

TALK 7

MALAYSIA

The Qualities of Teaching to Generate Distinguished Thinkers and Creative Personalities

Globalisation is a locomotive to change the world, which has definitely brought a wide range of culture and thoughts and nurtured materialistic attitudes. The education sector is certainly affected by globalization. The issue upheld in education today is to ascertain competency for each individual involved in the educational process as well as the competitive advantage that must be possessed by educational institutions. This is crucial in order to produce a superior generation that is capable of leading the world just as the previous supreme generation which was produced by the Islamic world once ago did. From the research conducted, two main components to generate distinguished thinkers and creative personalities are i) The Quality of Teachers and ii) Teaching Methods.

Quality of Teachers

Being a teacher is one of the duties that is highly respected in Islam. Those who carry this heavy duty have been promised great rewards. A hadith from the Prophet Muhammad (saw) narrated by Abu Umamah al-Bahili, states,

«إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ وَأَهْلَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ حَتَّى النَّمْلَةَ فِي حَجَرِهَا وَحَتَّى الْحُوتَ لِيُصَلُّوا عَلَى مُعَلِّمِي النَّاسِ الْخَيْرِ»

“Allah and His angels and the people of the heavens and the earth, even the ants in their rocks and the fish, pray for blessings on those who teach people good.” [Reported by Tirmidhi].

There is also another hadith that promises benefits to teachers which states,

«إِذَا مَاتَ ابْنُ آدَمَ انْقَطَعَ عَمَلُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ ثَلَاثٍ: صَدَقَةٌ جَارِيَةٌ، أَوْ عِلْمٌ يَنْتَفَعُ بِهِ، أَوْ وَلَدٌ صَالِحٌ يَدْعُو لَهُ»

“When the human being dies, his deeds come to an end except for three: ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, or a righteous child who prays for him.” [Reported by Muslim].

Remarkably for a Muslim teacher, when he teaches knowledge based on what Allah (swt) has revealed, he has clearly been praised by the Prophet (saw) for he (saw) said,

« خَيْرُكُمْ مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ وَعَلَّمَهُ »

“The best of you are those who learn the Al- Qur'an and teach it.” [Reported by Bukhari and Muslim].

However, great rewards require huge responsibilities to be carried out as well as quality to be achieved and possessed by teachers. This is because teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge but are also a role model to children and the youth.

Unfortunately, the reality of a teacher nowadays is often far diverted from their main task to lead their students towards possessing a good and noble personality. Teachers are assigned and frequently monitored to promote the ideas of secularism. Religion is trivialized and dismissed from other sciences. What is even more unfortunate is when teachers spread the Western ideologies which are contrary to the teachings of Islam such as the love of one's nation and country, the pursuit of material happiness as the highest goal, maintaining the non-Islamic principles of liberal freedoms, democracy and many more. There are also some teachers who are involved with a variety of misconduct such as violation of dignity, drug trafficking, abuse of power and others which are certainly not worthy of being an example to their students.

In addition, the issue of teaching quality is often questioned and needs an appropriate solution to be implemented. In Malaysia, the number of “A”'s in one's examination results is used

as a benchmark to measure a student's success, as well as one of the performance indicators for teachers. As a result, the learning process becomes rigid and passive. Students are constantly 'fed' by teachers who rush in finishing the syllabus, have to attend extra classes and carry out drilling exercises in order to obtain "A"s. This situation does not help teachers in their effort to build confidence and skills in their students. Thus, it is not a surprise if our students do not master the knowledge they learn, do not have the skills to think creatively and critically, and are unprepared to continue their studies to a higher level or proceed to the next phase in life. Being busy chasing for success in the examination also limits the time teachers have to approach and build a close relationship with each student. As a matter of fact, the relationship between teachers and students is very important as teachers should provide advice, guidance and try to solve problems that are currently affecting their students or may happen to them.

Imam Ghazali stated that among the characteristics of effective teachers is to have compassion towards their students and treat them like their own children because Rasulullah (saw) stated, « إِنَّمَا أَنَا لَكُمْ مِثْلُ الْوَالِدِ لَوْلِيهِ أَعْلَمُكُمْ » **“Verily I am like a father of a child for you , and I teach you.”** We should follow the behavior and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (saw), not teaching a higher level before students master the previous level, advising students softly and compassionately to never practice bad behavior rather than scolding them severely or mocking them, customizing the learning process based on the level of the students and never forcing them to achieve something beyond their capabilities as well as providing learning materials that are easy to understand, clear and appropriate with the stage of their mind development.

