ACQUANTING A CHILD WITH HIS IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT IS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING ACCORDING TO ISLAMIC TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

An adage says that the mother is a school. With the help and sponsorship of the father, she provides everything the child needs in his nascent life. Immediately he matures in into sensitivity he finds no other associate but these two people. They nurture and shape the child's overall development. Prophet Muhammad had likened the parent with a shepherd in the tender care he devote to his herd. If the parent are really the caring type they teach him and tell him anything he should know as well as the security he requires. If they are not then Prophet Muhammad asserts that it is enough a crime for one to neglect his ward. When we care, rear and nurture our children are we then ready to release them and forfeit them? Are we going to keep them and preserve them? Scholars of olden generation and of newer ones have raised the alarm of the trend of dehumanization staged right from the colonial era. Over the years, it has taken multifarious fashions but still maintaining the tempo. It is hoped that the human entity tagged as a Nigerian would one day join the free world and attain the peak of modern civilization directly through his culture and language and not through someone else’s.

1. Introduction

In the words of Qur’an, This Qur’an guides unto the best. This means that whatever you set out to do Qur’anic guidance envelopes it. The issue of child learning is obviously among the themes tackled by the Qur’an by lying the general principle as is as it is its characteristics for example it instructed the Muslim to instruct his ward to pray and then to persevere over this affair. Qur’an has complete down the precepts of goodly life backed by the exemplary conduct of the Prophet of Islam. Each member of the society is expected to perform his/her role to make sure that right conduct is being adhered to. Family life present an ideal prototype community where these precepts would be put into practice. Each family reserves the right to device his modus operandi of conducting its affairs provided it hold unto the principle of good living. The Qur’an advises thus

But seek the abode of the Hereafter in that which Allah hath given thee and neglect not thy portion of the world, and be thou kind even as Allah hath been kind to thee, and seek not corruption in the earth; lo! Allah love not corrupters 28:77

Islam with its institutions is now losing ground for secularism under the guise of modernism it is this battle that is raging from within and from without that education which is the fruit of life must be separated from religion because simply because secularism is the order of the day. The contention is that Islam must discard its values and adopt secular values, which portrayed as liberal education. In fact, secular education is the most illiberal type of education. An argument is here been presented that Islamic moral ethical values is not inimical to modernity or modern civilization, however, Islam can work to perfect modern civilization. So that the ethics in the above verse could be accomplished. Moreover, to a Muslim colonialism has not ended as long as he is not given free hand and enabling
environment and backing to educate his youngsters by the dictates of his religion and using his vernacular language.

1.1 Parent as shepherds

Parent generally consider children as a great divine endowment, in fact they are the fruit of the matrimonial togetherness. The Qur’an says, “Wealth and sons are allurements (joys) of the life of this world” Q18:46 Al-Hashimi (1999) says, but this depends on the children having good, solid upbringing which will make them respectful, kind and a source of happiness.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had in a famous tradition said: “All of you are shepherds and you will therefore be held responsible for the conduct of your flock. The Leader is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. A man is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. A woman is a shepherd in her matrimonial home and is responsible for what goes on in the house. A servant is a shepherd in the care of the wealth of his master and is responsible for that” (Bukhari No. 853). As regards, the import of this Prophetic declaration (Al-Hinn M.S. et al 2001) asserted that the Hadith teaches us three things: 1. In Islam responsibilities are accountable in the day of judgement, as it is also accountable and punishable in our life time in the court of law. 2. That responsibility in Islam involves everybody no matter how high or low his or her status may be. 3. That parent’s nurture and discipline of their children is the most important duty they should live up to and that there should be genuine concern in case of retrogression of the children’s character.

