Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigerian Schools:

Challenges of the 6-3-3-4 Educational System

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by

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Chapter Eight

UTILIZING THE PRINCIPLES OF TA^{C}LIMU ^{C}L-MUTA^{C}LLIM. FOR THE ISLAMISATION OF THE MODERN TECHNIQUES OF LEARNING.

by

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Learning process or the process of teaching is a description of the procedure and atmosphere in which the student learns or in which the teacher impacts knolwedge into the student. Whether "learning" or "teaching" is the word used would largely depend on from whose perspective the process of education is being considered.

Most writers on education have laid such emphasis on teaching and teaching techniques and methodology with insufficient attention paid to the learning methodology except as a factor in the process of teaching. This does not imply that nothing has been done from the perspective of the students but that the area needs more emphasis than it now attracts.

Burhanuddin Az-Zarnuji was an Arab Islamic Scholar and Philosopher who lived in the later part of the twelveth century and the early part of the thirteenth century of the Christian era. He authored the book *Ta ^{c}limu ^{c}L-nuta^{c} llim tariqah ^{c}t- ta^{c}allumi* (Teaching the learner the methodology of learning)[1] The author considered the factors that inhibit or aid learning and related educational factors to the process of learning. Though the book is basically for the learning of Islamic sciences, it contains a number of principles which if carefully examined, adapted and applied could be novel inputs into the improvement of the modern process of learning.

Learning is an Islamic duty just as acquisition of all beneficial areas of knowledge is a duty of the *Ummah.*[2] Prophet Muhammad instructed his followers thus: "Seeking knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim – male or female"[3] Thus, learning per se is a duty which every Muslim must discharge.

In the recent time certain theories and techniques have become popular in educational circles and projected as tested universal theories of teaching and learning. These theories and techniques largely originated from the Western part of the globe. The theories were as one would expect, based on certain Western philosophies and ideas which have also been moulded by Western social, political and even religious factors. The Muslim world has for long swallowed these theories and techniques with little or no critical appraisal;, with the concommitant effect that certain Islamic ideals and teachings were not allowed to play the desired roles in shaping the process of education. Furthermore, a false impression is being paraded that the West is the harbinger of scientific teaching.

Az-zarnuji had, centuries earlier, addressed major factors in the learning process such as the influence of the environment, the school, the home, the peer, the society at large the scholars, the teachers, the mosque and in particular the various ethical norms of the students who are the target of the educational process.

The present educational system which Muslims too have adopted, despite its highly orchestrated claim of being scientific, is yet to achieve the desired goals; hence the need for another look at the educational theories of the earlier Muslim scholars with a view to identifying other neglected areas which might rectify the flaws of the present highly secularised system. Taiwo saw the need for the past to rescue to present when he wrote that:

So many international and domestic events had obviously altered the context and perspectives of the modern education that it is important to give greater prominence to the legacy of the past. Since education has gone through critical scrutiny and changes, we as teachers should therefore know what must be changed and that should be kept.[4]

This is more true of Muslim education which has long being left to he waves of secular theories as if Islamic education has no peculiar theories worthy of examination and application.

The first serious attempt at designing appropriate Islamic methodology and principles of learning was made in the recent past in 1977 when the First World Conference on Muslim Education was held in Mekkah in 1977. The conference produced a number of serious cholarly papers which culminated in a series of publication by King Abdul Aziz University Jeddah. The six books[5] addressed and suggested viable solutions to various problems affecting the evolution of sound Islamic techniques of learning. One area which, is our opinion, has not been seriously addressed is the studet as a major factor in the learning process.

As the name of the work suggests, Az-Zarnuji's work considers different factors of education from the perspective of the learner,. hence this attempt at making the book a strong basis for the formulation of certain theories for Islamic education. Our approach is to relate theories propounded by Az-Zarnuji to those of some Modern Western oriented educational theoreticians. 'We shall also attempt, where necessary, to provide Islamic legal justification for the support or opposition to any of the theories, be they from Za-Zarnuji or from the other sources. Even where Za-Zarnuji and modern educationists agree, we call attention to the agreement to justify the basis of the adoption of the theories and belie the wrong notion that scientific teaching is only a modern development.

