

Philosophical Investigation of Al-Zarnuji's Ta'lim al-Muta'allim: Strengthening Ethical Engagement into Teaching and Learning

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Abstract: There emerge the issues on how the process of teaching and learning should be implemented in the way that ethical consideration becomes entirely a main concern to enhance the personality with admirable attitude. There has been lack of scholarly attention to elaborate the philosophical inquiry into the foundational stage especially referring to Muslim scholarly work. This research aims to investigate the philosophical inquiry of Al-Zarnuji's ideas in his concept of Ta'lim al-Muta'allim. This work serves as a source of guidance for Islamic education because it presents fascinating theories on teaching and learning. Literature review was conducted to examine the conceptual framework to the contemporary perspective. The findings reveal ethical engagement which al-Zarnuji concerns refers to strengthening the process of learning and teaching. This becomes central to drive the process itself into the enhancement to the target supposed in the way that there is no separated form in the process of transfer both knowledge and value.

Key words: Al-Zarnuji, Talim al-Muta'allim, philosophical inquiry, ethical engagement, teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, there emerge the issues on how the process of teaching and learning should be implemented in the way that ethical consideration becomes entirely a main concern to enhance the personality with admirable attitude. This refers to how educating moral character among the students has a significant role to perform them in the relation to personal and social life (Halstead and Taylor, 2000). The number of research conducted towards ethical foundation in character education in Indonesia through integration between Muslim scholarly ideas (Huda and Kartanegara, 2015a). Moreover, this is strengthened about Islamic spiritual character values to perform the students with moral behaviour (Halstead, 2007; Huda and Kartanegara, 2015b). However, there has been lack of scholarly attention to elaborate the philosophical inquiry into the foundational stage especially referring to Muslim scholarly work. As a result, it is necessary to explore in depth the philosophical inquiry to enable the moral values accordingly for the human life to become the constructional foundation in problem solving. In this regard, it will lead to gain feedback on the enhancement of personal development in the mental and moral essence. Thus, achieving the progress in the educational field has

an inextricable link to the ethical engagement which refers to the Muslim scholarly work, since investigation on the ideas of previous Muslim scholars could enable the contemporary generation to provide significant insights for the educational practices. In doing so, this article elaborates the philosophical approach through the lens of al-Zarnuji's Talim al-Muta'allim. This treatise serves as a source of guidance for Islamic education because it presents fascinating theories on teaching and learning which are relevant for the teaching of religious values at the entire levels of education in the Muslim world (Huda *et al.*, 2016). This research has attracted the interest of not only Muslim scholars but modern Western academics as well (Affandi, 1993; Gilliot, 2012).

BRIEF OF TALIM AL-MUTAALLIM AND AL-ZARNUJI

Born in Zarnuj, a small town in Eastern Turkistan, a state adjoining River Tigris (Athiyatullah, 1970), al-Zarnuji was one of the Islamic educational philosophers (and indeed, one of the pioneers in the field of Islamic education) who lived in the 13th century during the Abbasid regime. He belonged to the anafi School of Islamic jurisprudence. He outlined his educational thought in the treatise entitled, Ta'lim al Muta'allim, in

which he explores the ethical guidelines both the teacher (the muta'allim) and the student (the muta'allim) could follow to achieve better results in the teaching and learning process. Al-Zarnuji is associated with two names (Athiyatullah, 1970). One is honorific, (i.e., Burhan al-Din), while the other is his actual name, (i.e., Taj al-Din Nu'man B. Ibrahim B. al-Khalil al-Zarnuji). He is reported to have understudied and corresponded with several scholars during the period of his learning. However, the following appear to be the most popular (Ahmad, 1986):

- Fakhr al-Islam al-asan Ibn Mansur al Farghani Khadikan (1196 CE)
- Zahir al-Din al-asan Ibn 'Ali al-Marghinani, (1204 CE)
- Fakhr al Din al Kashani (1191 CE)
- Burhan al-Din 'Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Farghinani al-Marghinani (1195 CE)
- Rukn al-Din Muammad B. Abi Bakr Khwarzade (491-576 AH) (Affandi, 1993).

