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The Concept of Rote Learning and its Applications
in the Teaching and Learning of Qurʾān and Sunnah

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Abstract: Rote learning is characterised as a method of memorising facts, ideas, concepts, or information based on repetition to achieve an outcome of learning. Rote learning (memorisation by repetition) has both benefits and drawbacks, depending on the way it is applied. For instance, when meaningful learning is the goal, remembering becomes a means to an end. Whereas, when the goal is on knowledge acquisition, the focus becomes solely on remembering elements or fragments of knowledge. However, the current Western perspective on rote learning, from the lens of traditional Islamic education, has been unfavourable and misleading. In the West, this method is seen as making the learners passive and susceptible to religious and political indoctrination. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the function of memorisation method as a means to promote meaningful learning, in the teaching and learning of Qurʾān and Sunnah. It also seeks to examine the application of revised taxonomy in the learning of Qurʾān and Sunnah, as well as other related sciences. This is a library-based research, and therefore, qualitative in nature. The researcher employs an intensive and extensive survey of the works relevant to the study. Furthermore, a cursory survey on the application of the revised taxonomy to the learning of Qurʾān and Sunnah and other related sciences was also carried. Findings from this study revealed that memorisation method as applied to Islamic education is not an end in itself, rather a means to an end, i.e. meaningful learning. A thorough examination on the application of revised taxonomy to the learning of Qurʾān and Sunnah and other related sciences would further support this finding.

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Introduction

Rote learning is defined as the memorisation of facts, ideas, concepts, or information based on repetition. Rote learning has been considered a basic step necessary in learning certain subjects. It focusses on the presentation of new information to facilitate the learners' encoding of new facts, ideas, or information, as well as the recalling of already acquired facts, ideas or information.

The benefit of rote learning lies in its ability to support quick recall and retrieving of basic facts, ideas, information from long-term memory and also serves as foundation blocks for development of further learning. However, rote learning has been criticized on the following grounds: (1) it fosters repetition; (2) learners can easily lose focus; (3) it doesn't foster deeper understanding of a learning material; (4) it doesn't allow for the use of social skills; (5) it doesn't connect or relate new information to previous knowledge; and (6) may result in wrong impression or understanding of a concept.

Thus, in rote learning, the teacher is actively engaged in conveying the content by teaching the whole class directly, where the teacher's control over the learners is extensive, suggesting that learners have a low level of experience in learning. Thereby learners' development is hindered because critical thinking or complex thinking is not promoted in a class dominated by the teacher. The engagement and interaction with learning materials at a deeper level and development of problem-solving skills are not present. Therefore, thinking out of the box that is necessary for creativity and innovation is hindered.

However, two pertinent questions arise, is there exist a single "best" approach and whether one approach is more efficient than the other. The fact that that learning is a complex, ongoing process that seems to be strongly dependent on and influenced by one's prior learning experience, perhaps, the appropriate response to the raised questions would be "it depends" because learning is a function of many factors, and the learning process is not static, as it is constantly changing in nature and diversity. What might be effective, in presenting a complex body of knowledge, for a first timer, would not be effective enough to stimulate a learner who is more familiar with the content. Thus, one does not teach facts the same way that the concepts and problem-solving are taught; likewise, one teaches differently depending on the proficiency level of the learners (Ertmer, Peggy A and Newby, 2013).

Further, the way we define learning and our standpoint on how learning takes place has bearings on how learning material is presented to the learners and the decision on how much of the learning material the learners has acquired. Thus, learning is viewed from two standpoints, knowledge acquisition and meaningful learning. The former is consistent with a focus on rote learning in which learners seek to add new knowledge to their memories. Whereas the latter is consistent with the view of learning as knowledge construction in which learners seek to make sense of their experience. However, an important educational goal is to attain meaningful learning which demands that learning experiences goes beyond mere

presentation of factual knowledge and simply retrieving or recalling of factual knowledge (Mayer, 2002).

Likewise, among the most crucial educational goals are promotion of retention and learning transfer. Retention is the ability of the learner to recall the learned information at a later time the way it was been presented. It involves retrieving relevant knowledge from long term memory. Transfer of learning refers to application learned experience in a new and novel situation, or how prior experience facilitate new learning (Ertmer, Peggy A and Newby, 2013). Thus, retention requires the learners to recall or retrieve what they have acquired of knowledge, whereas transfer requires the learners, in addition to recall of knowledge, to apply the knowledge gained in the most beneficial and useful ways (Mayer, 2002).