AIMS OF LEARNING IN ISLAM

The first problem to be tackled in every act of man is the purpose of the act. The purpose would determine the process, the extent and the evaluation of the action. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) Muhammad said:

"Actions are in accordance with intention"[6] In Islam, the purpose of education is to make man perform as vice-gerent of God on earth.[7]

Az-Zarnuji saw the aims of learning as "attainment of God's pleasure."[8] Thus, knowledge is not a mundane duty but a religious duty "for the sake of the hereafter*[9]"

Learning is just an aspect of man's life and Almighty Allah declared: "I have not created the jins and men but that they should worship me".[10] Az-Zarnuji thus defines the purpose of learning as to attain the benefits of the hereafter; to eliminate ignorance from others and self and for the revival of Islam.*[11] If man plays the role of vice-gerency of Allah very well in this world, he would seek to control other creatures of Allah, which are created by Allah to be utilised by human – beings*[12] Learning all techniques of manipulating other creatures of God to promote the welfare of man on earth is a religious duty, if the learner takes due congnisance of the fact that his reward is not limited to this world but also extended to the hereafter where he shall, through his learning efforts here attain the pleasure of Allah.

Modern educational theories are not as comprehensive in the area of philosophy of education as does Islamic philosophy, because the former saw education as a means to creating an end, which is, functionalism in the society. Whereas in Islam both learning and functionalism in the society are still means towards the attainment of the pleasure of God.

Numerous Quranic passages attest to the fact that scientific observation and enquiries have been submerged into Islamic learning which Allah considers as capable of only been fully rewarded by Him alone. The Qur'an considers a truly scientific mind as a quality of an absolute and firm believer in Allah. God says:

> Have they (men) not then observed the sky above them, how we have constructed it and beautified it and how there are no rifts therein?
>
> And the earth have we spread out, and have flung firm hills therein, and have caused of every lovely kind to grow thereon. A vision and a reminder for every pertinent slave[13]

Thus, unlike the popular modern theory of Whitehead[14], which saw education simply as "as the acquisition of the art of the utilisation of knowledge", education in Islam, transcends the "Art" to a greater goal – the purpose, which is, Allah's pleasure.

VALUE OF LEANRING:

Learning is the only exclusive endowment of man[15]. According to this theory of Az-Zarnuji, animals do not share learning and knowledge with man. This position of Az-Zarnuji is difficult to be upheld because the story of Sulayman and the ants in the Qur'an[16] suggests that other living beings, particularly animals could learn and adapt, though at a lower level than that of man.

Furthermore, modern psychology has come up with experiments which point to the possibility of learning in animals[17]. A higher value for learning is the one derivable from the Islamic aim of learning. Learning leads to eternal satisfaction if obtained and constructively applied.

Az-Zarnuji made a very interesting historical point which a learner ought to allow to motivate him into learning. That is that man's superiority over the angels was attained through knowledge.[18]

Furthermore, knowledge generates piety and disuade man from animalistic and materialistic tendencies[19]

As a support for his opinion, Az-Zarnuji quoted a poem: He who seeks knowledge for the hereafter

Has won the favour of being rightly guided. A grievous loss is the lot of he who seeks knowledge. To attain benefits from man[20]

Az-Zarnuji adored learning so much that he quoted extensively from various sources to butress his view that learning is the highest thing with which a man can be engaged. He wrote: The knowledgeable one is higher in rank,

Other ranks are inferior to it. The greatness of the learned multiplies.

While the ignoramus after death only lies wasted under the earth. He who aspires for knowledge aspires for all goals.

He who attains it, attains all needs[21]

If a learner is exposed to those and many other values and advantages of learning which Az-Zarnuji has identified in his book, he is likely to realise that lack of hope of securing a job with an estbalished agency is not sufficient to discourage him from learning. Knowledge is light that illuminates the mind of man and raises him above ignorance and servitude.

THE CURRICULUM:

The Holy Qur'an states:

> And the believers should not all set out. For every batch of them (Muslims), a party should set out to gain sound knowledge in religion,a nd that they may warn their people when they return to them so that they may take caution[22]

The passage is in support of the opinion of Az-Zarnuji that Muslims need not all become specialists in the field fo Islamic Studies, rather it is sufficient for every Muslim to acquire what is necessary for him to discharge his daily responsibilities to God[23]. oooooooooooooooooooooooooo

From this premise, Muslim designers of Muslim educational curriculum; the learner and other participants in the process of education should take a clue from this provision on basic religious duties. The curriculum needs to address what constitutes the basic necessities of the learner and designed in such a manner that the learner would be able to discharge the basic duties through the skill and knowledge imparted into him on the basis of the curriculum. These essentials are as basic as food in the opinion of Az-Zarnuji[24]

E. James seems to agree with Az-Zarnuji that there are three broad criteria for curriculum:

> It contains information which is essential to the business of living. It inculcates valuable skills. It contributes to the spiritual development of the individual[25]

The Muslim educational curriculum should thus provide the learner with basic skills which will enable him discharge not only his basic religious duties but also other basic duties, such as personal hygiene, rudimentaries of law, simple security and safety measures. He, at the appropriate level of learning, should be able to live an almost totally independent life. Learning should provide him with a modality for feeding himself, clothing himself and providing shelter for himself.

