An Islamic Perspective on the Role of Education in Responding to Social Issues Among Students in Malaysia

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In meeting its economic, social, and political goals, Malaysia and many other countries are challenged with the rise of social problems among their citizens. Being an Islamic country, the question of the role of religion in shaping good behavior has been an issue of concern. In spite of religion, education is seen as a significant instrument to tackle this social issue. The aim of this article is to highlight an Islamic perspective on the role of education in responding to social issues among students. This paper begins with philosophical discussion on the purpose and the meaning of education. Further discussion is on the three aspects inherent to the concept of education, i.e., the man, the content, and the method, is explained. To conclude, several suggestions are recommended to strengthen the existing educational system in Malaysia.

Keywords: concept of education, social issues, knowledge, Islamic education

Introduction

The emergence of science and technology has positive and negative effect. The positive effect, such as innovation in science and technology, has transformed human beings into a better life and has accelerated their activities and productivities. Nevertheless, the negative effects of modern life are rapidly accelerating. The rapid development and innovation of technology has exerted a great influence upon the pattern of human interaction, and has resulted in the changes of interpersonal and intergroup relations. Technology has connected people more closely, yet technology also has brought into the traditional culture a new wave of other cultures, which has somehow impacted the values. As a result, individuals have been very busy with their own matters and they no longer pay much care and concern about other people. This is as reflective as what has happened in the community when a "single collective religious identity" seems to fragment due to the development of communication (Ameli, 2002) and also decline in religious values, tradition, and belief (Patrick & Joseph, 2007; Sergio, 2003; Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2004). This has reflected the various potential ways leading to youth behavioral problems. Azhar and Nasir (2010) held the behavioral problem of modern youth is mainly because human identities and characteristic are converted into machines of consumption, feeding the desires of our bodies, but always to the detriment of the true desires of our souls, which has led us to a "moral and spiritual void", resulting in a state of human disequilibrium. Though the emergence of science and technology is not opposed to Islam, its conception that void of religion is contradicted with Islamic worldview (Malik, 2000). In Islam, religion is a way of life that educates man to be good. Therefore, education is indeed pivotal. Education aims at modification of human behavior in the light of Islamic virtues.

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The Concept of Education in Islam

The concept of education in Islam can be divided into its purpose and its meaning. In general, the purpose of education is to serve only to God (Abdullah, 1989)[1]. As God is divined and he loves all the goodness, man should be good too. On this point, many Muslim scholars (Hadi, 1979; Al-Attas, 1991) referred man as "the image of God" (vicegerent of God), because he partaked the transcendence of God. In this respect, man is being created to comprehend all the qualities of God. Therefore, the main aim of education in Islam is to produce a good man. The description of good man can be categorized into two dimensions. The first dimension is about the relationship between man and his creator, and the second is his relationship with others. The good man in the first dimension is the one who is sincerely conscious of his responsibilities towards the true God, recognizes the power and the unity of God, and creates God-consciousness in his soul (Hadi, 1979; Bidmos, 1994; Al-Taftazani, 1986; Al-Attas, 1991). In practical, he is the one who fulfills the essential elements in Islam, such as five times daily prayer, fasting during the "ramadhan" and pilgrimage in Mecca and also observe the regulations of Islamic rules in all their actions. In spite of fulfilling his responsibilities to himself, man is obliged to maintain friendly relationship with other creatures with justice (Bidmos, 1984; Al-Taftazani, 1986). This is the second dimension of good man. God likes man who respects the dignity of his brother and always invites others to goodness (Abdullah, 1989)[2].

