

Approaches for teaching, learning and doing research as deduced from the Qur'an and Sunnah

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ABSTRACT

Approaches to teaching and learning keep on changing continuously as evidenced in the development of sub-disciplines dealing with education within the discipline, for example, medical education. This paper brings in another perspective in the search for the ideal teaching and learning approaches. Starting from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, this paper identifies about 20 different aspects of teaching and learning found in these two Islamic sources. These aspects could be grouped into four categories: pre-learning phase and setting the context; personality qualities needed for good teaching and learning relationship; teaching approaches; and lastly, approaches for enhancing the learning process. The paper demonstrates the great potential of the Qur'an and Sunnah for informing on the effective ways for teaching and learning.

KEYWORDS: Teaching, Learning, Research, Theology

INTRODUCTION

Research in education has shed light on the various aspects of the learning process that were previously not given sufficient attention. Some of these aspects include the teacher-learner relationship, the quality of the learning environment, the teaching style, the different ways of learning, the larger role of assessment, the dynamic aspect of curriculum etc. In Islam, no aspect of the learning process was taken for granted. The very first *ayats* (verses) revealed in the *Qur'an* were specifically about reading and writing:

“Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists), Has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who has taught (the writing) by the pen, Has taught man that which he knew not.” (96;1-5)

In these *ayats*, reading and writing were given a divine dimension as it was Allah Ta'ala who taught by the pen and taught man what he did not know. This divine aspect is confirmed in another part of the *Qur'an* in which Allah Ta'ala says:

“...So be afraid of Allah, and Allah teaches you...” (2;282)

Related to reading and writing is knowledge, which is

also emphasized in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. It stands to reason that *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* would contain wealth of ideas on the three ingredients of knowledge, namely; teaching, learning and research. This is supported by *ayat* that says that the *Qur'an* has made all things clear,

“...And We have sent down to you the Book (the *Qur'an*) as an exposition of everything...” (16;89)

and another *ayat* that says that the *Qur'an* has given all kinds of examples.

“And indeed We have fully explained to mankind, in this *Qur'an*, every kind of similitude...” (17;89)

What remains is for researchers to apply themselves and make relevant and plausible extrapolations from the relevant pointers found in the *Qur'an*.

The *Sunnah* also has details about knowledge ('ilm') and its various dimensions. For example, one supplication in the *Sunnah* refers specifically to knowledge:

“ O my Lord, increase me in knowledge”

The *Sunnah* recognises the existence of extra sensory sources of knowledge. This includes revelation, dreams, '*firas*' or sixth sense. However, with the exception of revelation, the others are regarded as exceptional rather than the norm. They exist and may be used in some instances but are not to replace normal and regular sources of knowledge. One example of this was when the Prophet *sallallahu alaihi wa sal-lam* (SAW) accepted the Azaan (muslim call to prayer) that came by the way of a dream.

Beside revelation, the general Islamic approach to

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teaching and learning is one that deals with human-to-human tuition. An ayat in the *Qur'an* says that if angels were the occupants of earth then an angelic messenger would have been sent to them (17;95):

'Say: "If there were on the earth, angels walking about in peace and security, We should certainly have sent down for them from the heaven an angel as a Messenger'

The *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* emphasize the merits of both wisdom ('*Hikma*') and knowledge ('*ilm*'). According to the *Qur'an*, the one given wisdom has been given lot of goodness. According to one hadith, *Sulaiman alaihi salaam* (AS) was given the choice between wisdom, wealth and kingdom. He chose wisdom and subsequently got both wealth and kingdom.

In the next section and subsequent subsections, we extract the approaches to teaching and learning as found in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. Our discussion is based on extrapolation rather than '*Tafsir*' and draw heavily from the stories of the prophets as narrated in the *Qur'an*. In the last section we discuss the findings followed by some concluding remarks.

Approaches to teaching and learning as found in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*

1. Pre-learning phase and setting of the learning context

Professional development through building the principles of beliefs and attitudes before assigning tasks.