Nothing depicts the kind of concern that parents should have for their kids than the following verse: “O you who believe! Save yourselves and your family from a fire whose fuel is men and stones...” (Qur’an 66:6) This is obviously the peak of genuine love, affection and mercy. Therefore, the Muslim parent should live up to the following points: A. understand his great responsibility towards his children. B. Use the best methods in bringing them up by physically demonstrating his love and affection towards them. C. Spend on them, willingly and generously. Not discriminate between them in any way. F. Be alert to everything that may have negative influence on them. G. Instill good behavior and attitude in them. Actually, it is this type of ethical code that (Ibn Abi Zayd Al-Qayrawani) expresses in the following words: “Know, O Muslims! That the best of all human souls is the one, which is most advertent to virtue. Impeccable of all is the one that has not imbibed mischief. What the great scholars and pious people have been most concerned with is instilling good knowledge and virtuous character to the youngsters, in the hope that they will be sagacious and well acquainted with the requirement of their religion. After knowing their religion they will as well know all the duties expected of them, since teaching Qur’an to the young extinguishes the wrath of Allah. Likewise, learning something in childhood is tantamount to engraving figures on the stone.”

1.2 The paragon of virtue

After the migration of Prophet Muhammad to Madinah, the opportunity to deliver the divine revelation became ample. The whole life of the Prophet (PBUH) turned to be a code of law for the whole Muslims to emulate.

Allah Al-mighty informs as the paramount duty of the Prophet Muhammad thus:

> It is he who has sent amongst the unlettered, an apostle from among them to rehearse to them His signs, to sanctify them and to instruct them in scripture and wisdom, although they had been before, in manifest error. Q 62:1
This verse of the Qur'an describes three objectives of the prophet’s mission.

1. He explains Allah’s commandments and signs, and their rational interpretation to the people.
2. He teaches them the book and the wisdom in order to understand the purpose and objectives of the ability and power of a person to arrive at the right decision according to the law of Allah.
3. He purifies his followers’ hearts, actions, their notions of right and wrong, and develops good qualities, good morals and right actions in them. Purification of two fold significance. Firstly, it means purification of body and soul of all evils, and secondly, it means nourishment and development according to their own natural ability.

(Abdulkhaliq,A 1983) He was simple and humble, although he bestowed great care on his person. Abu said al-Khudri said that the Prophet was more modest than a virgin behind her curtain was. He was also most indulgent to his inferiors and he would not allow anyone to scold whatever they did: but rather to correct them. “Ten years” said Anas his servant, I was with the Prophet, and he never said as much as “woe” to me.

Despite the simplicity, kindness and affectionate behavior of the Prophet, he used to show strong disapproval of abominable behaviours. For example, he at one time showed his disappointment with Mu’adh’s, because he (Muadh) used to prolong prayers whenever he led prayers and people had complained about that.

In the act of teaching, appropriate illustration is very vital. It widen the scope of understanding of the learner. The Prophet was quite aware of this fact. He used his hands to make sketchy drawings to illustrate certain points. He at one time illustrated the (Sirat al-Mustaqeem) the ‘Straight path’ as a straight line. The Satanic path he illustrated as crooked lines.

In explaining man’s tribulations and fate on earth, the Prophet made an illustration in the following manner: He made a square, and said, this is the fate of man. He then made a circle inside that square, and said this is human being. He made another circle outside the square, and said, this is man’s aspirations and ambitions. He then drew many lines between the middle circle (human being) and the outer circle (aspirations). The Prophet explained these lines as the struggles and constraints encountered by human kind before his fate. What the Prophet (PBUH) meant by this illustration was to show that human beings die before attaining all their hopes and ambitions and that human effort is necessary in attaining them.

The Prophet (PBUH) was broad hearted. He would accommodate whoever appeared before him, he never decried a questioner nor had he ever scolded a challenger. He would attentively listen to an enquirer or a challenger. He would then overwhelm the enquirer or challenger with his illuminating roofs and penetrating insight, leaving the questioner with no alternative than to succumb to the guidance of the greatest teacher.

Muslim scholars of the early times had realized the significance of acquaintance with the art of teaching apart from possessing the knowledge itself. They discovered that for the teacher to impart knowledge efficiently, he must know the psychology of the students at the different stages of their development. Acquaintance with their psychology will make him know the appropriate method and course contents for the different categories of students. Ibn Khaldun(2003) said Teaching is a profession, which requires knowledge, practice and benevolence. It is like physical training which; in order to be skillful, one has to be practicing continuously at the same time acquiring new skill as well.
In his book, Ibn Khaldun dedicated a section, which reads; a section, which explains that teaching, is a profession among other professions. In this section, he explained that each of the four Imams among the leaders of the schools of law has his own method that is distinct from the other. This he cites as one of the proofs that teaching is a profession that has its own distinct methods and ideals.