The second purpose of education in Islam is to harmonize between the good (divine) and the bad (evil) qualities in the human soul. The main aim of harmonizing these two elements is to ensure a balance development of the body, the mind, and the soul of individual (Bidmos, 1984; Hassan, 1983). Al-Attas described a good man is when he constantly strives to improve every aspect of his inner self towards perfection as a man of "adab" (good manner) (Wan Mohd Nor, 1998). In relation, there are three different potentialities governed the human soul which represent the good and the bad qualities. The first potential is "nafs al-ammarah", the root of all blameworthy qualities (evil). If this blameworthy quality is stronger and more powerful than the divine (good) elements, human soul will be subservient to evil and follow the lust, which will affect his behavior and action. On the other hand, if the divine (good) elements are stronger and highly conscious of God, they will be able to instruct the evil soul to submit to the goodness. Thus, all the blameworthy qualities are substituted with goodness, and tranquility will finally exist in the human soul. This potentiality is called nafs al-mutamainnah. The third potentiality is nafs al-lawwamah, which is midway between the evil potentiality of nafs al-ammmarah and the good elements. This soul is always unconscious except when it is illuminated by the light of the goodness and later on becomes conscious (Al-Ghazali, 1998a). In this situation, self-discipline and spiritual training are significant in disciplining the soul to the goodness.

The second aspect in the concept of education in Islam is its meaning, which referres to the terminological and philosophical point of view. According to Al-Attas (Wan Mohd Nor, 1998), the meaning of education in its totality is inherent in the connotations term "tarbiyyah", "ta'lim", and "ta'dib" taken altogether. Though all terms refer to education, ta'dib is more accurate and precise in interpreting the concept of education. Ta'lim means to instruct, to teach, to train, to school, and to educate[3], which contains elements of knowledge and

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[1] God says, "I have only created *Jinns* and men, that they may serve Me. No sustenance do I require of them, not do I require that they should feed Me" (Surah al-Dhariyat, 51:56-57).
[2] See Surah Al-Imran, 3:104.
[3] Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic Edition*. J. Milton Cowan, 3rd printing (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban), 1980, 636 (Hereafter, as cited in a dictionary).

schooling. Tarbiyyah means to nurture, to bear, to feed, to foster, to nourish, to cause to increase growth, to rear, and to bring forth to mature produce (Al-Attas, 1991). However, tarbiyyah is not adequate to convey the meaning of education from its terminological point of view. This is because its meaning is not only applied to man, but also to other species such as animal, minerals, and plants (Al-Attas, 1991). The focus of tarbiyyah is more on physical and emotional aspect of man. Therefore, ta'dib (root word: "addaba") which means to refine, to educate, to discipline, to punish, and to chastise (Wehr, 1980), is more appropriate to denote education, as its meaning conveys the process of educating man intellectually, spiritually, and socially. Moreover, its meaning is already, including tarbiyyah, ta'lim, and also knowledge or the content[4] (Al-Taftazani, 1986; Bidmos, 1984).The word ta'dib is also used by the prophet (pbuh) when he says, "My Lord educated (addaba) me, and made my education (ta'dib) most excellent" (Al-Ghazali, 1998a) Based on this hadith, the fun damental element inherent in the concept of education in Islam is to inculcate adab to individual. Hence, what is the meaning of adab and how it relates to education? Adab in its original sense means invitation to a banquet which implies the idea of a good and honorable social intercourse. In this case, adab is about disciplining the mind and soul. It is also about acquisition of good qualities and attributes of the mind and soul, so that individual can differentiate between: good and bad; right and wrong; and true and false (Al-Attas, 1979). In conclusion, ta'dib according to Al-Attas is referred to a process of instilling something into human beings and inculcation of adab in man. Three elements inherent in the concept of ta'dib, i.e., the method or education (refers to "a process of instilling"), a content (refers to "something"), and recipient (refers to "human beings") (Al-Attas, 1991). The discussion of these elements is as follows:

The Man

Man is constituted of the body and the soul. The body and the soul are very closely interrelated. Nevertheless, the real essence that gears the physical body to function is the soul. Man is also known as a rational being. The rational or "aql" distinguished man from other beings. The real nature of aql is that it is a spiritual substances by which the rational soul recognizes and distinguishes truth from falsehood (Al-Ghazali, 1998a; Al-Attas, 1991). Rationality in man refers to the capacity for understanding speech, and the power responsible for the formulation of meanings (which involves judgment, discrimination, distinction, and clarification), and articulation of expressions in meaningful pattern (Al-Attas, 1991). In relation, the development of human intellect depends upon the internal and external senses. There are five external senses in the developmental order of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch, respectively. The function of the external senses is to perceive objects or things in the external world. On the other hand, there are also five internal senses. These internal senses perceived internally the sensual images and their meanings, combined or separated them, conceived notions of them, preserved the conceptions, hence conceived and formed intellection of them. Unlike the external senses, these internal senses do not have specific sense organs, but they are naturally intellectual and connected with the physical intermediaries. Their function is localized in the anterior, posterior, and middle regions of the brain (Al-Attas, 1991; Muhammad, 1992).

