, knowledge is disseminated through a correct learning approach. The relationship that exists between teachers and students is vital for imparting knowledge correctly. The educational environment will most likely determine what happens. A teacher will complement knowledge with physical activities to enhance understanding. For instance, the differences in character and ability of every learner requires a teacher to deal with each one accordingly. When a specific skill is required, it should be taught such that the skill is functional. Al Ghazali reaffirms that a scholar functions to seek the truth and impart it in others. Anyone who learns, has a duty to teach. Teachers are indispensable and should practice what they teach. They should act as an example to their students and most importantly disseminate knowledge to keep them raise awareness of what is required.

### **Education as a means to abide by Sharia Laws**

Al Ghazali states the purpose of education is to cultivate man to abide by *sharia* laws. The teaching of religion aims at man experiencing happiness close to God. Through this, man is assured of salvation and happiness in eternal life. According to Al Ghazali, the aim of education is to prepare man to follow the teachings of God and assure salvation and happiness in life thereafter. He assures that nearness to God is a fruit of knowledge. As such, eternal salvation is the biggest achievement by man and this is only possible through seeking knowledge as an aim of education. Al Ghazali asserts that education leads humans to the realization of the existence of Allah in order to abide by his laws (Al Ghazali, 1962). The goal of man is to be happy and be close to God. This helps the society build progress in the concept of knowledge.

While education is a technique in itself, the principle of Al Ghazali discusses about the relationship of God and mankind. It gives a clear perception of God, the world and life. Through education, learners understand the details of what they are required of. The religious personality of an individual is nurtured through the cultivated character. In Al Ghazali's view, human beings are not virtuous in nature. The society is evil to an extent that the good is outweighed. It is subject to the guidance of God and have no choice other than to obey. To uphold religion therefore, affords individuals the opportunity of adoring him. Whoever turns down the society and worldly goals including wealth, power expresses obedience.

According to Al Ghazali, spiritual consciousness is vital for education to take place. If man cannot obey the law, then he cannot be happy. Without the understanding of his existence, we cannot make to follow His laws. To perceive how the world is ruled by Allah and to abide by his laws is one thing, while to be an intellect and not honor is existence is another. Al Ghazali therefore advises on children to be taught about God from the elementary stage. They should not necessarily understand at that point but through their gradual development, they learn. Through this, they develop their character accordingly and correctly. They learn to respect the law. If at a young age they are aware, they therefore grow up to individuals of substance. They grow up upright in character and logically complemented.

### **The concept of character and moral development**

As argued, man is born as *tabula rasa* on a clean slate and acquire personality through their surroundings. The environment in which one lives in determines their behavior (Watt, 1963). Education is a responsibility on the parents. Childhood, builds the character of an individual. Therefore, good character is dependent on good upbringing while bad character relates to bad upbringing. To understand this phase of life and deal with the child effectively is vital for their upbringing. Education extensively involves aspects of religion, moral, intellectual and physical disposition of a learner. The philosophy by Al Ghazali on education assures that moral education is fundamental in educational aims. Through the parents, teachers and peers, moral development is built differently. Students can only gain knowledge if their spirit is freed of bad habits and other malpractices. Worldly affairs and ties will pull them away from seeking understanding.

Therefore, a student's own effort and character is vital for moral development. As it is assured by Al Ghazali, the aim of education works in line with the aim of life. Thus, the curriculum should teach students how to live as individuals and in the society. Where the curriculum is *Farz-e-Ain* (Obligatory), the aim is to nurture the behavioral aspect in learners. Childhood is an entity that fully depends on the environment for their social life. In life, both the family and the school are tasked with the role of teaching children language, morals and behavior. Childhood is a phase for character formation. In regard of this, Al Ghazali describes the role of teachers as a motivation for the elementary phase and realization of interests at these stages. Interests are developed in stages of (i) physical movement, (ii) sex and emotional relations, (iii) freedom and leadership and (iv) knowledge and intellectual exploration (Al Ghazali, 1980). Education therefore builds inner motivations, desires and learner motivations as inferred by Al Ghazali. As such, education is only possible through active engagement of learners. Teachers are a source of information and learners absorb the knowledge. Most importantly, allowing a learner to experience life outside a classroom.

For Al-Ghazali, students that show good morals, are obedient and interact well should be rewarded in ways that make them motivated as in 'public honor and praise' to encourage their colleagues. In addition, infants should learn morals at a young age. Al Ghazali discusses that skills should be introduced from low-level skills to higher levels gradually. This approach supports the principle of learner responsibility and challenging content taught at higher education levels. Learning should be focused on the concepts and practices and settles down to the idea that higher education should necessitate challenges and liability on the learner's side. Al Ghazali suggests that boys should join elementary school to learn the Koran and should not access love poetry because it sows corruption (Al Ghazali, 1980). This means that what is learnt at an early stage is engraved. They cannot escape what they have learnt.