The current practice of compartmentalization of knowledge into secular and religious disciplines have no ground in Islam. The author calls attention to the fact that there is no line of demarcation between secular and religious learning. He called attention to the jurist – Muhammad B. Hassan – who was asked to write on asceticism but who retorted that he would rather write on Commerce.[26] The author seizes that opportunity to make the point that by writing on, or studying any other discipline, religious ethics and ideals are indirectly being applied.

It is necessary however to mention hat classification of learning into two – that of medicine and jurisprudence – by Az- Zarnuji[27] is simplistic. Knowledge and learning transcend these two areas of study.

The learning processes, according to the ideas of Az-Zarnuji, should take full cognisance of the ideas and morals of the community. The tenets of Islam should be reflected in every discipline that is being learnt. Az-Zarnuji mentioned virtues such as generosity, humility and chastity[28] as necessary ingredients to the leanring process.

There should therefore, be a conscious effort to correlate the theories or discoveries in every area study to the teachings of Islam on the matter. Muslims need not feel shy to state areas of disparity between the secular theories and the teachings of Islam. Where scientifically proven position contradict that of Islam on the subject-matter; not only should the secular theories or discoveries be re-examined, the true position of Islam on the subject-matter should also be re-ascertained. When there is an obvious disagreement between the postulation of the Qur'an and the current scientific position on the issue, once it is ascertained that there was no misinterpretation of the quranic position on the part of Islamic and Muslim scholars; the learner's attention should be drawn to the disparity. It is not unlikely that whatever faults that led to the wrong position of 'science' would be discovered by such learners who have unshakable belief in the absolute correctness of the position taken by Allah on any issue. This does not suggest cooking up of theories, which Az-Zarnuji condemned in venal scholars.[29]

It is necessary that the curriculum should proceed from the known to the unknown and that the capability of the learner should not be over-tasked by his learning more than what he could thoroughly grasp at any given time. The author emphasised that the books being used in the learning process should progress gradually from simple to the complex ones[30]

The author quoted a poem thus: On speech, I advise you on five

Perhaps you may heed the advice of a sincere adviser. Do not forget the motif of a speech and its time, nor its how, what and where in totality.

The relevant of the poem to learning[31] is that the curriculum should not lose sight of the purpose of the learning, the time or the period in which the learning is taking place including other demands necessitated by the period; the methodology should also be under constant control and review if required; the subject- matter must be competently handled and assimilated by the learner and the circumstances or the society in which the learning is taking place should also be reflected in the curriculum so as to provide the learned with necessary and relevant prerequisite for the utilization of his knowledge.

Adult education, extra-moral classes, part-time and sandwich courses which are currently just gaining ground in Nigeria has been suggested centuries ago by Az-Zarnuji. He emphasised that:

> "a seeker (of knowledge) must necessarily earn his living to meet the expenses of his family and other relation[32]"

Rote learning, according to the author is not available[33] but should be minimised for "what is memorised would vanish and what is written is entrenched"[34] Modern educationist[35] affirm this position of his.

THE LEARNER

As mentioned earlier, *Ta'lim* ... was addressed to the learners, what pertains to other participatory factors is accidental and thus minimal. Az-Zarnuji propounded several theories and stipulated certain ethical norms for the learner. Space and other ncessities would limit our consideration to few of such theories and norms.

Az-Zarniji warned the learner against probing into the unknown. He took astrology as the method of seeking to know what is hidden and condemned[36] astrology except for the identification of the *qiblah*.[37] It could be derived from this theory that a learner needs not seek to know what the examination he is yet to take contains. Apart from numerous Quranic passages on honesty and sincerity, which a learner who seeks to know in advance the questions on which he is to be tested, must have violated; he has also restricted the level of knowledge he acquires from the learning processes-Examination is not a goal in learning, rather it is a method of ovulation through which the trainer seeks to know how much of knowledge has been learnt by the learner.