In the story of Musa AS as recounted in *Surah Ta Ha* (20), we see an example of a route towards professional development. Allah Ta'ala gives Musa AS a specific instruction, that of removing his shoes. Allah Ta'ala then gives the context, tawhid (God consciousness) and the importance of the hereafter. After that Allah Ta'ala makes Musa AS go through a real life demonstration. It is after all these that the task is now given. In short, Musa AS went through a steep learning curve towards professional development. The story is given in the *ayats* below:

And has there come to you the story of Mûsa (Moses)?

When he saw a fire, he said to his family: "Wait! Verily, I have seen a fire, perhaps I can bring you some burning brand therefrom, or find some guidance at the fire."

And when he came to it (the fire), he was called by name: "O Mûsa (Moses)!

"Verily! I am your Lord! So take off your shoes, you are in the sacred valley, *Tuwa*.

"And I have chosen you. So listen to that which is inspired to you.

"Verily! I am Allâh! *Lâ ilâha illa Ana* (none has the right

to be worshipped but I), so worship Me, and perform *As-Salât (Iqâmat-as-Salât)* for My Remembrance.

"Verily, the Hour is coming and My Will is to keep it hidden that every person may be rewarded for that which he strives.

"Therefore, let not the one who believes not therein (i.e. in the Day of Resurrection, Reckoning, Paradise and Hell, etc.), but follows his own lusts, divert you there from, lest you perish.

"And what is that in your right hand, O Mûsa (Moses)?"

He said: "This is my stick, whereon I lean, and where-with I beat down branches for my sheep, and wherein I find other uses."

(Allâh) said: "Cast it down, O Mûsa (Moses)!" He cast it down, and behold! It was a snake, moving quickly.

Allâh said:"Grasp it, and fear not, We shall return it to its former state,

"And press your (right) hand to your (left) side, it will come forth white (and shining), without any disease as another sign,

"That We may show you (some) of Our Greater Signs.

"Go to Fir'aun (Pharaoh)! Verily, he has transgressed (all bounds in disbelief and disobedience, and has behaved as an arrogant, and as a tyrant)." (20;9-24).

2. Personality qualities needed for a good teaching and learning relationship

Qualities of teachers and learners

Successful teaching and learning is contingent upon a sincere relationship between teacher and learner. There must be trust between the two, the teacher must have mercy and knowledge and the learner must have the qualities of patience and obedience.

Evidence for this deduction comes from the story of Musa AS and Khidr AS as reported in *Surah Al Kahf* (18).

"Then they found one of our slaves, unto whom We had bestowed mercy from Us, and whom We had taught knowledge from Us.

Mûsa (Moses) said to him (Khidr) 'May I follow you so that you teach me something of that knowledge (guidance and true path) which you have been taught (by Allâh)?' He (Khidr) said: 'Verily! You will not be able to have **patience** with me! And how can you have patience about a thing which you know not?' Mûsa (Moses) said: 'If Allâh will, you will find me **patient**, and I will **not disobey** you in aught.' He (Khidr) said: 'Then, if you follow me, ask me not about anything

till I myself mention it to you.’ “ (18;66-70)

Included here is the manner of addressing the learner. In Surah Ta Ha (20), Allah Ta’ala addresses Musa AS by his first name on several occasions. For example:

“And when he came to it (the fire), he was called by name: ‘O Musa’ “ (20;11)

and

“And what is that in your right hand O Musa” (20;17)

For effective learning, the learner has to listen attentively. As Allah Ta’ala commanded Musa AS:

“And I have chosen you. So listen to that which will be revealed (to you) (20;13)

This quality of attentive listening was one of the qualities that the Prophet Muhammad SAW possessed. On one occasion, after listening carefully to Abul Walid, he asked him ‘Have you finished’. He SAW gave him full audience, listened to him and allowed to say his full before replying.