The Content

The content refers to knowledge ("ilm"). As human soul from the very beginning has been equipped with the knowledge of God, seeking knowledge is an important attributes of man. Because of knowledge, teaching

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[4] Concept of Education, 26.

and learning becomes meaningful and reasonable. Knowledge from modern conception is something that can be proven by human reason and known in the scientific and empirical investigation (Feibleman, 1999). It is something that can be experienced by man and can be grasped by human reason. However, in Islam, all the invisible aspects, such as values and religion are part of knowledge. Therefore, knowledge from Islamic point of view is "the arrival in the soul of the meaning of a thing". The "meaning of a thing" is the right meaning of it obtained from the Holy Qur'an (Al-Attas, 1991).

Knowledge is divided into "fard 'ayn" and "fard kifayah". The former is referred to the knowledge of Oneness of God (tawhid) which also encompasses the fundamental principles in religion. This kind of knowledge can be acquired by man through his acts of worship and devotion. His worship to God depends on God's grace and his own latent spiritual power and capacity created by God to receive it (Al-Ghazali, 1998b; Al-Attas, 1978). Man receives this knowledge by direct insight or spiritual savoring (dhawq) and unveiling to his spiritual vision (kashf). This knowledge is referring to the highest knowledge ("makrifah"). It is considered as the highest knowledge, because it gives insight into knowledge of God or the knowledge of the truth (Al-Attas, 1995). Hence, it is obligatory (fard'ayn) to every Muslim man and woman to learn it. The second is the knowledge which is obligatory to some Muslims only. It can be divided into religious (shar'iyyah) and non-religious (ghayr syar'iyyah). The religious sciences are derived from the Prophets (pbuh), while the non-religious sciences are acquired through reasoning and experimentation. This kind of knowledge which can be acquired through intellectual and bodily faculties in man is discursive and deductive (Al-Ghazali, 1998b; Al-Attas, 1978). Knowledge is unlimited. However, man's nature, capacity, lifespan, and needs are limited. He, hence, needs to limit his personal acquisition of knowledge. It is neither desirable nor possible for an individual to acquire all the sciences. However, the Muslim community should organize its educational system, so that all the sciences and also the religious virtues can be studied and applied as well as can be expanded all over the world (Wan Mohd Nor, 1998). For this reason, this kind of knowledge is obligatory upon only some individuals in the community (fard kifayah). Nevertheless, this category of knowledge should be guided by the former one, which is the true knowledge.

The Method

Educational process is related to disciplining the physical and spiritual aspects of an individual which involves in acquisition of knowledge and transformation of his personality. When knowledge is transferred to man, not only the mind-set changes, but also the behavior and character are affected. The thinking ability will respond to an affective domain and results to the way of doing things (Sidek, 2009). This process entails spiritual struggle ("mujahadah") and discipline ("riyadah"). These two activities will lead towards purification of the soul and refinement of character ("tahdhib al-akhlaq"). In educating young children, self-discipline is indeed important. Self-discipline means a training to inculcate good traits in the soul through simple and continuous practice and finally with intense struggle until good action is manifested (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Al-Miskawayh, 1968). Since the faculty of desire is the first to appear in childhood period, disciplining the child at this stage is aimed at preserving the balance and moderate between the excess and deficiency of his faculty. Thus, the child especially at the discernment age should be supervised carefully. The first trait to be controlled is the greed for food (Al-Ghazali, 1995).