1.0 The Teaching and Learning of Qurʾān and Sunnah: The Function of Memorisation.

In the West, memorisation method of instruction has been considered as one of the negative features of traditional Islamic education, rendering learners to be passive and susceptible to religious and political indoctrination (Kadi, 2006). Various researches have proved this assertion to be misleading. This is because memorisation method as applied to Islamic education is not an end in itself, rather a means to an end.

According to Mayer (2002) when teachers only concentrate on rote learning, teaching and assessing focus solely on remembering elements or fragments of knowledge, often in isolation of any context. When teachers focus on meaningful learning, however, remembering knowledge is incorporated within the larger task of constructing new knowledge or solving new problems. Thus, when meaningful learning is the goal, then remembering becomes a means to an end, rather than the end itself (Mayer, 2002).

Boyle cited in Kadi (2006) finds this concept, as applied to the Qurʾān in particular, to be mischaracterization resulting from lack of understanding of the assumptions about memorisation. Relating the concept of memorisation to those of understanding, reason and knowledge, she examines the purpose of memorisation in light of ethnographic field research she conducted in Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria. She concludes that memorisation is actually the first, rather than the last, step in the learning process in Islamic educational institutions and that the memorisation of the Qurʾān enables learners to "embody" it and hence to make it a constant in their spiritual and moral development (Kadi, 2006).

The effectiveness and efficiency of embody the noble Qurʾān for spiritual and moral development is contained the noble Qurʾān 2: 2, and 17: 9 respectively: "This is the Book in which there is no doubt. (Since its Author, Allah, the Creator of this universe, possesses the complete knowledge, there is no room for doubt about its contents.) It is a guide for those who are God conscious." (tr. Malik); "Verily this Qurʾān does guide to that which is most right (or stable) and gives the glad tidings to the Believers who work deeds of righteousness that they shall have a magnificent reward". (tr. Yusuf Ali)

For Hardaker, Glenn, and Sabki (2018), Islamic pedagogy is characterised by heartfelt interactions between the teacher and learner by means of verbal communication, facilitating memorisation, and the didactic approach towards sacred text. Their work shows that Islamic pedagogy in the *madrasah* is considered a largely spiritual process through which knowledge extant in the potential is in the hearts of the learners and gradually unfolds in the form of embodied actions (Hardaker, Glenn and Sabki, 2018). Waghid (2014) argued that a maximalist account of learning does not entirely reject rote learning, but considers that learning is more a matter of deliberation (*shūrā*). This means that learning takes place when standpoints are contested in the classrooms and justifiable evidence are brought forward in defence of certain viewpoints.

al-Zarnūjī mentions teaching through practice and application and stresses the importance of repetition and dictation. Teaching by the method of application has greater impact on the soul and confirms knowledge. His work indicates that activities and practices are inextricably connected with all elements of learning. Learning activities cannot be separated from content, aims and motivation, because activities are functions of motivation and lead to it. Activities makes learning interesting, eliminate laziness and makes learning lively. They are not conditions that lead to learning: they are learning itself and form part of its aims and targets. Thus, comprehension activities are not different from comprehension but are comprehension itself (al-Khaledi, 2011).

2.0 Application of Revised Taxonomy to the Learning of Qurʾān and Sunnah

The revised taxonomy involves six cognitive process categories; remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate, and create. The application of the revised taxonomy to the learning of Qurʾān and Sunnah and other related sciences further emphasized the fact that memorisation method, as applied to Islamic education, is a means to an end, rather than the end itself

This is examined in the light of Mayer's (2002) work, "*Rote Versus Meaningful Learning*" that describes revised taxonomy based on the notion that learning can be extended to involve a fuller range of cognitive processes. Based on a review of the illustrative objectives contained in the original taxonomy and an examination of other classification systems, the researchers selected 19 specific cognitive processes that fit within the six categories.

2.1 Remember

This category involves instructional objectives that promote the retention of the learning material in the same way it is presented. Remembering is consistent with the ability to recall and retrieve information located in the long term memory. This is required for meaningful learning and problem solving when the knowledge is used in more complex tasks. For example, knowledge of correct spelling of Arabic words is *necessary* for the mastery of recitation of Qurʾān and Sunnah/hadith of the Prophet.