Teaching by showing mercy

The Prophet SAW was a merciful teacher. One occasion in which this came out clearly was when a bedouin urinated in the Masjid Nabawi (Prophet’s mosque). He halted the companions who wanted to hit him and instead asked for water to be poured on the urine.

Narrated Anas bin Malik: “A bedouin urinated in the mosque and the people ran to (beat) him. Allah’s Apostle said, ‘Do not interrupt his urination (i.e. let him finish).’ Then the Prophet asked for a tumbler of water and poured the water over the place of urine.” (Reported in *Bukhari Volume 8, Book 73, Number 54*)

He then addressed the Bedouin saying simple that the Masjid was not the place for doing such action.

Saying “*I don’t know*” when you do not know

The Sunnah encourages humility in both the teacher and learner. The teacher should say “I do not know” if he does not know and similarly for the learner. The Prophet SAW himself said that he did not know when he did not know the answer.

This can be seen from the following hadith:

“A man asked the Prophet SAW which piece of land is the best. He SAW replied ‘I do not know’. Then he subsequently asked which piece of land was the most evil. He SAW replied ‘I do not know’. Then Allah Ta’ala revealed that masjid was the best and market was the worst.

When the teacher admits to the student the he did not know he is effectively saying to the student that

he is not the only source of knowledge and that there are other sources of knowledge. This stimulates the learner to look for other sources. As such, saying you do not know when you do not know is part of knowledge.

In acting on this hadith, the famous scholar, Imam Malik *rahimahullah* is well known for the numerous times for which he replied ‘I do not know’.

Teaching by examples and matching words with action.

One of the most popular ways that the Prophet SAW used in teaching his companions was through examples. If he teaches about charity then he is the foremost in giving charity. In fasting, he is the foremost in fasting. In praying at night, he is the foremost. This is captured by the following ahadith:

Narrated Jabir: “Never was the Prophet asked for a thing to be given for which his answer was ‘no’.” (Reported in *Bukhari Volume 8, Book 73, Number 60*)

Narrated Masruq: “We were sitting with ‘Abdullah bin ‘Amr who was narrating to us (Hadith): He said, “Allah’s Apostle was neither a Fahish nor a Mutafahhish, and he used to say, ‘The best among you are the best in character (having good manners)’” (*Bukhari Volume 8, Book 73, Number 61*)

Narrated Anas: I served the Prophet for ten years, and he never said to me, ‘Uf’ (a minor harsh word denoting impatience) and never blamed me by saying, ‘Why did you do so or why didn’t you do so?’” (Reported in *Bukhari Volume 8, Book 73, Number 64*)

For the impact of the lesson to be lasting and effective, the teacher himself should be exemplary. It is thus contrary to the sunnah for a teacher to teach about the bad effects of smoking while he, himself is a smoker.

3. Teaching approaches

Relevance of one-to-one teaching

From Surah Luqman (31), we can see the relevance of one-to-one tuition in teaching and learning.

“And (remember) when Luqmân said to his son when he was advising him: “O my son! Join not in worship others with Allâh. Verily! Joining others in worship with Allâh is a great *Zûlm* (wrong) indeed.” (31;15)

This one-to-one teaching was also applied by the Prophet SAW in the famous hadith with Ibn Abbass *radialahu anhuma* (RA) in which he taught him, among other points, the important lesson that benefit can only come to someone when Allah Ta’ala has ordained it for that person.

The Prophet SAW also used one-to-one teaching strategy. One example of this is in the story of Ibn Abbas in

which he taught him about *Tawhid* and *Qadr*. Another example is given in the Hadith below about the sahabi who did not perform the prayer properly:

Narrated Abu Huraira: ‘Once the Prophet entered the mosque, a man came in, offered the prayer and greeted the Prophet. The Prophet returned his greeting and said to him, “Go back and pray again for you have not prayed.” The man offered the prayer again, came back and greeted the Prophet. He said to him thrice, “Go back and pray again for you have not prayed.” The man said, “By Him Who has sent you with the truth! I do not know a better way of praying. Kindly teach Me how to pray.” He said, “When you stand for the prayer, say *Takbir* and then recite from the *Qur’an* what you know and then bow with calmness till you feel at ease, then rise from bowing till you stand straight. Afterwards prostrate calmly till you feel at ease and then raise (your head) and sit with Calmness till you feel at ease and then prostrate with calmness till you feel at ease in prostration and do the same in the whole of your prayer.” ‘(Reported in *Bukhari Volume 1, Book 12, Number 759*)