1.3 Islamic Education and the Colonial influence

In Islam, the family form the first nucleus of societal composition and every member of the family and especially the young child is immensely important. The Qur’an declares, “And Allah hath given you wives of your own kind, and hath given you, from your wives, sons and grandsons, and hath made provision of good things for you” Q16:72 Therefore, life in Islam is essentially a moral enterprise and as Prophet Muhammad declared that, the Lord Almighty has sent him to perfect moral character.

(Muslehuddin M 1978) has further asserted this fact thus:

Duties are generally expressed in terms of duties to God and duties to society, but the spirit underlying duties to God is the spiritual development of one’s self so as to be mindful of duties to others a harmonious interaction between the sense of God and the sense of fellow-men resulting in righteous. Such is the concept of morality in Islam.

Therefore, the Prophetic submission that the Islamic society is as a building made of bricks whereby each brick supports the other is pertinent here. This is obviously what F.D Lugard the Governor General of Colonial Nigeria said as quoted by (Nduka, O. 1975) thus, “Islam carries with it its own religious sanctions, while the animism and fetish of the pagan represent no system of ethics and no principle of conduct”. Nduka further says, “As Islam is not only a religion but a whole way of life, to deviate from the Moslem proprieties by adopting either the Christian religion or the Western system of education was frowned upon by the Moslem hierarchy”.

The present system of education operating in this country is either a duplication or an importation from the Western system. These systems are directly contradictory to our traditional Islamic outlook. Alhaji Junaidu lucidly expressed this fact when he said.

“Few are the places given to the study of African ideas and Moral systems in the humanities curriculum. The organization and structure of governments in Hausa and Yoruba societies are dismissed as irrelevant mistakes of undeveloped imaginations. It is truly remarkable fact that Social Sciences can be taught to our students without a single mention of Ibn Khaldun to whom much of the ideas in modern social sciences are owed. Nor does one hear of Ibn Rushd, One wonders how anybody can presume to understand or write about the events, which have shaped this community without a serious study and discussion of works of Shehu Uthman bn Fodio, Abdullahi of Gwandu, Sultan Bello and host of other scholars before them. Their ideas certainly govern the behavior of this society.

(Sarumi A 2007) in giving a concise description of the nature of Quranic which satisfy the basic requirements of schooling, which is not only peculiar to a specific brand of curriculum prepared by a particular set of people for a set purposes opines thus,

Qura’nic schools share a number of common basic features with modern secular schools. Regardless of the regional variations, Qur’anic schools teach children to learn in a structured setting, respect the teacher, use language and recite in unison, encode and decode the alphabet, become a moral person, a good citizen, and more recently, do basic arithmetic.
These features compete favourably with most secular pre-school and primary school settings in developing countries.

(Tilde A. 2011) We remain indebted to all scholars who preserved the tradition of learning in the Qur’anic schools over the centuries. May God reward them abundantly. They were responsible for producing the civil servants that manned various departments of government in the old caliphates of Borno, Mali, Songhai, Kanem-Borno and Sokoto. The chain has remained unbroken up to the present day. It is our hope that the ongoing pressure to modernize the schools will not break that chain but introduce the changes that will task their students with achieving the targets of both the traditional system and, as much as possible, that of basic education as outlined in our national curriculum.

(Elechi G.E & Yekorogha L.R 2013) Imam Shafii, the chief proponent of migration, is quoted as extending this migration concept to business, among other things. He likened it to a precious stone, which he said is nothing unless it is maned and transported away from its soil.
The British invasion and colonization of northern Nigerian in 1904 has been identified as being responsible for the death of the almajiri system. Colonizers killed and deposed those emirs who resisted foreign rule as the subjugated lost control of their territories and were forced to accept the new role of these men as mere traditional rulers. With the British withdrawal of state funding for almajiri schools, emirs lost fundamental control of almajiri system and it collapsed. Disregard for the almajiri system in favour of western education ignited animosity and antagonism from the malams, the pupils and northern Nigerian society. There was much fear that western education, which is of Christian-European origin, would mean graduates losing their Islamic identity and embracing anti-social behaviours that negated the values and principles of Islam.

