



A Study of the Islamic Perspective of Cognitive Development and Its Implications in Education in the Muslim World

Salisu Shehu

Department of Education,
Bayero University, Kano - Nigeria

Abstract

This study is an attempt at expounding an Islamic perspective of cognitive development. It begins with a critical over view of the methodological and conceptual problems of conventional psychology. This is with a view to establishing the need and relevance of the Islamic perspective. For the purpose of expounding the Islamic perspective of cognitive development numerous verses of the Glorious Qur'an and Prophetic Traditions (Hadith), which have explicit or implicit implications to cognitive development, were collated and quoted. Their authentic and authoritative interpretations as given by various erudite and celebrated Qur'anic and Hadith exegetists and scholars were investigated and reported. Upon doing this, a number of principles, factors, and processes of human development (especially cognitive development) were derived. More significantly, through inferences, deductions and syntheses, some nine (9) stages of cognitive development were extracted from the said Qur'anic verses and hadiths. Finally, the Qur'anic view on cognitive decline due to ageing was also studied. It has been found that the Qur'an affirms that human beings do experience some forms of cognitive decline with ageing. Based on the findings mentioned above, some educational implications in the Muslim World were suggested and subsequently some recommendations were made.

Keywords: *Cognitive development, implication, education, Islamic perspective.*

Abstrak

Kajian ini merupakan satu percubaan bagi menghuraikan perkembangan kognitif perspektif Islam. Ia bermula dengan pandangan kritikal secara keseluruhan terhadap masalah metodologi dan konsep psikologi konvensional. Ini bertujuan untuk mewujudkan keperluan dan hubungan dengan perspektif Islam. Bagi tujuan penghuraian perkembangan kognitif melalui perspektif Islam terhadap kebanyakan ayat-ayat suci Al-Quran dan Hadis (Hadith) yang mempunyai implikasi yang jelas atau tersirat dan perkembangan kognitif telah dikumpulkan dan dirujukan. Tafsiran yang sahih dan berwibawa seperti yang diberikan oleh pelbagai ilmunan serta diraikan oleh penafsir dan ulama Al-Quran dan Hadis telah dikaji dan dilaporkan. Dalam kajian ini, beberapa prinsip, faktor-faktor, dan proses perkembangan manusia (terutama perkembangan kognitif) telah diperolehi. Secara signifikan, melalui kesimpulan, pengurangan dan sintesis, terdapat sembilan (9) peringkat perkembangan kognitif ini telah dipetik daripada ayat-ayat al-Quran dan hadis-hadis tersebut. Akhirnya, melalui pandangan Al-Qur'an terhadap pengurangan kognitif akibat daripada penuaan juga dikaji. Ia telah mendapati bahawa al-Quran menegaskan bahawa manusia yang mengalami beberapa bentuk pengurangan kognitif adalah akibat penuaan. Berdasarkan kajian di atas, beberapa implikasi pendidikan di dalam dunia Islam telah dicadangkan dan seterusnya beberapa perubahan telah dilakukan.

Kata kunci: *Perkembangan kognitif, implikasi, pendidikan, perspektif Islam*

**Corresponding author: Salisu Shehu
Department of Education
Bayero University
Kano - Nigeria
Email: muhammadtafawabalewa@gmail.com;
sshehu2002@yahoo.com*

Introduction

In order to grasp the essence of the present study it seems necessary to trace the background of Western secular education, in particular its view of man. There is no doubt that the fundamental, dominant and prevailing conception of man in the West is materialist as well as secularist. This is as a result of certain historical circumstances and experiences which the West passed through from the beginning of the Renaissance through the scientific and later the industrial revolution to date. We are all aware of the conflict between the Church (principally Catholic clergymen) and early European scientists, which led to the collective persecution of the latter, at the behest of the former. However, it did not take long for the conflict to have a negative effect on society. Having realized the prospects of science, the state (the Roman Empire) had to divorce itself from the Church only to form an alliance with the scientists and also support them. It was this alliance that made it possible for scientific scholarship to flourish in Europe to its present level of development.