Small group discussion

Discussion groups are effective tools for learning. The approach to be used in the discussion group should be in the form of asking questions:

‘Likewise, We awakened them (from their long deep sleep) that they **might question one another**. A speaker from among them said: “How long have you stayed (here)?” They said: “We have stayed (perhaps) a day or part of a day.” They said: “Your Lord (Alone) knows best how long you have stayed (here). So send one of you with this silver coin of yours to the town, and let him find out which is the good lawful food, and bring some of that to you. And let him be careful and let no man know of you.’ (18;19)

And the critical number for effective group discussion is seven. Our evidence for this comes from the story of the people of the Cave in Surah Khaf (18). As Allah Ta’ala says, He raised them up for the purpose of them asking each other.

“ (Some) say they were three, the dog being the fourth among them; (others) say they were five, the dog being the sixth, guessing at the unseen; (yet others) say they were seven, the dog being the eighth. Say (O Muhammad SAW): “My Lord knows best their number; none knows them but a few.” So debate not (about their number, etc.) except with the clear proof (which We have revealed to you). And consult not any of them (people of the Scripture, Jews and Christians) about (the affair of) the people of the Cave “ (18;22)

In addition, in group discussion, anyone could speak, not necessarily the leader. The ayat above said that ‘A speaker from among them’, not necessarily their leader.

Debate

In several places, the *Qur’an* uses debate as a teaching and learning strategy. One example of this is the following encounter between Ibrahim AS and Namrud: ‘Have you not looked at him who disputed with Ibrâhim (Abraham) about his Lord (Allâh), because Allâh had given him the kingdom? When Ibrâhim (Abraham) said (to him): “My Lord (Allâh) is He Who gives life and causes death.” He said, “I give life and cause death.” Ibrâhim (Abraham) said, “Verily! Allâh causes the sun to rise from the east; then cause it you to rise from the west.” So the disbeliever was utterly defeated. And Allâh guides not the people, who are *Zâlimûn* (wrong-doers, etc.) (2;258)

Evidence-based learning

The *Qur’an* gives importance to evidence and this comes out in several *Ayats*:

“Say (O Muhammad SAW), ‘Produce your proof if you are truthful.’ ” (2;111)

‘Or have they taken for worship (other) *âliha* (gods) besides Him? Say: “Bring your proof:” This (the *Qur’ân*) is the Reminder for those with me and the Reminder for those before me. But most of them know not the Truth, so they are averse.’ (21;24)

‘Is not He (better than your so-called gods) Who originates creation, and shall thereafter repeat it, and Who provides for you from heaven and earth? Is there any *ilâh* (god) with Allâh? Say, “Bring forth your proofs, if you are truthful.” ’(27;64)

Observational learning

Observation is a central part of learning. Our evidence for this is the repeated instruction in the *Qur’an* for one to go through the lands and see and observe.

“Say (O Muhammad SAW): ‘Travel in the land...’”(6;11)

“Say to them (O Muhammad SAW) ‘Travel in the land and see how has been the end of the criminals (those who denied Allâh’s Messengers and disobeyed Allâh).’ “ (27;69)

Experimental learning

The role of experiment is well appreciated in contemporary learning methods. It provides one of the best ways for controlling for confounding variables and for demonstrating a cause-effect relationship. This experimental approach is employed in the *Qur’an* as demonstrated in the story of Ibrahim AS when he asked Allah Ta’ala to show him how He Ta’ala gives life to the dead. Allah Ta’ala made Ibrahim AS go through a process which we now call ‘experiment’.