Teachers need to think and live in line with Islam by understanding the meaning of life which is to be accountable to the Creator of the universe. The teachers must be aware that their behavior should be in accordance with what is ordered by Allah (swt). It should not be contrary to the Islamic law, because in reality teachers are the representatives of education and teaching. Teachers must also build a close relationship with their students and be empathic to them by asking and helping in solving their problems and dilemmas. Therefore, teachers should be patient and kind and understand the level of their students. They must be trusted by their students, be convincing, approachable, wise in communication and often give advice. The advice they give must be based on Islam and practical so that the students know how to apply their advice; they need to think carefully about how to produce students who will become the best servants of Allah (swt) and the best source of goodness for their community, the ummah and humanity. Thus, teachers certainly need to ensure they become quality human resources based on the Islamic ideology. Quality human resources based on the Islamic ideology must possess these characteristics : i) Islamic qualities; ii) master *Thaqafah* (understanding of the Islamic Shari'ah); iii) master knowledge regarding life (science and technology) which is adequate to meet its daily needs. As a result, these quality teachers will produce a generation that does not only excel in science and technology, but also has an outstanding personality – a personality which shines from the integration of correct *aqliyah* (thinking) and *nafsiyah* (disposition) which will always produce a pious and noble attitude. A personality like this will become the pride of the Ummah and also admired by its enemies. It is this generation that we hope will become the future legacy which will lead the Ummah towards becoming a great, powerful and advanced nation.

Teaching Method

The following aspect which is also crucial besides the quality of teachers is the method of teaching in educating students. Appropriate teaching methods are needed to generate creative thinkers and young people who thirst for knowledge and are always eager to learn and contribute to the progress of society. Some of the problems or failures of teaching methods used today in schools include - learning by rote, merely reading the textbooks, teaching with irrelevant examples that do not touch on the reality of students, teaching in a way that does not convince the mind or touch the heart and explaining things in a way that is not understandable due to the different levels between students. As a result, students become bored, they have no passion to learn, they have no passion to attend school and finally find it difficult to absorb knowledge. What is worse is when the syllabus adopts a secular mentality which has a bad effect on the formation of the 'Nafsiyah' and 'Aqliyah' of students. Thus, a generation that is far from being instilled with

proper education is formed, rigid and stagnant, incapable of being creative and innovative in solving the problems of life and in the end becomes more undeveloped than other nations. This is what is currently happening in the Muslim countries all over the world. This setback displays a bad image towards the Muslim Ummah especially in the eyes of the enemy, the West, whereas a long time ago when the Muslims were under the leadership of the Khilafah, they were respected and revered by the enemies due to their success. Among the winning formulas of the Islamic civilization was that they succeeded in producing a generation using the correct teaching methods.

The correct teaching method is a rational address by the teacher and the student's intellectual learning/reception. Thought or mind/rational ('aql) is the tool for both teaching and studying. The mind is composed of four (elements): The brain (suitable for thinking), senses, the reality, and previous information about/of the reality. The mind or thought have the same meaning namely: "Transferring sensation of the reality via the senses to the brain with existing previous information to translate the reality"; then issuing a judgement upon the reality. If one wishes to transmit/communicate this thought to others, as in the education process, the teacher transmits this thought to students via one or more styles of expression, principally language. If the students link this thought with a sensed or previously sensed reality, or one which is similar as they had previously sensed, this thought would be transmitted to them just as if they had achieved it. Thus the teacher, when transmitting thoughts to students, must bring its meaning close to the students' brains by attempting to link it with a reality they sense, or a reality close to what they have sensed, such that they adopt it as a thought and not mere information. Accordingly the teacher must be keen to make the students sense the reality; if he cannot bring forward the reality itself, he must depict an image close to that reality in the student's brain by using visual, audio, or video means when giving the thought such that the student links the information with a sensed or conceived reality resulting in thought.

The sensed reality is the one that man can sense via one of his five senses, whether this reality is material or abstract (ma'anawiyy). This is a fundamental element in the thinking process. The hidden/invisible matters (mugheebaat) that man cannot sense with any of his senses e.g. Paradise, Hellfire, the Throne etc are not topics of thinking via the senses; rather they are topics of thought via information whose credibility is definitive (qat'iyy) like the Noble Qur'an and mutawatir Hadith.