Even after the alliance of the state with the scientists, the Church perpetuated its persecutions against the scientists. As a result of that a number of scientists like Galileo Galilee, Copernicus, etc., were ex-communicated and massacred. The reason for the conflict and the subsequent persecutions were not far from the fact that the ideas propagated by the scientists conflicted with certain Church doctrines and dogmas (Al-Hawali, 1987). In reaction to such persecutions the scientists rejected religion (in extreme cases) or simply condemned it as a hindrance to the growth and progress of knowledge. The consequence of this conflict was the formulation of an entirely materialist/secularist system of knowledge and indeed subsequently, a materialist/secularist conception of life and worldview. This positivist pervaded all aspects of Western civilization including education. Thus invariably, the philosophical foundation of Western education is materialist as well as secularist in nature

Conceptual and Methodological Issues in the Evolution of Psychology

Modern (secular) psychology, which is part and parcel of the overall Western system of knowledge and education, has suffered from the influence of the Western materialist worldview. As a result of this, psychology attempts to explain the nature of man and to interpret his psychological dispositions along secularist/materialist viewpoints with the tendency to neglect his spiritual aspect. This led to the portrayal of a distorted picture of man whose endeavours

appear to be interpreted in terms of pursuing only his biological and passionate needs; and personality and overall behaviours can “can only” be determined and judged in terms of controllables and observables (Hamid, 1977). As a consequence of this, a number of theories and conceptions about man are compartmentalized parochial explanations, which are generally devoid of basic human realities. Up to this time, in most aspects of human psychology there is hardly any single psychological theory that has provided a comprehensive explanation of human nature. Furthermore, a number of psychological theories had been short-lived because they could not stand the tests of time, constructive criticisms and scrutiny. This conceptual crisis about the real nature of man and his tendencies has posed a challenge to contemporary psychologists. As Alexis Carrel puts it, “...man is still unknown... and our knowledge about ourselves is still primitive and partial (Alexis Carrel – ‘Man the Unknown’ – cited by Yunus, 1986).

The conceptual crisis described above has been the major characteristic of modern psychology throughout its history. For this reason, psychology has always changed and modified its principal spheres of interest (Al-Hashimi, 1981). At early times psychology concerned itself with the study of the soul, later it concentrated on the mind, it still continued to metamorphose at one time or the other up to the present era of exaggerated and pervasive empiricism championed by behaviorism. Woodworth (1948, quoted by Al-Hashimi; 1981) had given succinct chronological description of this conceptual crisis.

In much more clear terms, Al-Hashimi (1981) himself summed up the chronic problem of modern psychology in the following way:

The basic problem of modern western psychology is that it does not regard man as a whole in all his constituent dimensions and psychic phenomena. Rather, each stage in the history of psychology has singled out one aspect of the human psyche and devoted complete attention to it, ignoring other aspects. Such bias was the result of the diversity of cultures and orientation of psychologists. Its consequence was the appearance of numerous dissimilar designs and concepts all of which cannot be true; nor can any single one be true. The problem with psychological studies has been, and still is, their failure to comprehend accurately, profoundly and thoroughly the various aspects of the human psyche, and to maintain the balance among all interacting factors in psychological life.

From the fore-going, it is seen that, modern psychology has been saddled with a lot of problems and crises ranging from conceptual to methodological. As a direct and inevitable consequence, there has been an undue emphasis on empirical experimentation which led to the subjection of almost all psychological variables to certain rigid hypothetico-deductive empirical methodologies (logical positivism) which essentially treat man as only a physical or material being.

Cognition in the Evolutionary Trends of Modern Psychology

Cognitive psychology, as an aspect of modern psychology could not have escaped the kinds of crisis that characterized general psychology. In fact, the same conceptual and methodological crises, which characterized the historical and conceptual development of mainstream psychology all found expression in cognitive psychology. From a historical perspective the analysis of cognitive faculties constituted the central and major subject of psychology. But this interest on human cognition eroded gradually with the gradual inclination of psychology towards instinctive tendencies and passions, until it was finally given a deadly blow by the 20th century behaviourists (Hearnshaw, 1987). So, human cognition became relegated to the background in psychological studies.