‘And (remember) when Ibrâhim (Abraham) said, “My

Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead.” He (Allâh) said: “Do you not believe?” He [Ibrâhim (Abraham)] said: “Yes (I believe), but to be stronger in Faith.” He said: “Take four birds, then cause them to incline towards you (then slaughter them, cut them into pieces), and then put a portion of them on every hill, and call them, they will come to you in haste. And know that Allâh is All-Mighty, All-Wise.” (2;260)

Another demonstration of a similar kind of experiment is by Isa AS when he fashioned clay in the form of a bird and blow into it and it became alive by Allah’s leave. In the first instance, the ‘experiment’ was for the benefit of Ibrahim AS while in the second instance it was the purpose of dawah to Islam.

Real-life demonstration

The Qur’an covers another situation which cannot be called research. The closest description for this can be called a ‘real-life demonstration’. One example of this is Surah Baqarah (2;259),

Or like the one who passed by a town and it had tumbled over its roofs. He said: “Oh! How will Allâh ever bring it to life after its death?” So Allâh caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up (again). He said: “How long did you remain (dead)?” He (the man) said: “(Perhaps) I remained (dead) a day or part of a day”. He said: “Nay, you have remained (dead) for a hundred years, look at your food and your drink, they show no change; and look at your donkey! And thus We have made of you a sign for the people. Look at the bones, how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh”. When this was clearly shown to him, he said, “I know (now) that Allâh is Able to do all things.”

The story of Musa AS described above (under professional development) also falls under this section.

Field study

Related to the above, one can deduce that the learning process has room for conducting a field study. The evidence for this comes from the journey of Musa AS and Khidr AS as reported in Surah Al Kahf:

‘So they both proceeded, till, when they embarked the ship, he (Khidr) scuttled it. Mûsa (Moses) said: “Have you scuttled it in order to drown its people? Verily, you have committed a thing “*Imra*” (a *Munkar* - evil, bad, dreadful thing).”

He (Khidr) said: “Did I not tell you, that you would not be able to have patience with me?”

[Mûsa (Moses)] said: “Call me not to account for what I forgot, and be not hard upon me for my affair (with you).”

Then they both proceeded, till they met a boy, he (Khidr) killed him. Mûsa (Moses) said: “Have you killed

an innocent person who had killed none? Verily, you have committed a thing “*Nukra*” (a great *Munkar* - prohibited, evil, dreadful thing!)”

(Khidr) said: “Did I not tell you that you can have no patience with me?” [Mûsa (Moses)] said: “If I ask you anything after this, keep me not in your company, you have received an excuse from me.”

Then they both proceeded, till, when they came to the people of a town, they asked them for food, but they refused to entertain them. Then they found therein a wall about to collapse and he (Khidr) set it up straight. [Mûsa (Moses)] said: If you had wished, surely, you could have taken wages for it!”

(Khidr) said: “This is the parting between me and you, I will tell you the interpretation of (those) things over which you were unable to hold patience.’ (18;71-78)

This story has a lot in it. The teacher sets out the conditions for the learning and he himself was abiding by the conditions. In the interaction between teacher and learner, the story brings out qualities of mercy in the teacher. Khidr AS, pardoned Musa AS on three occasions before applying the penalty. Before applying the penalty, the learner was reminded each time he broke the rules. We also see from this story the psychological strategy of keeping the student in suspense. It is possible that in this manner of keeping the student in suspense, the student gives full attention to the lesson and the impact becomes more impressive and maximum benefit is derived. We can extrapolate further and deduce that the ‘curriculum’ for a teaching-learning ‘course’ can be flexible and multidimensional, as long as they help in achieving the ‘objectives’ of the course. The evidence for this also comes from the story of Musa AS and Khidr AS when their teaching-learning course took them through various contrastingly different phases.