1.4 Islam versus western acculturation

According to (Qutb M.) “Culture occupies a very prominent position in human life. It permeates all human endeavours and this is what turn life smooth and easy. So every effort made under the auspices of culture opens new horizons of beneficial toil, productivity, and innovation. If it had not been for this great divine endowment human kind would have spent his life learning only to walk, talk, and probably count. However, despite the importance of culture in human life it may turn in to dysfunctional element when it loses its value and transformed into a manipulative tool. In this case the mind is least effected when it is mutilated or disfigured”. Here he tells us about a situation where the identity and personality is lost. A situation where a society becomes vulnerable to disgrace and shame because it has lost its self-esteem.

Prophet Muhammad gave us an axiom thus, “Every Child is born with a natural propensity to believe in the divine being, his parent turns him into a Jew or Christian or a Magian”. By this, the position of the parent is clear in the task of shaping a child’s socio-cultural perception of the world around him. He sees his/her parent as an example of everything ideal in life. Therefore, for the child to have a balanced development he/she must be allowed to have the opportunity of having a smooth transition from the first stage of his life in to a stage where he would be matured to mingle to influence and be influence by people outside his environment.

The bright future of any society depends on the caliber of individuals the teacher is able to produce at school. Teachers are the torch that guides the community to knowledge and civilization. The teacher in the democratic western society tries to implant western democracy in the minds of his pupils. The Muslim teacher should implant solid and sound Islamic belief in the mind of the learners in his charge. The Muslim teacher of physics for example should explain, say, the force of gravity to his students, as all other student should have learnt, but he should not stop at that. He
should prove to his students the magnificence of the one who has provided this force for human use.

(Castle E.B 1976) says we must remember, true religion is not only learning things about religious belief; it is also the faithful application of what we believe to the way we live. Formal teaching, necessary as it is, is not enough. The quality of a school is not finally tested in the examination room but by the behavior of the teachers and pupils who form the school community.

A successful teacher therefore, may not necessarily be the one who is only able to make his learners memorise a lot of the learning materials, theories, or formulas. However, a successful teacher is the one who, apart from making the learners memorise some learning materials, is able to make the learning material have impact on the lives of the learners. He should also be able to make the learners able to apply the knowledge acquired from him to other fields of learning. Thus, the aim of a teacher is to produce a sufficient man, instead of a mere learned man.

(Ibn Khaldun) asserts that in the beginning of the educational process a child should be given examples that are not beyond his immediate environment by his teacher. This is because children comprehend and digest the learning material better and easier, if it is something that has some element of what they are accustomed

(Mehta P.B 2011) talking about the attitude of the colonial imperialist hegemony submits as follows, the place of other civilization is already marked: they can be anything from “vacant lands” to “barbarians” waiting to be civilized; they may have excellences of their own, but those excellences have normative standing at the mercy and behest of the imperial order itself.

It was within this framework that indigenous cultures existed during the colonial era. Therefore, all native societies and native culture would have earned credence not on their own accord but by their adherence to the superior colonial culture who have come to civilize them. Under this pretext, everything has to be subjugated and thus the people lost their personality and even identity in favour of an alien way of life. (Lewis L.J.1962) admitted that, “the wholesale transfer of the educational conventions of Europe and America to the people of Africa has certainly not been an act of wisdom, however justly it may be defended as a proof of genuine interest in the native people.” These words attributes the failure of the native education in the first attempt during the colonial era especially in the predominantly Muslim enclave on this vital problem. The Muslims have vehemently resisted the proliferation of missionary schools because they deemed it as the process of Christianizing them. Nevertheless, the colonial masters cared less about the negative consequences of their policies. Probably because of their feeling that Imperial orders bring with them a conception of existence and order that attempts to incarnate itself in the visible dominion of the earth.” In addition, that “Imperial orders can structure political possibilities, fix the terms of economic exchange, produce hierarchies of knowledge, and redraw the boundaries between the sacred and the profane”.