2.2 Understand

Learners are said to understand when they are able to construct meaning from instructional material. Learners understand when they are able to relate new knowledge to previous gained knowledge. This involves integrating new knowledge with the existing schemas and cognitive framework. For example, learning *ṣalāt* involves learning recitation, performance of a *rakʿah* (a unit of salah); the number of *rakʿah* in each complete *ṣalāt*; the obligatory and non-obligatory steps in *ṣalāt*; what vitiate *ṣalāt*; and error in *ṣalāt* (*sujūd sahwī*). Thus, to understand *salah* demands the ability of learners to form a connection between one stage and another in *ṣalāt*.

The associated cognitive processes in the above are "*recognizing*" and "*recalling*" (Mayer, 2002). Recognising involves locating facts, information, ideas, or past learning experiences, in the long term memory, that are relevant to new experience. For example, performance of *ṣalāt* requires recitation of *sūrat al-Fātiḥah*. Recalling involves retrieving relevant information from the long term memory, i.e. correct and accurate recitation of *sūrat al-Fātiḥah* at the appropriate step in *ṣalāt*.

Cognitive process in the category of *"understand"* include interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining.

Interpreting is said to have taken place with the ability of learners to convert information from one form of representation to another. For example, learners are able to use the knowledge gained about *ṣalāt* to perform different kinds of *ṣalāts*, e.g. *ṣalāt al-khusūf, ṣalāt al-ʿīd, ṣalāt al-istisqāʾ.*

Exemplifying takes place when learners supply new example of a genera concept or principle, for example, after learning the principle of *qiyās* (analogical deduction), a source of Islamic law, learners are able to find new examples not included in the learning material.

Classifying takes place when learners are able to categorize things into certain particular classes. For example, learners after learning different categories of human actions in Islam, are able to classify certain actions into *wājib* (lawful), *mandūb* (recommended), *mubāḥ* (neutral) *makrūh* (discouraged) or *ḥarām* (forbidden).

Summarizing occurs when learners are able to provide a brief statement that describes a general theme. For example, summarizing Islam with a brief description of the five pillars of Islam. *Īmān* with a short description of the six articles of faith, *iḥsān* with the brief statement "to worship Allah as though you see Him".

Inferring involves drawing a logical conclusion from presented information. This occurs when learners are able derive relevant lessons from Qurʾānic parables. The educator should achieve these aims by relying on Qurʾānic parables for everyday situations and school activities, and by commenting on them by providing a description of their social and behavioural results. These parables help one to better understand the meaning of the

commandment, to cultivate divine emotions, and in training the mind in correct thinking and sound logical reasoning (al-Khaledi, 2011, p.42).

Comparing involves identifying similarities and differences between two or more objects, ideas, situations, problems, or events. For example, learners are able to distinguish between *ḥajj* and *ʿumrah, zakāh* and *ṣadaqah, ḥadīth nabawī* and *ḥadīth qudsī*, Qurʾān and *ḥadīth qudsī* by identifying similarities and differences between them.

Explaining takes place when learners are able to supply basic information that may adequately represent the learned experience. Example of this is when learners are able to supply the *isnād* and *matn* of a particular *ḥadīth* along with its classification (*ṣaḥīḥ, daʿīf,* or *mawḍū*).

2.3 Apply

Apply involves procedures to perform exercises or solve problems. This category consists of two cognitive processes: executing - when the task to be carried out is familiar to the learners, and implementing – when the task at hand is unfamiliar or constitute a problem to the learners.

Executing occurs when learners carry out a familiar task using a set of procedure. For example, application of *tajwīd* to already memorised *sūrah*s of the Qurʾān. Whereas, implementing takes place when learners apply one or more procedures to a given unfamiliar task. For example, application of *tajwīd* to a new *sūrah* to be learned. Thus, unlike executing, which relies almost exclusively on cognitive processes associated with *"apply"* implementing involves cognitive processes associated with both *"understand"* and *"apply".*

2.4 Analyse

Analyse involves breaking material into its constituent parts and determining how the parts are related to each other and to the overall structure. This category involves cognitive processes of differentiating, organizing, and attributing. Thus, *"analysis"* is attained when learners are able to determine the relevance a particular information (differentiating), the manner in which pieces of information are composed (organizing), and the underlying purpose of the information. For example, when a learner is able to differentiate a particular *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* from a group *ḥadīth*s, determined its *isnād* and *matn*, and how it is related to the particular group of *ḥadīth*s.