In disciplinary process, punishment is inevitable. Mild physical punishment will be imposed as soon as the child reaches seven years of age, particularly in the case of leaving his daily prayers. The intention of

punishment is to accustom a child to his religious duty (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Al-Miskawayh, 1968). Formal education for young children is started when he/she approaches seven years old, whereby his discernment faculty is emerging. At this phase, the teachers or tutors are given full authority to supervise the child in terms of his action and his conduct as well as to teach him knowledge. The teacher will be more concerned with the child's cognitive development through instruction and transmission of knowledge, while the parents will get involved in its practical application. The parents will take a responsibility to ensure that their child will consistently perform the five fundamental rituals in Islam (Al-Ghazali, 1995). Learning, according to Al-Ghazali (1995), is a process of recollecting our own identity. He referred to the soul in the situation when it was struggling to get rid from the evil domination and deviant from God. When the faculty of reason has been successful in subjugating the soul and brings it back to the truth, it is actually the process of recollecting its identity (Muhammad, 1978). Therefore, the acquisition of knowledge indeed begins with inner purification, whereby the child needs to be taught to purify his soul from vices and blameworthy qualities which is doomed inside the evil tendency.

Socialization is another method in educating young children by associating with a right companion. Parental authority at this stage is crucially important in determining the peer group for their child to mingle with. He should be prevented from playmates or peers who could influence him in contrary to what has been taught by his parents, from those who talk nonsense, who curse and insult others; and from mixing with children who are accustomed to luxurious and comfort life (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Al-Miskawayh, 1968). As the process of learning during childhood period is developed through perception and imagination, a child inclines to imitate what he perceives and listen as well as imitate their heroes and heroines from the Medias. In this case, good examples from parents, teachers, and other authorities in community are ultimately important. Likewise, electronic Medias, such as television, Internet, and radios should play their social role in promoting valuable programs and inculcating good values for the young children. Therefore, Al-Ghazali (1995) and Al-Miskawayhy (1968) reminded parents not to allow their children to listen to the amusement that could stimulate his desire, such as poem which deals with lover and passion. This is because it would implant the seeds of corruption in their heart. On the other hand, listening to the melodious recital of the Qur'an which contains of beautiful words and wisdom are good to strengthening the soul and inculcating good character trait of the children.

The Role of Education in Islam *vs.* Malaysian Educational System

Education in this modern world not only gives students a sound intellectual, but also must respond to and satisfy their social, emotional, and spiritual needs. Malaysian educational system today, especially the designation of the curriculum focuses on the cognitive aspect of the learner and to develop the capable human resource for the industries. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge is about having a good result in examination and employs a good job in the future. This situation has caused a deficiency in inner purification and emotional stability, which is the main aim in education (Hadi, 1979). The emphasis on cognitive or rational dimension solely is inadequate, because intelligent is not resided in the human brain. Muslim philosophers, such as Al-Ghazali (1998a) and Ibn Sina (Muhammad, 1992), held intelligent is resided in the heart. Their argumentation is based on several verses (Abdullah, 1989)[5], which implied the potentiality of human intellect in the heart. To improve human heart is by learning and understanding wholeheartedly his "curriculum", which

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[5] Surah Qaf, 50:37; Surah al-Munafiqun, 63:3; Surah al-Naml, 27:46.

is the Holy Qur'an. As God is the creator of the universe, he has designed a very appropriate curriculum to all mankind which embedded in the Qur'an. It is mentioned in the Qur'an that God taught Adam all the names of the things then presented it to the angels (Abdullah, 1989)[6]. Therefore, his curriculum (the Qur'an) should be the first subject to be taught and the Sunnah of his messenger as a second subject.

The content of the Qur'an encompasses all aspects of human life: the knowledge of sciences and universe; the history of the past and other civilization; the knowledge of mathematics and jurisprudence; the psychology of human beings, and so forth (Abdullah, 1989). The Sunnah is the tradition of the Prophet is regarded as the second source of knowledge in Islam. It encompasses the saying of the Prophet, his action, his silent, and his approval of the actions of others. Its function is to explain and interpret some of the ambiguous verses or command in the Qur'an, such as the way to perform prayer (salat) or the way to perform pilgrimage. Qur'an has been the main subject in traditional education. For example, in traditional Malay education, Qu'ran has been taught to the children at very early age. The children will stay with their religious teacher for a certain period or years to study the sciences of Qur'an, Arabic language, and also the essential of Islam until they graduated. As part of their informal training, the children were trained to be independent and habituated with interpersonal skills training, such as cooking and laundry (Abdullah, 1970).