In the end, the Native Nigerian, left in a fix not knowing how to go about even conducting his life would have to tread behind his colonial master. He has definitely been disfigured, for, he ceased to be the man that he was, and was not yet transformed into what his benefactors desire him to become. (Ikejiani O 1964) in describing the kind of transformation done by the British education, system in Nigeria says:

It has succeeded in uprooting the young Nigerian from his way of life without actually giving him a satisfactory tool of living. As a result, the educated Nigerian is left confused, without root either in African culture, or in the culture of the West of which he is trying hard to be a
part. Having been encouraged to rebel from his culture and people, he remains a fugitive in his way of life for the educated Nigerian has not yet found a place either in the culture of Africa nor in that of the West in which to reintegrate his personality and make an effective contribution to his people and humanity. He is still in search of a new way of life. He needs a new social order and new moral values. This is an urgent problem, which Nigeria must solve now.

Clearly, the United States, the modern industrialized world, and indeed the International community as a whole would prefer an Islamic world that is compatible with the rest of the system: democratic, economically viable, politically stable, socially progressive, and follows the rules and norms of international conduct.

1.5 The Language factor

Among the methods employed by the Prophet (PBUH) was that, he would address his audience in their own dialect and not necessarily his own. From the discussions of Ibn Khaldun’s, view, it seems he was agitating for the Arabization of all fields of knowledge. He maintained that children who taught in language other than their own mother tongue are given only half of the knowledge. It is an indisputable fact that, human being understand and remember well what he acquires in his own mother tongue. Our friends who have had the opportunity of studying abroad in countries like Bulgaria, Russia and so forth for studies, that the medium of instruction in all this countries is the indigenous language of the country and not a foreign one. The Phelps-stokes report on education in Africa, abridged by (Lewis L.J. 1962), has succinctly delineated on the issue this of adaptation of native language as the lingua-franca and medium of instruction in the schools under the colonial administration in the following words:

With full appreciation of the European language, the value of the native tongue is immensely more vital, in that it is one of the chief means of preserving whatever is good in Native customs, ideas and ideals, and thereby preserving what is more important than all else, namely, Native self-respect. All peoples have an inherent right to their own language. It is the means of giving expressions to their own personality, however primitive they may be. The process of education must begin with the characteristics of the people as they are and help them to evolve to the higher levels. No greater injustice can be committed against a people than to deprive them of their own language.

This quotation says it all, considering the fact that when the white man came not all the Native people whom he had met were primitive. In fact, the northern side of the land currently tagged as Nigeria were fully civilized in the context of African civilization then. They have had Political structure reckoned with even by colonial masters themselves. They have had Economic system, which was working and still working, and most importantly, they have Educational system, which is still functioning, but needs major modifications. Every system anywhere must have undergone such modifications. The educational process must begin on a solid base, which must conform the characteristics of the people. This should be the starting point where all future achievements revolve around. People have to be proud of their language. The single prime element signifying their distinct identity and personality. It is the only symbol expressing their freedom and sovereignty.

Some contemporary Nigerian scholars have expressed views in line with this argument and which if applied in Nigeria would solve the language and multi-cultural phenomena in the Nigerian education system. We quote one of them here:-
If our children can develop mutual understanding and respect, tribal feeling will be minimized. One of the best ways in which this can be done is by getting into the thoughts and feeling of people through language a common language a lingua franca must be sought. Until this is achieved, we might do well to encourage in each region the study of one of the three major Nigerian language in the country (Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa) and make it a compulsory subject. By this means, the language problem in Nigeria will be narrowed down leading eventually to the final decision to adopt one Nigerian language as the lingua franca.

This goes in line with the views of Ibn KHaldun on intimating the child with his immediate environment, for real and purposeful learning. Our education system should aim at transmitting our type of culture and not at overwhelming the learners with ready-made models that are aliens, and most often conflicting to ours.