4. Approaches for enhancing the learning process

Reflection based on observation

The Qur’an shows that learning should be dynamic and based on reflection. Previously-held position should be revised based on more convincing evidence. The evidence for this comes from the story of Ibrahim AS on the search for his Lord, based on the evidence from celestial bodies. Ibrahim AS kept revising his opinion each time shortcoming was found on an evidence. There was observation followed by reflection before a decision is made. This is a logical learning process. Ibrahim AS changed his prior position based on the reflection, as recounted below:

“ And (remember) when Ibrâhim (Abraham) said to his father Azar: “Do you take idols as *âlihâ* (gods)? Verily, I see you and your people in manifest error. “Thus did we show Ibrâhim (Abraham) the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he be one of those who

have Faith with certainty. When the night covered him over with darkness he saw a star. He said: "This is my lord." But when it set, he said: "I like not those that set." When he saw the moon rising up, he said: "This is my lord." But when it set, he said: "Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among the erring people." When he saw the sun rising up, he said: "This is my lord. This is greater." But when it set, he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from all that you join as partners in worship with Allâh. Verily, I have turned my face towards Him Who has created the heavens and the earth *Hanifa* (Islâmic Monotheism, i.e. worshipping none but Allâh Alone) and I am not of *Al-Mushrikûn* " (6;74-79)

Simulation as an aid for teaching skill

The *Qur'an* shows that simulation can be successfully used as aid in teaching. Our evidence for this comes from the story of the sons of Adam AS. When one killed the other and did not know what to do with the corpse, it was a crow which demonstrated by means of simulation, how to bury the corpse.

"Then Allâh sent a crow who scratched the ground to show him to hide the dead body of his brother. He (the murderer) said: "Woe to me! Am I not even able to be as this crow and to hide the dead body of my brother?" Then he became one of those who regretted" (5;21)

Direct observation and feedback on learning skills.

In the *Qu'ran*, we come across a situation wherein the Prophet Nuh AS is instructed to construct a ship under the direct observation of Allah Ta'ala:

"And construct the ship under Our Eyes and with Our Inspiration, and address Me not on behalf of those who did wrong; they are surely to be drowned."

This is an example of direct observation and feedback being given on learning skills.

Spacing out the learning period

The *Qur'an* shows that the learning period should be spaced out rather covering everything at once. Our evidence for this is that the *Qur'an* was revealed over a period of 23 years and not sent at once. This makes understanding more grounded.

"And those who disbelieve say: "Why is not the *Qur'ân* revealed to him all at once?" Thus (it is sent down in parts), that We may strengthen your heart thereby. And We have revealed it to you gradually, in stages." (25;32)

Posing questions and providing instructional answers

One approach that the Prophet SAW often uses in teaching is that of posing questions. He would pose a question and the Sahaba *radiyalahu anhum* would

reply to the question if they knew or reply that that the Allah Ta'ala and the Prophet SAW knew best. He would then give the answer in the form of instruction. This happened in the following case:

"The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) once asked (his Companions): "Do you know the bankrupt person?" He repeated the question three times; the Companions replied, "The bankrupt person among us is the one who has no money." The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) then said, "But the bankrupt person of my community is one who appears on the Day of Resurrection with lots of prayers, fasts and charities, but he has abused someone, slandered another, devoured someone's wealth (unlawfully), shed another's blood, and has beaten still another; so Allah will take rewards of his good deeds and give them to those who had been victimized by him; if all of his good deeds were exhausted before their dues were paid, their sins will be taken and imposed on him, and consequently, he will be thrown into the fire-pit!" (Reported by Muslim).

Another example was in *Hajatul wida'a* in which he asked questions about which land it was and which day it was and which month it was. The answers he gave laid some of the foundations for human rights in Islam.