The principal tool for rational address and intellectual learning in teaching or learning is language and the words and sentences it contains, the meanings that these words and sentences indicate, and the thoughts carried by these meaning. If the teacher and student comprehend these words, sentences and meanings with respect to the thoughts they indicate, these tools would be effective in the teaching and learning process. Accordingly, every teacher and curriculum devisor must take student linguistic achievement into account and use words, sentences and compositions that they understand in order to facilitate the intellectual discourse between the two parties. This method is suitable to transmit or receive any thought, whether this thought is directly related to a specific viewpoint about life such as ideological thoughts, or not so related such as mathematical sciences. Teaching the intellectual text related to a viewpoint does not mean merely restricting oneself to its linguistic meaning; rather it means understanding the text so as to apply it upon its relevant reality in order that the student adopts the Shar'a mandated stance towards it, whether by acting or abstaining. So he studies this type of thought to control his behaviour according to the Shari'ah rules. Education is not merely for the sake of intellectual amusement', rather it is meant to build the Islamic personality, in intellect and disposition, that strives to attain Allah's pleasure in all its actions and statements. Whereas if the thoughts are of the second type i.e. thoughts not directly related to a specific viewpoint such as physics, chemistry, mathematics etc., they are studied to prepare the student to interact with the universe that Allah subjugated to serve man. The Muslim, as an Islamic personality, studies empirical sciences in order to derive benefit and employ it to serve the Islamic Ummah's interests and vital issues. Knowledge is not sought for its own sake; rather, it is sought in order that man benefits from the thoughts and knowledge he learns in this life according to the Islamic rules.

Allah *Ta'ala* said:

﴿وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا﴾

“Seek the home of the Hereafter with what Allah gave you, but do not forget your portion in this world” [TMQ Al-Qasas: 77]

In Islam, the discussion regarding the quality of education has been stated clearly in the Holy Al-Quran. Allah (swt) said :

﴿كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ﴾

“You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah...” [Ali Imran :110]

Throughout history, Islam has proven to build a distinctive human civilization, capable of enlightening and brightening nearly the entire universe from the dark ages and its triumph lasted for over 13 centuries. The main factor determining the excellence and glory of the Islamic civilization is faith (taqwa) and its knowledge. There was no separation or dichotomy of these two factors in the educational curriculum that was applied which resulted in a generation that is undoubtedly prowess until now. When mentioning the medical field, our minds will imagine the physique of a great man named Ibnu Sina (Avicenna) known as the founder of the scientific doctoral world. He was a great doctor, and at the same time he was also an expert, *faqih deen* especially in terms of ‘*usul fiqh*’. In addition, among the figures produced from the science and technology of Muslims were Ibnu Khaldun (Father of Economics), Ibnu Khawarizmi (Father of Mathematics) Jabir bin Hayyan (Father of Chemistry), Ibnu Batutah (Father of Geography), Al Khazini and Al Biruni (Father of Physics), Al Battani (Father of Astronomy), Ibnu al Bair al Nabati (Father of Biology) and countless other figures from the Muslimin and Muslimat. They are not just known as experts in the field of science and technology, but their expertise in the field of dinniyah (religion) are also recognized.

Conclusion

Thus, the curriculum applied by the Prophet (saw) is undeniably great and has given birth to numerous outstanding figures who are world references until today - figures who are not only great morally, but their contribution in spreading the message of Islam (dawah) is also awe-inspiring. If compared with the current curriculum, we can surely see a very high concern in the society if their children are not able to earn an 'A' or a pass in the assessment examination but are not concerned if their children do not obey the Islamic Shariah. The society nowadays view that examination results are everything. This is the consequence of the way of thinking that has been taught in the secular-based curriculum that is successfully implanted in the minds of people today.

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (saw), he provided education to the people, including during his rulership, as it is the state's obligation. It was similar in the time of Caliph Umar bin Al-Khattab (ra), who was always hopeful for quality students in the state who could assist in managing the affairs of the Ummah such as Muaz bin Jabal. Muaz was well-known as an individual who was capable of comprehending halal and haram and so was consequently assigned as the Supreme Judge at a young age of 18 years old. What about the generations of today, at the age of 18 years? What are the level of their capability? Therefore, it is time we, as the ummah of Muhammad (saw) intensify our dawah activities in establishing the Islamic caliphate that will definitely replace the entire corrupted way of life today with Islamic based education, in order to produce generations such as Muaz bin Jabal: a generation of high quality, differentiating between truth and falsehood, creative and critical and also capable of restoring the glory of Islam and Muslims worldwide.

Wallahu a'lam.

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