The author quoted certain lines of poem which contain what he considered as six basic requirements of a learner. These are mental alertness, stimulation, perseverance, maturity, guidance of the trainer and length of time[38]. He also identifies three principal human actors in the learning process – the learner, the master and the parents[39]. Other essential qualities of a learner, according to the author, include earnestness, diligence and zoal[40].

A contemporary educationist identifies factors influencing leanring as; heredity, physical condition of the learner, social conditions, stimulation, target involvement of the learner in the curriculum design, association of different things, emotion, peers, and the totality of those factors.[41] Farrant on the other

hand identified readiness, motivation and activity as "the three most important factors which contribute to speedy and effective learning"[42]

Despite the difference of centuries between the time when Az- Zarnuji wrote his theories and the contemporary theories, one still finds out from the instances cited above that the factors enumerated by Az-Zarnuji are wider, more comprehensive and all- embracing than those of contemporary educationalist. Mental alertness does not only include hereditary mental traits but also a sum total of what constitutes the mental status of the learner. Stimulation involves not only the socio-physical factors but also the hope of emotional satisfaction or disatisfaction to which knowledge might lead. Maturity for the acquisition of a particular knowledge is common to the three sources.

An area where Az-Zarnuji's theories surpass the contemporary author's is the prominence which he gave to guidance by the teacher, the sufficiency of time available for the leanring and the persistency and perseverance of the learner. These factor are very important because they are challenges to those Az-Zarnuji identified as the three main human actors. The teacher is very important in tbe learning process to such an extent that leaner – centered" education cannot yield any fruit unless the teacher discharges his duty to the learner diligently and positively. The parents of the learner and the learner should also be ready to a devote sufficient time to learning. The Holy prophet has called attention to the lengthy time which acquisition of knowledge requires when he said: "knowledge is from the cradle to the grave"[43] The three qualities of earnestness, diligence and zeal which Az-Zarnuji emphasised are in our opinion, unavoidable tools in the hand of a prospective scholar.

One other factor on which the author laid much emphasis is the choice of peers by the learner. He quoted two lines of poem to drag home his point that a hardworking morally sound and pious companion is an invaluable asset to the learner: About a man ask not (any question) but observe his companion,

For every companion is an emulator of his companion[44] The learner is further warned by the author against self-desires which may be temporarily satisfying only to have permanent effect on the learner.[45] In the choice of a trainer, Az-Zarnuji advised the learner to choose the most knowledgeable, the most pious and the eldest of scholars. While the two firms criteria appear incentrovertible the third – age – is likely to generate some opposition in contemporary minds which have been made to attach little or no importance to age as a quality of the teacher.

Cognisance needs be taken of the fact that it is when scholars are at par in terms of knowledge and piety that age is recommended as an additional quality. Experience, particularly in the training that requires practice and handi-work such as surgery, arts, and technology, is very important for attainment for and retention of mastery.

Az-Zarnujui urged the learner to have high hope and ambition in schoarship[46] and to avoid hastiness and impatience which are likely to inhibit the development of learning[47]

A controversial area of Az-Zarnuji's work is the assertion of the author on what may cause laziness for a learner. To the author, excessive sputum and wetness inhibit activities. He advised learners against so much of eating and much drinking which he said inhibit mental alertness. He advised the learner to use chewing stick to check sputum and wetness. 'The author advised the learner against he taking of too much fish which he said could inhibit learning[48]. He informed his audience that tree people are automatically detested by God they are the glutton, the miser and the haughty one[49]

We commend an examination of these theories to nutricians and bio-chemists in order to prove or disprove the position of Az- Zarnuji. An uncritical and unscientific dismissal of the theories is a dis-service to scholarship and learning. One however needs to say in passing that the Qur'an 16:14; 35:12; 16:5 and 40:79 among others calls attention to the nutritional values of animal protein in human diet[50]

Az-Zarnuji laid much stress on the negative effect of fatigue on a learner and urges a learner to make judicious use of his energy. He quoted an *hadith* that: "Your soul is a camel treat it with tenderness"[51] and that the maintenance of one's health and physique is a duty which a learner cannot avoid to neglect in the interest of learning.