1.6 Way forward

1.6.1 Contribution to the environment, which is an essential requirement of Islamic community, only becomes possible through adequate knowledge of the norms of the society. (Imam H 2012) asserts that,

The curricula which is informal comprises developing the child’s physical skill, character, intellectual skills and sense of belonging to the community as well as inculcating respect for elders, and giving specific vocational training and the understanding and appreciation of the community’s cultural heritage

1.6.2 Optimum intellectual attainment is only possible when one is accustomed with the traditions and norms of his society. (Imam H.2012)

There was also, the recognition of the importance of language as a means of preserving the culture of the people and for forging national unity. Consequently, the 1981 revised policy prescribed that each child be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages in the country; Hausa Ibo and Yoruba, other than the mother tongue

1.6.3 Foreign language should only be taught when the child attains a certain degree of maturity. It is then he can intellectually accommodate the diversifying disciplines, cultures trends challenges targeted at him. Among the signs of the Almighty was that he had created humankind in to nations and tribe so that they may recognize each other. Then what is the need of trying to stamp out your distinct identity, when no other entity has ever done so.

In fact, it has been shown repeatedly that young children are rather unsophisticated and immature learners in that they have not yet fully acquired certain cognitive skills, such as the capacity to abstract, generalize, infer and classify, that could help them in second-language acquisition.

In an often cited study, Harvard professor Catherine Snow and her coauthor, Marianne Hoefnagel-Hohle, examined the learning of Dutch by speakers of English in different age groups. They showed that twelve to fifteen year-olds did better than much younger learners.

This has been confirmed since then in other studies such as those that examined late immersion as opposed to early immersion children. Older children were simply more efficient learners than younger children. Of course, beyond a certain age (most situate it at around age 12 or even later), it might be difficult to acquire full native-like pronunciation in a second language, but this still leaves many years between infancy and adolescence.

1.6.4 Development in arts and culture should form an essential part of the curriculum.
(Ukeje B.O 1966) opines that “We can see clearly the urgent need to develop an educational system indigenous to Nigerian life and culture, with an aim that is realistic and related to the needs and aspirations of the Nigerian people, and designed to prepare each pupil for life in his environment”

Unfortunately the advocacy of Ukeje for a new indigenous educational system was not heeded to by the educational planners as asserted by (Imam H 2012) expressing the nature of the 1998 national policy on education which is still in use. “The policy reiterated the government’s stance in provision of secular education but with opportunities for religious instruction according to the faith of pupils’ parents.

1.6.5 Since there is no monopoly of one language over the other in the proper acquisition of knowledge, Mathematics taught in the mother tongue of schoolchildren.

Yet despite the prominence of English as the language of instruction, it is not a requisite for achieving excellence in Maths and science. Countries that rank high in Maths and science tests in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement), all have basic instruction in their local tongue (with the exception of Singapore). TIMSS is an important benchmark for comparing standards in maths and science around the world; the tests have been administered every four years since 1995.

We can hereby declare that every possible effort should be made to insist that Hausa- and the rest of the two major languages (Yoruba and Igbo) must form an essential part of any curriculum in the Nigerian schools and universities. We also need a broad based programme of translations, which will make available most of the books required in our schools, in the principal languages. These translations should cover both sciences and humanities.

2. Conclusion

The role of parent as regards their wards is so huge and significant that the complete educational enterprise rest on their initial effort, and how they were able to nurture and groom their children. There is then an urgent need for parent to be acquainted with the duties expected of them towards their children. Islam is not simply about observance of rituals but rather it is “Din wa Dunyan” Worshiping and living. The Muslim child must be made to understand first before anything else that he is living to be what he is designed to be. He should aspire to just that. The footsteps of Prophet Muhammad should be treaded because he represent the most ideal of human character and personality. The most distinguishing feature of olden instructional method and the modern one is that the former emphasizes mere acquisition of knowledge without exposing the child to practical application of the knowledge to real life situations. With this in place, the child assumes the right place in the scheme of things and becomes brave and courageous. This is our fundamental problem, which breeds many evils paramount of which is self-centeredness, which renders people just living for only themselves and no one else. This is because the Nigerian educational system does not seem to train Nigerians appreciate themselves as entities, their societies, and their culture. How then can there be real purposeful development?
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