Cognitive psychologists, however, brought about a revived interest and as Bruner (1956) rightly puts it, "mind returned and with it cognitive psychology". Although cognitive psychology has come to regain importance in modern psychology, it is still bedevilled by the same problems mentioned earlier. There is first, the problem of likening the human intellect to a computer or calculator (Dhaoudi, 1992). There is still the problem of ascribing the development and constitution of the intellect to hereditary forces alone, or environmental forces alone, leading on to the nature/nurture debate. As a consequence of all these, the general and specific approaches to the study of human cognition in modern psychology are mostly, either rigidly empirical and, therefore, largely mechanistic or unduly speculative.

With all the problems of psychology in general, and cognitive psychology in particular, the present researcher considered that there is a serious need to introduce a more comprehensive and more natural approach to the psychological study of man, in general, and of his cognitive disposition, in particular. The Islamic perspective of psychology is a positive step in this direction.

Contributions of Muslim Scholars to Cognitive Psychology

The tremendous legacy which early Muslims bequeathed to us was not only limited to general psychology. Cognitive psychology has had a fare share in that regard. A brief review of that is presented here. Besides Ibn al-Jawzi's work, '*al-Azhkiya'u*' – 'Stories of the Intelligent People', a number of early Muslim scholars described the virtues, nature, structure and types/categorization of the human intellect. Al-Mawardi for example, after discussing the virtues of the intellect in his book – '*Adab al-Dunya wa al-Deen*' gave a description of two types of intellect, namely '*al-Aql al-Ghariziy*' – 'the Natural Intellect' and '*al-Aql al-Muktasab*' – 'the Acquired Intellect'. He explained that the first type is the original, inborn intellect and the only criterion with which man was differentiated from animals. Bestowed in the human mind, it is the basic foundation of consciousness, sensation, and perception. The second type according to him is acquired through experience and training. It is an off shoot of the first one. It is the end/goal of knowledge. It develops if it is put to proper function and it retards if it not made functional (neglected or ignored).

Both of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun also gave structural descriptions of the human intellect. While the first gave a four-dimensional attributes to it in his masterpiece – '*Ihya Ulum al-Deen*', the latter described it in three ways which he called, the Discerning Intellect, the Experimental Intellect and the Speculative Intellect. It is instructive to note that Imam al-Ghazali discussed several other cognitive variables that include intellectual disparity among individuals and the factors that influence intellectual development and also determine individual differences in intelligence. Some of these factors identified by al-Ghazali are age, heredity, and environment. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim also discussed aspects of cognitive development in his book titled: '*Tuhfah al-Maudud bi ah-Kam al-Maulud*.' Earlier than all these three scholars, Al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibiyy described the first type of intellect (*al-Aql al-Ghariziy*) as an instinctive attribute which has been prepared in man for perceiving or grasping (*idrak*) abstract knowledge. In his two books namely, '*Aadan al-Nufus*' and '*Risalah al-Mustarshideen*' he identified several cognitive variables like attention, imagination, Impulsivity, intelligence, mental retardation, measuring intelligence, etc.(Nejatiy and Sayyid (2008)

Aspects of Cognitive Psychology in the Qur'an

Since fifteen centuries ago, the Qur'an has alluded to the uniqueness of man as a rational and intelligent being distinct from other creatures. The Qur'an tells us (over 1400 years ago) that man has been endowed with a superb intellect (cognitive tract), power of speech and reasoning, and freewill. God says:

The Beneficent Hath made known the Qur'an, He hath created man, He hath taught him speech (and intelligence). (Qur'an: 551-4).

The Qur'an also tells us that consequent upon the favours endowed to him – intellect, etc. – man has been elevated upon all other creatures and that the whole universe has been subjected to his use. God says:

We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea, given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our creation. (Qur'an: 17:70).