The learner is cautioned not to put anything into writing unless he understand the thing.[52] According to Az-Zarnuji's opinion, writing of things that are not clear to the learner blurts intellect, kills motivation and causes disenchantment while it is also time – waiting. he recommended that the most recent lecture should be revised five times by the learner while the immediate previous lesson should be revised four times and in that order of reduction until the last five lessons are revised daily by the learner.[53]

The learner is advised to place much value on time and maximise the use to which he pouts his time[54] and to have absolute trust in God as the Giver of Knowledge[55]. The learner should not allow pre-occupation with scholarship or any other mundane affair to affect his concentration in ritual prayer and to pay sufficient attention to learning[56] Bad habits and lack of personal hygiene are other factors identified by Az-Zarnuji as repelling to learning[57]

An area in which *Ta*ᶜ*lim*... has attracted much notoriety among students is the servitude and slavery to the teacher which the book seems to require from the learner. For instance the author quoted Caliph ᶜAli as saying:

> I am a slave to whoever taught me a single letter. He may set me free or enslave me if he chooses[58]

The student is advised to give much veneration to the teacher so much so that he would not walk in front of the teacher, sit on the teacher's seat, initiate a talk before the teacher, ask him questions when he is fatigued, avert his anger, not to knock on his door but wait till he comes out, and p[ay due respect to relations of the teacher[59].

The provisions of the book on teacher/student relationship were geared towards promotion of the status of learning and the scholars. Almost all these kinds of obeisance and respect are being demanded by protocols for political office holders and very few people resent the situation. What probably accounts for the unpreparedness of the contemporary learners to pay obeisance to and serve the teacher is that the modern teacher is paid for the services being rendered.

The purpose of the servitude was to serve as motivation and inspiration to the teacher so that he might strive to the utmost to give the best of himself to the learner. While the goal of the provisions are better served by according respect and dignity to the teaching profession by the Government, it is essential that the learner should realise that the teacher's love for him would enhance the performance of the teacher hence the need for the learner not to behave in any disrespectful manner to the teacher. In the days of Az-Zarnuji it was only the attiutde of the learner and his parents, to the teacher that could motivate or discourage the teacher. Then, education was a private and individual enterprise. The onus has now being largely transferred to the public service to ensure that teachers are adequately motivated.

Al-Ghazali[60] had propounded similar theories on student/teacher relations[61] and these theories had to be put in their proper context in order to appreciate the goals and purposes for which they are meant.

THE TEACHER

The teacher is advised by Az-Zarnuji to be patient and humble. He should possess self respect and avoid devaluation of knowledge through his actions[62] In relating with his student, the teacher must maintain dignified mean between haughtiness and cheapish self humiliation. Farrant[63] Schofield[64] and R.S. Peters[65] have also mentioned the need for self control on the part of a teacher.

Child-Centredness, if carried into the extreme, may lead to permissiveness purposelessness and a break-down of discipline among learners.

THE GOVERNMENT:

The modern Governments could take a clue from the suggestion of Az-Zarnuji that the Imam could compel certain individuals among his subjects to go into the study of special disciplines which are needed by the society but for which there are no volunteers.[66]

The society, according to the author, cannot attain greatness unless much premium is placed on scholars and scholarship. Az- Zarnuji's[67] views have an implication of discouragement of hasty production of scholars which automatic promotion or condonement of ineptitude and mediocrity suggests.

The Government needs to adequately give handsome reward to the teachers for as seen in the work of Az-Zarnuji[68], a thousand pounds is not too much a fee for the teaching of a letter or word. The society needs to pay due respect to the teacher and scholarship. Mediocrity should be eliminated and scholarship promoted.

THE HOME:

The home should control, as much as practicable the influences to which their children are constantly exposed. The influence of bad association can be catathropic for the learner[69]

The reference made by Az-Zarnuji to the attitude of the caliph to his son's service to teacher is very instructive to contemporary parents.

The teacher was performing ablution while the student was pouring water into the hands of the teacher when the student's parents arrived and asked the teacher to allow the students pour water with one hand and rub the limbs of the teacher with his other hand.

A situation whereby parents threaten the teacher for beating or scolding the pupil is dangerous, in our view, to the process of learning.

CONCLUSION:

Within limited space and resources we have called attention to certain opinions of Az-Zarnuji on learning and scholarship. We do not lay claim to total coverage of all the educational issues raised by the author. Rather, we have attempted to inspire educationists to pick up the book and do a more extensive analysis of the issues contained therein, with a view to utilizing an aspect of Islamic heritage for the construction of a pragmatic and forward-looking techniques of learning among Muslims.

We have also, out of necessity of limitations, avoid an evaluation or critique of the book. It is our intention to *in Sha-Allah,* carry out a critical review of the work at a later date. 'One interesting and striking feature of this work is that some of the theories and ideas that could otherwise, have been considered as contemporary innovations are vividly shown as having being propounded in wider perspective, centuries before the contemporary investigations and theorems.

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