It is reported that, by 1203, al-Zarnuji had compiled all the 13 chapters of this book. For this reason, many of his biographers argue that the book was written in the 13th century (Athiyatullah, 1970). However, it appears that much of the work was done earlier. In any case, it is a widely acclaimed piece and it is used as a source of reference for research in the field of education by Muslims and Western academics alike (Syamsyuddin, 2012). In the Islamic educational institutions, particularly, the pesantren, the traditional Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, *Talim al-Mutaallim* is often regarded as the book of basic learning guidelines for students (Nata, 2003).

It is a unique piece of work because its principles explain the ethical foundation of teaching and learning. The 13 chapters of this discussion include issues relating to: the nature and merit of knowledge; the intention at the time of the study; the types of knowledge permissible to acquire; and respect for knowledge and those who possesses it. Others include: hard work and perseverance in the learning process; when to start and organize the lesson; and *tawakkul* (trust in God). He also discusses the time for the acquisition of knowledge as well as time management in the teaching and learning process. Other topics include how to cooperate with and show compassion to others in the learning process; issues relating to self-discipline during the time of learning; how to improve one's retentive memory and overcome forgetfulness; and how to survive materially during the period of learning. It could be argued that this treatise served a good purpose for students. This is because, it appears, many students at that time encountered certain

difficulties in education and the acquisition of quality knowledge; hence, they failed to achieve their aims. According to al-Zarnuji, most of these students did not successfully meet their goals because they were not mindful of the correct methods of learning. Thus, as Grunebaum and Abel (1947) conclude, al-Zarnuji's discourse facilitated the devising of a better study approach or method to guide these students about whom he had read and heard from his own teachers. In other words, he believed that the students had not been taught what was most beneficial for them and had, therefore wasted the chunk of their time on unbeneficial knowledge.

ABOUT AL-ZARNUJI'S IDEAS ON EDUCATION

In appreciating the educational philosophy, understanding the concept of education and its roots in Islam is essential to first recognize its further elaboration. Three words denote education in Arabic as follows: *ta'lim* which refers to schooling, teaching or instruction, *tarbiyyah* which refers to breeding, upbringing or nurturing and *ma'rifah* which basically refers to knowledge or knowhow about something, learning, awareness about a piece of information, etc. Although, the above words, apparently, refer to different aspects of human awareness, all of them revolve around the concept of education. Al-Zarnuji has given such concern on the way which students and teachers may conduct in all the activity with addressing the ethical engagement to guide the direction in appropriate manner (Huda and Kartanegara, 2015c).

In this regard, to gain the subsequent purpose in the way that becomes fundamental to go through the learning-teaching process, the quality learning should be taken into account with its characterises to drive the dynamic and nature to evolve the development of personal and social life. As a result, there are three things which Islamic education should go through character which refers to the way to interact with others, belief which refers to the spiritual enhancement and also practical engagement through vision and curriculum (Huda and Kartanegara, 2015d). At this point, Al-Zarnuji emphasizes the extent of spirituality and character to raise the human perfection integrated with competence and technics which students should recognize and behave. These include: holistic intelligence or capability for learning; motivation for learning; patience and commitment to the learning process; affordability and financial support; teacher's inspiration and determination; and commitment to time management in learning (Huda and Kartanegara, 2016).

The above coordinates will help to bring about comprehensive education from the Islamic educational perspective and thus many other variables are needed to sustain it. In addition, the provision of sustainable support for achieving results-oriented education is a necessity for modern life. This is due to the significant role education plays in developing and nourishing people's potentials for continuous societal growth. As a result, all important stakeholders of an educational institution must discharge their duties as required to facilitate a comprehensive learning. This is to prepare the learner's ability to master both these two, namely the spirituality and religious activity to get involved in the relationship to perform person with good personality. In doing this, the students who have the endeavour to learning must behave the true intention into three core stages: seeking God's pleasure in Tawhid approach, individual development and social involvement (Huda and Kartanegara, 2015e). In addition, among the teacher, there are a number of the characteristics proposed as follows: professional and competent ('alim), maintain good pedagogy (wara', waqur, hilm and abr) and getting more experienced (asann). As a result, the ownership of effective teacher character will have an impact on improving the quality of education (Huda *et al.*, 2016). This will, in turn, encourage the student's self-reliance, self-assurance, independent thinking and spiritual fortitude that will eventually make him the perfect man (insan al-kamil) in the Muslim society.

PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION OF AL-ZARNUJI'S IDEAS ON ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

There are three areas which education should concern including individual, social and professional aspect. This could be engaged into the ethical engagement in education and especially to give the feedback to the attitude of the person in performing the activities. It is clear that ethical engagement should become the main priority in education. The Islamic ethics on learning emphasize the responsibility of the students to their teacher in the course of the study. These ethics, therefore, emphasize that the students must accord the teacher and generally, all those who possess knowledge, a maximum respect. Besides the above, what the students learn also has ethical implications. According to al-Zarnuji, in designing a curriculum, the purpose as well as the ethical aspects (i.e., its religious implications) should be carefully considered to ensure that they are in harmony with the principles of Islam. He argues that not all fields of knowledge are ethical for consideration in

education from the Islamic perspective. Among the ethical fields are medical science and of course Islamic jurisprudence in which these are the fields of knowledge that are useful for the society (Huda and Kartanegara, 2015a-e). However, in selecting the beneficial types of knowledge, the availability of experienced or qualified teachers for those fields is also an important prerequisite. In the third chapter of his *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, al-Zarnuji illustrates the key points that enable students to determine which fields are ethical and which are not. Students have to think carefully before they choose disciplines in the course of learning. Besides the general purposes enumerated earlier, al-Zarnuji also suggests that students select fields of learning in accordance with the specific purpose or goals they have set for themselves in life. This implies that the parents' choices for their wards do not find favour here because the student's personal interest is very crucial in the choice of an educational career. Even so, he also argues that a field like astronomy is good for the Muslim students only on condition that one learns only what is helpful for determining the times and direction (qiblah) of worship. Thus, here too, he opines that the most recommended fields are those that have bearings on one's spiritual development.

ENHANCING ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING AND TEACHING PROCESS

Ethical engagement which al-Zarnuji concerns refers to strengthening the purpose of learning and teaching. It is central to drive the process itself into the enhancement to the target supposed in the way that there is no separated form in the process of transfer both knowledge and value. This would lead to transform the personality with good behaviour and intellectual and spiritual involvement. To achieve this, there are two things which may possibly be supposed to do during the process of teaching and learning. Those are recognizing the right and responsibility. In this regard, the effort to conduct both learning and teaching needs to cooperate with ethical engagement in the practical level. This would enhance the standard of quality process in the learning with concerning to implement entirely into the self-arrangement. From any kind of form which may take, preparing the students to work towards the achievement of certain goals in life education is expected to the principle which needs to concern in further. As a result, this has to be oriented in every level of education in the purpose to the well-being of both the individual and the larger society. The specific purpose set for any particular aspect of education is crucial for: assessing the benefit of that aspect for the society and measuring the quality of

the teaching process (Huda *et al.*, 2016). Quality teaching prepares the students to face future challenges and serves as the basic requirement for achieving societal goals. Hence, the purpose set for any field of education determines how dynamic the graduates that would be produced would be. This implies that the teachers themselves have to be dynamic at any material moment in order to facilitate the setting up of a good standard for the transformation of human life in its entirety.

CONCLUSION

This study does elaborate the philosophical investigation into the ethical engagement in teaching and learning from the insights of al-Zarnuj's bestseller, *Talim al-Muta'allim*. This concept expounds the principles for achieving quality education and could be useful for improving the performance of both students and teachers today. Addressing important practical shortfalls in the present implementation of educational policies, these principles detail the requirements for bringing-about well-informed personalities. Moreover such philosophical investigation forming into the knowledge would be engaged into the relevance of transformation of the society and the maintenance of moral values. Although the research is basically library-based in the way that is attempting to appreciate the philosophy, it addresses several issues that affect students and, to a large extent, teachers, in the teaching and learning process.

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