Moreover, in many verses of the Glorious Qur'an, Allah stresses the importance of knowledge. He also emphasizes to us the greatness of His favours upon man by endowing him with the intellect, and at the same time exhorts or even challenges us to make good use of our power of reasoning and cognition to acquire sound and proven/factual knowledge, particularly as it pertains to knowing Him (Allah) and His Glory. In many verses of the Holy Qur'an, He usually makes the following kinds of statements and appeals – 'will ye not reflect?'; 'per chance ye may understand'; 'are signs for a people who reflect (think), etc. some other verse however, have far-reaching psychological implications and under-tones from a developmental perspective.

Against the background set forth, it could be said that the study of human cognition – how it develops, what facilitates its development, what retards it, what are its attributes, elements, structures and processes, etc., motivated the present researcher to present an Islamic perspective of cognitive development.

Presuppositions about Gradual Cognitive Development in Islam

One of the factors that motivated early Muslim scholars to the study of the nature of the human intellect in the Muslim world must have been the central and fundamental position which the human intellect occupies in the realm of Islamic Law. That is, the fact that a sound and matured intellect has

always been made a precondition to all obligations and in some cases, to the validity of discharging them. In Islam no person is obliged to undertake any form of religious obligation or duty compulsorily unless he/she is adequately mentally developed or sound. This is the reason why religious who have not attained the age of physical and mental maturity. The same thing applies to the insane and the sleeping person. The implication of this is that, a young person who is not mentally developed, and cannot therefore independently and decisively discern the good from the bad is not held responsible for his actions. No sin is therefore recorded against him for all his actions. The same thing applies to the sleeper, insane, and or the mentally retorted. While establishing this law the Prophet (SAW) says:

The pen (for record of sins) is suspended (from recording sins) against the minor child until he attains maturity, the insane until he regains sanity; and the sleeper until he wakes up.

And in the Qur'an, Suratun – Nur, verse 58, God says:

O ye who believe! Let those whom your right hands possess, and the (children) among you who have not come of age ask your permission (before they come to your presence on three occasions...

However, in verse 59 of the same surah, He says:

But when the children among you come of age, let them (also) ask for permission, as do those senior to them in age...

It could be seen that in the first verse only the three occasions in which people customarily rest were specified for seeking permission in respect of the immature children. Presumably the ones that have not attained matured intellectual development. But in the second verse there was no exception or specification as to the time for seeking permission. They should now seek permission at all times because they have now come of age both physically and mentally.

Now, what this basic principle (i.e. intellectual maturity being the basis and the pre-condition of all religious obligations and actions) presupposes is that the Qur'an or rather Islam considers and recognizes that intellectual maturity (cognitive development) is a stage – like, gradual process. This therefore means that the notion of cognitive development has a strong basis in Islam, and that it follows through certain stages to develop to its fullest stage of development.

It is in the light of this underlying presupposition that the verses and hadiths, which have developmental undertones are studied and presented here. From all the verses and hadith taken together definite stages of cognitive development are deductible and also extractable.

The Qur'anic View of the Concept and Meaning of Cognitive Development

In modern developmental psychology, cognitive development is defined only in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness of one's responses to environmental stimuli in all their manifestations and dimensions. In other words modern psychology views cognitive development merely as the acquisition of progressive and qualitative changes in mental abilities which enable the person to adapt to his environment properly and effectively. Perception which is one of the fundamental basis of cognition on in this regard is therefore, confined to only two levels. These are the sensory and intellectual levels which simply involve the sensory organs and the cognitive processes of reasoning, insight and the like. In contrast, the Islamic perspective of cognitive development as given in the Qur'an presents a wider view of perception. This view of perception as presented by the Qur'an is what gives basis to the Islamic conception of cognitive development.

According to Muhammad (1995) Islam recognizes three levels of human perception. These are the sensory, intellectual and spiritual levels. It is the last level that is absent in modern psychological explanations of perception and cognition. The cognitive organs in which all these three levels of perception are presented are the sensory organs(hiss); the mind/intellect (aqI); and the hearth (qalb). Allah says in the Qur'an, verse 78, chapter 16 (Suratun-Nahli):

It is He (Allah) Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when ye knew nothing: and He gave you hearing an sight and intelligence and affections: that ye may give thanks (to Him).