Narrated Ibn 'Umar: The Prophet said at Mina, "Do you know what day is today?" They (the people) replied, "Allah and His Apostle know better," He said "Today is 10th of Dhul-Hijja, the sacred (forbidden) day. Do you know what town is this town?" They (the people) replied, "Allah and His Apostle know better." He said, "This is the (forbidden) sacred town (Mecca a sanctuary)." And do you know which month is this month?" They (the People) replied, "Allah and His Apostle know better." He said, "This is the Sacred (forbidden) month." He added, "Allah has made your blood, your properties and your honor Sacred to one another (i.e. Muslims) like the sanctity of this day of yours in this month of yours, in this town of yours." (Reported in *Bukhari Volume 8, Book 73, Number 69*)

In this hadith, the Prophet SAW is asking obvious questions and remaining silent and then providing instructional answers. Silence in this case helps to maximize alertness and capture interest. Thus, when teaching, silence can be used as effective teaching aid.

Posing questions and providing feedback

One other approach to teaching is that of posing questions and providing instructional answers and feedback. The best example of this is the Hadith Jibraeel. In that Hadith, Jibraeel AS appeared in the form of a person and asked the Prophet SAW questions in the presence of some of his companions and gave the feedback in the form of confirming the answer given. At the end of the discussion and the departure of Jibraeel AS, the Prophet SAW confirmed that it was Jibraeel AS who came to teach them their religion.

Narrated Abu Huraira: One day while the Prophet was sitting in the company of some people, (The angel) Gabriel came and asked, "What is faith?" Allah's Apostle replied, 'Faith is to believe in Allah, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection.'" Then he further asked, "What is Islam?" Allah's Apostle replied, "To worship Allah Alone and none else, to offer prayers perfectly to pay the compulsory charity (Zakat) and to observe fasts during the month of Ramadan." Then he further asked, "What is Ihsan (perfection)?" Allah's Apostle replied, "To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you." Then he further asked, "When will the Hour be established?" Allah's Apostle replied, "The answerer has no better knowledge than the questioner. But I will inform you about its portents.

1. When a slave (lady) gives birth to her master.
2. When the shepherds of black camels start boasting and competing with others in the construction of higher buildings. And the Hour is one of five things which nobody knows except Allah.

The Prophet then recited: "Verily, with Allah (Alone) is the knowledge of the Hour--." (31. 34) Then that man (Gabriel) left and the Prophet asked his companions to call him back, but they could not see him. Then the Prophet said, "That was Gabriel who came to teach the people their religion." Abu 'Abdullah said: He (the Prophet) considered all that as a part of faith. (Reported in *Bukhari Volume 1, Book 2, Number 47*)

Giving examples, posing a question and giving the lesson

In some instance, the Prophet SAW would give an example, pose a question and then give the lesson. One example of this is the example of wudhu and bathing in a running stream.

The Prophet SAW asked the companions, "if one of you had a stream running by his door and he takes a bath in it five times a day, would any dirt be left on him?" They replied! "No dirt would be left on him". The Prophet SAW said: "This is the case with Salat (the five daily prayers) Allah makes the Salat wipe out his sins".

Another example is that of likening a believer to the date palm.

Narrated Ibn 'Umar: Allah's Apostle said, "Amongst the trees, there is a tree, the leaves of which do not fall and is like a Muslim. Tell me the name of that tree." Everybody started thinking about the trees of the desert areas. And I thought of the date-palm tree but felt shy to answer the others then asked, "What is that tree, O Allah's Apostle?" He replied, "It is the date-palm tree" (*Bukhari Volume 1, Book 3, Number*

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Another example is when he asked if woman would throw her child into the fire. Through her actions, the woman had expressed how strongly she loved her child. The *Sahabi* replied in the negative. The Prophet SAW then gave them the lesson that Allah Ta'ala is more merciful to His slaves than woman is to her child.

Teaching by referring to lessons in the past

The Prophet SAW would refer to events in history in order to teach a lesson. One example was in the asking of too many questions in the matter of religion. He warned his companions nations before were destroyed because of their excessive questioning. When the companions were being oppressed in Makkah in the early years of Islam and were eager for Allah's help to come quickly, the Prophet SAW told them about believer in the past who were severely punished until they was sawed into two halves but they never forsook their belief in Allah's Oneness. He then enjoined upon them to be patient. This parallels the academic practice of literature review. Important lessons can be drawn on past experiences to inform the problem at hand.