### **The interactive nature of education**

Education in Al Ghazali's view focuses on both the learner and teacher equally. In his opinion, education is a form of interaction for both to benefit. He highlights the environment in which learning takes place as a condition to imparting knowledge. The life of a student is fundamental in the practice of learning. To honor diversity in classrooms is a task to promote the best of learning. Al Ghazali's principles states that to deal with this aspect is core to a meritable learning process. The comfort of a learner in class is paramount, and to understand how they react to race, religion, social class and gender topics is central to teaching. For learners, they should obey and respect their teachers. Teachers should be considered a role model and a virtuous example. The teacher is portrayed as not only a source of knowledge but also a facilitator and a mentor.

Al Ghazali is concerned about the intellectual side of teaching where the teacher should think about both their subjects and learners. Interacting with the student will require teachers to deal with learner's differences and pay close concentration to psychological changes through age, physical and intellectual capability from child to adult stages (Hourani, 1984). This requires the teacher to know the student's learning styles. Religious sciences for Al Ghazali is the ultimate and most noble study as they lead man to God. The pedagogic techniques are important. Most importantly learning is productive when its more practical. In the theory, learning makes the teacher a coach. Teachers and scholars are extraordinarily vital in Al Ghazali's principles of education. In this regard, teacher-student relationships predict how enjoyable learning is.

In reality, education is achieved through the application of reason and logic linked to spiritual knowledge. For both, education must be provided equally. It is an all-encompassing influence since Islamic education serves as a blueprint for the individual and the society as a primary source of knowledge. It is regarded as an all-round process that involves the social, spiritual and rational aspects of an individual. From an Islamic perspective therefore, to favor reason and logic (intellectual knowledge) alone is inadequate in instilling elements of love, kindness, generosity and compassion which are spiritual and are acquired by spiritual training. In my opinion, education should couple up all dimensions of an individual's character. Teachers act as role models and should impart both intellectual and spiritual knowledge to learners. They should link the spiritual virtues to real-life practice. Thus, it is true to say that education should equally benefit all. It should stimulate both logic and spiritual consciousness.

### **Implication of Al-Ghazali's Principle of education**

Al-Ghazali makes a recommendation on the idea of proficiency in learning. according to him, learning should not continue without assurance of mastery of content in the previous topic. Teachers should ensure that a student mastered the concept in the first matter before proceeding. Teachers should be attentive to the interaction of knowledge with reality. A sustainable approach of teaching is to link situations with the knowledge and skills in class. With regards to religious education, Al-Ghazali suggests an introduction of the core aspects of religion through inculcation and memorization and at a subsequent stage, explanation should be made. As in this theory, education is not a mere process of imparting knowledge and skills. It is rather a whole process of interaction between teachers and learners to gain merit for instructing and the learners improve on their knowledge. Education is a key for aligning young minds and society ideologies.

Al-Ghazali divided his curriculum to Obligatory and Optional (*Farz-e-Kifaya*). Through the *Farz-e-Kifaya* part of education, one could earn a living as it is associated with the economic and practical part. The primary goal of humans being to fulfill the obligation of having to feed their families as required by *Sharia* laws, education is fundamental to earning a livelihood (Karim, 1993). The amount of knowledge acquired in class would help in achieving the aforementioned goal. Therefore, the ability of man to earn a living is abiding by the laws of God. In Al Ghazali's era, students were allowed to choose the subjects they wanted to study. The curriculum therefore accommodated skills that support the aim of life and complements aims of education. From a content point of view, students are taught how to live in the society, as members of the Islam community. Their behavioral factor is developed accordingly through moral development at an elementary stage. As well, essential knowledge is imparted to the practicality of skills to enhance outcomes.

### **CONCLUSION**

Conclusively, education in Al Ghazali's perspective should be linked to the aim of life. Activities in school should be tailored from the aims and objectives of education. In support of this, the main objective of education is creating a comprehension of ideas and facilitating the achievement of the purpose of life according to Allah and not contrary to it. The process of education should nurture individuals towards a conscious realization of the creator and obey his laws. In my opinion, I agree with Al Ghazali on the concept that an individual's behavior is predicted by the environment. To create an environment where ideas are parallel to the aims of education is therefore fundamental to human survival. Humans are expected to fulfil learning and put it in practice. Education involves a whole personality of an individual and therefore, every aspect of moral, intellectual or physical personality is cultivated in learning.

In the Islamic world, the theory of education lays out the means to achieving objectives. To every seeker of knowledge, education is key to an understanding of what life entails. It is aimed at achieving satisfaction and attaining true happiness; the happiness that comes with being close to Allah. Learning has its value and Al Ghazali has reflected on the Islamic thinking on education. In addition to this, the importance of learning environment nurtures character in individuals to face real life circumstances. The objectives of an education structures in AlGhazali's principle is inclusive and diverse.

From a holistic viewpoint, education is defined in detail by Al Ghazali. The aims, objectives and function of education in the Islamic thinking. He supports passionate seeking of learning from the learner's side coupled up with the passionate delivering of instructions from the teacher's side. It outlines its objectives clearly and links to the objectives of life. To achieve the purpose of life, we ought to submit to Allah as Al Ghazali suggests that education should lead humans towards the consciousness of God so that they obey His laws. He pushes for the achievement of the aims of Islamic education and the realization of skills that build an individual.

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