At the sensory level of perception, the sensory organs of seeing, hearing, smelling, and so on are significantly involved. At the intellectual level the 'aqI (intellect/mind) is involved. And it involves a process of cognition, reasoning, insight, and so on. But at the spiritual level of perception both the intellect (aqI) and the heart (qalb) are involved. The perceptual process involved at this level are intuition, inspiration and the like. The effective integration of all these perceptual levels and processes is what gives

basis to an overall cognitive development. Muhammad (1995) went on to say that the levels and processes of perception as given above is what constitute the basic components of the epistemological principle of Islamic psychology. This principle recognizes all of these levels of perception and realities as constituting legitimate knowledge and on the basis of this, the principle, he said:

Recognizes a hierarchy of knowledge the lowest being that of sensory perception and the highest level being that of spiritual perception. Thus the epistemological principle of Islamic psychology recognizes revelation as a source of knowledge and guidance and, at the same time, recognizing the individual's capacity and need for all levels of perception: Sensory, intellectual, and spiritual. Sensory observation and discursive reason are important but they are not the only methods of arriving at knowledge.

From the foregoing analysis, the Qur'anic conception and meaning of cognitive development becomes clear. That is to say that as far as the Qur'an is concerned; the effective use of one's sensory organs and intellect to effectively perceive and respond to the environmental stimuli is an integral part of cognitive development. But even when such is achieved one cannot be deemed to have become fully developed intellectually unless and until he is able to successfully integrate these two levels of perception with the spiritual level. It is with this integration that an individual can perceive his Creator well and appreciate the need and desert to worship Him.

When this is done it is then that an individual could be said to have attained a full intellectual development. The Qur'an alludes to this conception in several verses as follows:i. verse 179 of chapter 7 – Suratul A'araf reads:

Many are the Jinns and men We have made for hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle – nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning).

ii. Verse 44 of chapter 25, Suratul-Furqan, reads:

Or thinkest thou that most of them listen or understand? They are only like cattle; - nay, they are worse astray in path.

In these two verses God has shown clearly that full intellectual development is attained only when an individual is able to perceive effectively the message of his Lord and Creator. Failing that, a person is no more better than an animal in terms of cognitive functioning.

The Islamic meaning of cognitive development transcends mere cognitive ability to manipulate and adapt to the environment effectively, but it also comprises the individual's knowledge about his Creator (Allah), his perception of his duties and rights towards Him and the extent to which he discharges them in terms of worship to Him. As we could see this is the conception put forward by Al-Ghazzali, in his postulations on human cognitive development.

Extractable Stages of Cognitive Development from the Qur'anic Verses and Ahadith

Having presented some of the verses which imply the gradual and stage-like nature of cognitive development, it is pertinent and also imperative to attempt extracting and delineating the stages that must have been denoted either explicitly or implicitly by the said verses and hadiths. This writer strongly believes that doing this will make a more comprehensive presentation of the Islamic perspective of cognitive development. In addition to that, and equally significant is that, it will provide a very good basis for undertaking further researches/studies on the subject matter especially as it pertains to practical experimentation. In the light of the above, the following stages have been extracted from the above verses and ahadith. For each stage extracted, an attempt has been made to substantiate it with the relevant verse or Hadith. But it needs to be emphasized here that the stages of cognitive development as implied by these verses are strongly tied to the stages of physical development in an interwoven manner. The stages are presented as follows:

Stage One: Sinnul idrak al-Hissi (Period of Sensory Perception) (From Birth to 2 years)

This is the first stage of post-natal life. It is chiefly characterized by sensory perception through the five sense organs, which send information to the mind. As it could be inferred from the Qur'anic verses which postulated this stage, the mind at the initial period of this stage is blank or like tabula rasa (to borrow the Lockean terminology). The mind then interprets and stores the information based on its limited experience and maturity. Behaviour at this stage is principally characterized by reflexive and instinctive tendencies which are in – born and innate (specie-behaviour).