Pitching the teaching according to the stage of the learner

The Sunnah recognises the differences in understanding and intellectual maturity of people. In part of a hadith, the Prophet SAW is reported to have said that people should be spoken to according to the level of their intelligence. As such, one is advised to pitch his speech according to the level of intelligence of the learners. This means that it is totally inappropriate to teach grade two learners about HIV/AIDS. This wisdom is grossly disregarded in some educational curricula.

Encouragement - positive reinforcement

The Sunnah encourages specialisation in knowledge. The Prophet SAW recognized the different areas in which the sahaba had specialised and accordingly directed sahaba to consult them in those areas. In the area of halal and haram, the specialist during the time of the Prophet SAW was Muadh bin Jabal. Similarly, Abdullah bin Abbas was the specialist in *Qur'anic* explanation etc. The Prophet even recommended for the Sahaba to consult with certain Jew for the medical ailments.

Encouragement can take a more personal dimension. One example is the case when the Prophet SAW asked Kaab bin Malik *radiya lahu anhu* on the greatest *ayaat* in the *Qur'an*. When Kaab replied correctly that it was *ayatal Kursi*, the Prophet SAW hit his chest, saying to him, 'Congratulations'. In this case, we see the encouragement expressed through touch and verbal communication, as a way to reinforce the recognition.

Use of illustration

The Sunnah shows how illustration can be used as a teaching aid. One example was when the Prophet SAW demonstrated by his two fingers to show how close he would be in Jannah with the person who sponsors an orphan. The other example is when he SAW drew lines on the ground- a straight line and branches off the straight line. He then point to the straight line and said that this is straight path while the others were branches that lead people astray. He SAW then recited the following ayat:

“And verily, this (i.e. Allâh’s Commandments mentioned in the above two Verses 151 and 152) is my Straight Path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away from His Path. This He has ordained for you that you may become Al-*Muttaqûn* (the pious - see V.2:2).” (6;153)

Discussion and conclusion

While the *Qur’an* is primarily a book of guidance, it has pointers to all other areas in life. The same applies for the *Sunnah*. From these pointers, a lot of extrapolations can be made. In this brief communication, we have attempted to make some extrapolations with regards to teaching and learning.

The study has brought out about twenty different aspects of teaching and learning found in the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*. These can be grouped into four categories: pre-learning phase and setting the context, qualities of both teacher and learner, teaching approaches and lastly approaches for enhancing the learning process. These form the ingredients for a theory on teaching and learning. The use of any of these approaches in teaching and learning can be justified based on the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*. The challenge is how to use weave them into a curriculum in an integrated manner.

Research has already been done on some of the health benefits of *sunnah*. While for Muslims, there was no need to attempt to verify the benefits of the *sunnah*, the research helps in inviting non-Muslims to Islam. Some of these *sunnah* practices including the washing of hands, moderation in eating, fasting, eating honey, olive oil, dates, black seed etc. This article is not about that line of research. Instead, our position is that the *Sunnah* holds great potential for informing on the effective ways for teaching and learning. These practices are generic and apply to almost all disciplines. Further research is needed on finding out the extent to which these *Sunnah* practices are directly or indirectly applied in teaching and learning in Islamic environments. In case these are found to be absent or low, a before-and-after study needs to be conducted to study the effect of the introduction of intervention of the Islamic approach on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The success of such studies will help make a case for recommending their implementation in universities in Islamic environments.

In conclusion, for any subject, it is feasible to use the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* as the starting point and make meaningful extrapolations relevant to the subject matter. As the *Qur’an* has been likened to an ocean, it has to be the starting point for all knowledge, accompanied by the *Sunnah*. Once that is done, the parameters become well defined and academic endeavours and research become well directed and purposeful. As the *Qur’an* is the criterion for distinguishing right from wrong, it can also, through extrapolation, provide the criterion for distinguishing between permissible and non-permissible research.

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