Differentiating takes place when learners are able to distinguish the relevance and irrelevance, or important and unimportant parts of a particular learning experience. In learning *ṣalāt*, for example, when a learner differentiates between the obligatory and non-obligatory steps, then, differentiating has occurred. Another example is when a learner distinguishes between *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* and *daʿīf ḥadīth* from a collection of *ḥadīth*s, using a set of criteria (*isnād* and *matn*).

Organising; it involves the determination of how a given element is related and function within a system or a structure. It is finding coherence, or structuring. Organising occurs when, for example, learners are able to structure historical description of the revelation and preservation of the Qurʾān, or historical events that surround the revelation of particular passage(s) of the Qurʾān (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).

Attributing, known as deconstructing is the ability of learners to determine the point of view, biases, and values, or intent underlying a given learning material. Attributing takes place when learners determine a particular perspective from which certain verse(s) of the Qurʾān is interpreted (is it in a *Sunni* context or *Sufism* that gives life to a long tradition of spiritual interpretation).

2.5 Evaluate

Evaluate involves making judgements based on criteria or standard which include certain qualities, such as, effectiveness, efficiency, and consistency. This category involves cognitive processes of checking and critiquing. Checking is related to internal judgements e.g. internal consistency. Whereas critiquing deals with external judgements, it is based on external criteria.

Checking happens when learners identify within a process or determine whether a given process possesses internal consistency. This is applicable when learners are able to detect inconsistency within a given *isnād* of a particular *ḥadīth*, or determine whether it follows effective genuine procedure.

Critiquing happens when learners discover inconsistencies between a learning material and some external criteria, or whether a given material enjoys external consistency. This applies when learners are able to discover, for example, inconsistency between *matn* of a particular *ḥadīth* with a certain *sahih ḥadīth* or Quranic verse(s), or determine whether the text of a particular *ḥadīth* is consistent with or align with certain genuine procedure.

Critiquing has to do with critical thinking, which lies at the core of teaching and learning of Qurʾān and Sunnah, where a combination of reason and knowledge is a necessary requirement and that absent of one or the other results in creating situations that are either useless or dangerous (Rosenthal, 2007). Thus, the use of dialogue and debate method was prioritised by medieval Muslim educators. This is in form of conversation with learners, as a way asking probing questions that have bearing to their own world to provoke their interest and trigger their intellect (al-Khaledi, 2011).

2.6 Create

Create involves assembling elements to form coherent or functional whole. In other words, to rearrange elements into a new pattern or structure. This helps learners to develop original minds. The Islamic pedagogical view of teaching scientific reasoning is embedded in the noble Qurʾān which has more often than not advocated the application of the critical

mind to the study of nature, natural phenomena, and the entire cosmos, how it was started, renewed and how it is going to end (al-Sharaf, 2013). Noble Qurʾān 29: 20 declares "Say to them: "Travel through the earth" and see how Allah originates the creation, then creates the latter creation. Surely, Allah has power over everything."

The Qurʾanic verse refers to the natural phenomena of renewal to promotes contemplation as how Allah creates and recreates things in the universe, and advocate traveling for discovery as a principle of scientific reasoning in data collection phase (al-Sharaf, 2013).

Create involves three cognitive processes: generating, planning, and producing. Generating involves creative thinking. In generating a learner is provided with a given problem and must come up with alternative solutions. For example learners may be given the task to generate multiple ways an educational institution, or any corporate existence, can fulfil *maqāsid al-Sharīʿah* (objectives of Islamic law): the preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth.

Planning involves devising a method for carrying out some particular tasks. For example, learners could be required to list steps needed for the fulfilment of *maqāsid al-Sharīʿah* in a particular institution, organization, or corporate body.

Producing: known as constructing, involves giving learners a functional description of a goal and the need to create a product that satisfies the description. For example, learners are asked to design an institution that satisfies the requirements of *maqāsid al-Sharīʿah*. The goal is accomplished, for example, when learners are able to identify the availability of mosques as *ḥifẓ al-dīn*, health facilities as *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (life), educational services and resources as *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql* (intellect), maternity home and child care as *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (progeny), and security services as *ḥifẓ al-māl* (wealth).

Conclusion

Rote learning is defined as the memorisation of facts, ideas, concepts, or information based on repetition. Rote learning has been considered a basic step necessary in learning certain subjects. It focusses on the presentation of new information to facilitate the learners' encoding of new facts, ideas, or information, as well as the recalling of the already acquired facts, ideas or information.

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