With continuous interaction with the environment these tendencies fade away gradually and are replaced by voluntary behaviours. The verse which indicates this stage of cognitive development reads:

It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when ye knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections (minds): That ye may give thanks (to God).

This is the stage which Piaget called the sensori motor stage. In the above verse, the Qur'an had alluded to the sensori nature of child's behaviour 14 centuries before Piaget came into existence. Allah also referred to this stage of human development in many other verses. For example: 32:9, 57:23, etc.

Stage Two: Attufulatul-Mubakkirah (early childhood) (From 2 – 7 years)

This stage is covered by many verses. For example verse 5 of suratun-Nisa'i (chapter 4) which reads:

To those weak of understanding (feeble-minded) make not over your property...

The phrase, "those weak of understanding" has been interpreted by renowned and celebrated exegetists like Ibn-Abbas as young children. The basis of demarcating the ascending age limit of this stage at the age of seven (7) years is the Hadith in which the Prophet (SAW) ordered that children at the age of seven should be enjoined to pray. This Hadith suggests that by getting into the 7th year, the child has completed one stage of his mental growth and is therefore moving into another. Based on this, the 7th age therefore becomes a point of demarcation.

Stage Three: Sinnul tamyiz/Attufulatul-Muta'akh-khirah (Period of Discernment or Later Childhood) (From 7–10 years)

This stage is delimited by the Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) part of which has been quoted above. In the Hadith, the Prophet (SAW) said children should be caned for abandoning prayer at the age of ten years. This Hadith really suggests an entirely exclusive period of mental development. It implies that at the age of seven the child begins to discern what is worth doing. By the age of 10 years such ability to discern has gained a significant quality that the child could even be punished for abandoning what is worth doing.

Stage Four: Sinnul-Murahaqah (Period of Early Adolescence). (From the 10 – 15 years).

This is the period within which the individual's cognitive development starts to assume a formal trend. The foundation for abstract thought starts to be laid here. In this period the individual still remains within the domain of childhood mentality. His level of intellectual development has not assumed the status of maturity. That is why in the Islamic sense; the individual child at this stage has not become a *mukallaf* (majority person who could be responsible for all his actions). The basis of these postulations on this stage is the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah which was quoted above. i.e.:

The pen (for record of deeds) has been suspended in respect of three people; the child until he attains puberty...

Stage Five: Sinnul-Bulugh (Age of Puberty – Youthful Age) (From 15 – 33 years)

The age of puberty is a turning point in the child's physical and cognitive development. An elaborate discussion on the verses and ahadith which establish this assertion has been made earlier in this chapter. The individual child is assumed to have reached a status of mature cognitive development from the age of puberty. That is why all obligations become automatically compulsory upon him the moment he enters the age of puberty. He is now responsible for all his actions and deeds. That is why if he commits any sin, it will now be recorded against him. The Hadith just quoted above substantiates this explanation. Several other verses quoted earlier also affirm this. For example 24:598, and 59; 4:6, etc. The Hadith of Abdullah ibn Umar quoted earlier provides the basis for delimitating the starting point of this stage at 15 years of age. So also the interpretations of Islamic scholars (quoted severally earlier). The same thing applies to the end limit of the stage.

Stage Six: Sinnu Bulugil Ashadd (Period of Full Physical and Intellectual Strength – Complete Intellectual development (From 33 – 40 years)

The verses which substantiate the demarcation of this stage are many. They include 6:152, 12:22, 17:36; 22:5; 28:14; 40:67; and 46:14 which particularly provide the most glaring evidence on this. It reads in part as follows:

... AT length when he reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years ...

It is therefore clear from this verse that at the age of 40 years normal individuals usually reach the peak of their intellectual development. The interpretations and explanations of the renowned exegetists, most of which have been quoted earlier also substantiate this point.