The current Malaysian educational system should emphasize religious sciences, which is fundamental and "fard 'ayn" (obligatory). The religious science encompasses the studying of Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the jurisprudence, theology, Islamic metaphysics, and linguistic sciences should be inculcate at every level: primary, secondary, and pre-university and university level. Its content and scope should be designed in gradations as befitting each level (Al-Attas, 1991). This rudimentary knowledge is crucial for our young generation in responding to modern and post-modern challenges. Though it might be difficult for some young Muslims to mastery these subjects, but not so to acquire a rudimentary knowledge of these traditions (Seyyed, 1993).The second focus is on fard kifayah (acquired knowledge). It encompasses the human sciences, the natural sciences, the applied sciences, and technology sciences. The teaching of these subjects must be imbued with Islamic elements and key concepts. Besides these subjects, new disciplines must be added, such as comparative religion from the Islamic perspective, western cultures and civilization, linguistic sciences, and Islamic history. These new disciplines will ensure logical continuity and cohesion in the successive educational progression from religious sciences to the rational, intellectual, and philosophical sciences and "vise-versa" (Seyyed, 1993).

Amongst the main aim of education as drawn by ministry of education in Malaysia is to produce person with a balanced growth spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and bodily senses. To achieve this target, individual should love knowledge. Love of knowledge means an effort to seek knowledge not only through reading but also through discussing, researching, debating, or observation. The importance of knowledge has been emphasized clearly in the holy Qur'an (Abdullah, 1989)[7], when God urged men to read and to seek knowledge. It is reported that knowledge has played an important role in the emergence of the great civilization in the past, such as Islam and the Greek (Wan Mohd Nor, 2003). The effort of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companion in disseminating the knowledge of Islam all over the world is much appreciated when they have successfully changed and transformed the people from ignorance to the truth (Ahmad, 1983). Therefore, love of

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[6] Surah Baqarah, 2:29.
[7] Surah Al-Iqra', 96:1-4.

knowledge should be inculcated at a very young age through reading habit. Prior to that, it should be infused in the curriculum too, so that it can be discussed comprehensively. In the current Malaysian curriculum, love of knowledge has been integrated in the 16 values of the integrated curriculum for primary and secondary school. However, it is insufficient to explain the whole conception of love of knowledge (Wan Mohd Nor, 2003) particularly on the fundamental virtue (ummahat al-akhlaq), i.e., wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice (Al-Miskawayh, 1968). From the fundamental virtue, emerged other virtues, such as compassion, self-reliance, moderation, respect, love, freedom, cleanliness, honesty, diligence, co-operation, rationality, public spiritedness, and good morals as existed in the current Malaysian curriculum. Yet, these virtues were not explained comprehensively especially from philosophical point of view (Sidek, 2009). In this case, teaching method should be multiplied. To enhance moral consciousness among students, their moral reasoning should be stimulated in teaching and learning, such as through moral reasoning activities (Pushphavalli, 2009). Since values can be divided into values of being (such as courage, honesty, and discipline) and values of giving (such as respect, love, and loyal), outdoor exercise which is social based is profoundly important (Linda & Eyre, 1993).

The above discussion reveals Malaysian educational system is basically impersonal and teaching is just a profession rather than a vocation for developing knowledge or moral understanding. It is unfortunate that some of our teachers consider their professional function separate from any moral or ethical values. This perception contradicts with Islamic teachings that regard teachers as spiritual source as well as professional guidance. Thus, teacher's training program should be revised. The correct understanding of the concept of knowledge and the importance of ethics should be properly taught in the training program. Likewise, love of knowledge should be part of teacher's training program.

Conclusions

Education has always been a major agenda in child's development program, as it can bring about social, emotional, and spiritual change towards better quality of life. The foregoing discussion is a humble attempt to clarify, according to Islamic, perspective the role of education in responding to social issues among students. By highlighting the concept of education in Islam, it is no doubt that education at every level in Malaysia should be revised and strengthened. Despite focusing on content and method, the correct understanding on the concept of knowledge and the teaching and learning approach should be improvised. Aside of teachers and school authority, parents play an important role in education. Since parents certainly know their children better, it is very beneficial if they can involve in their children's education in particular monitoring their social life.

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