Stage Seven: Sinnul Tawaqquf (Period of Constancy in Cognitive Development). (From 40 – 60 years)

Although decline in cognitive functioning is assumed to start usually after 40 years such decline, even if it happens, is very subtle and hardly observable or noticeable. That is why some scholars called this stage as Sinnul-Tawaqquf, meaning a stage within which no further progressive development of mental functioning is recognizable or the decline itself. It is better called age of constancy in mental development. But it is clear that a person's mental functions remain evidently normal within this stage. The basis of this assertion is the Hadith in which the Prophet (SAW) interpreted verses 37 of chapter 35 (Suratu-Fatir). The verse and Hadith were both quoted earlier. But in addition to that the Prophet (SAW) was also reported to have said that:

Whoever Allah has caused to live up to sixty years, he has blocked all his (on the Day of Judgement for his laxities and faults or shortcomings). Reported by Bukhari and others, on the authority of Abu-Hurairah

Stage Eight: Sinnush-Shaikhukhati (Old- Age) (From 60–80 years)

The above Hadith provides basis for demarcating this stage. It is at this stage that gradual and steady decline in mental functioning start to become evident. In verse 67 of Suratu-Ghafir (chapter 40), God says:

... (and We cause you to live) so that you become old...

The Arabic word used in this verse is – *shuyukhan* – that is old people. Its specific mention in this verse means that it is an exclusive stage of its own different from another stage that comes after it. i.e. the last stage that is stated below:

Stage Nine: Ardhalul-Umuri (Feeblest Old Age or Sensescence) (From 80 years and above)

This begins sometimes after eighty years; it is the period with which mental degeneration becomes much more obvious particularly as age increases towards 100 years and above. Many verses of the Qur'an made reference to this stage of cognitive development. For example: 16:70 and 22:5. Both were quoted earlier. The Noble Prophet (SAW) used to seek refuge with Allah from being made to live up to this stage of life. The Hadith was reported by Bukhari, on the authority of Anas ibn Malik. It reads:

O Allah! I seek refuge with you from indolence, cowardice, senility and miserliness.

In another version also reported by Bukhari on the authority of Sa'ad bn Abi Waqqas, the Prophet (SAW) used to say:

And I seek refuge with You from being turned to the feeblest old age.

But it should be noted here that, the Prophet (SAW) used to make this supplication only for the purpose of teaching his followers. This is because, as far as his position is concerned (the Noblest of all creatures) even if he lives a thousand years, he will never revert to that condition.

Implications of the Study to Education

All over the world, educational curriculum is now mostly learner-centred. In other words, the training and overall socialization of the learner has in most cases been the focal point of the educational curriculum. This makes the learner to be the starting and ending point as well as the central figure of the curriculum. Because of this, knowledge of the child or adult learner, his psychological dispositions, and his overall developmental patterns becomes necessary in any curriculum design and policy formulation in education.

Piagetian theory implies that in the process of designing a curriculum or planning a lesson, it is always necessary to consider and take care of the level or stage of cognitive development of the curriculum clients – i.e. the pupils or students. This means that for each category of students/pupils in a particular stage of cognitive development there are contents and methods, which are particularly relevant and suitable to them. Without taking care of this factor, curriculum design, teaching and even policy making in education may be a futile or fruitless.

However, it is important to note that there are fundamental differences between Piagetian theory and the Islamic perspective. One of such differences is the fact that the human intellect is essentially a blessing and favour of God endowed to man for a purpose. This purpose is the worship of God. Piaget did not recognize this fact in his theoretical postulations about the human intellect. But the implication of this to education is that, education should be primarily Education should first and foremost be seen as the essential means towards attaining the pleasure of God and not primarily as a means towards earning material livelihood. This means that knowledge and or education has an intrinsic spiritual value which needs to be emphasized and pursued for the betterment of man's spiritual aspect of life. If only the material value of knowledge is recognized, cherished and pursued by education it is bound to produce an imbalanced socialization. It will initiate, promote and perpetuate materialist socialization at the expense of the spiritual aspect.

What humanity witnesses today of exaggerated greed, avarice and self-centeredness are the products of secular, materialistic education. These vices are themselves the foundations of our social problems and social ills like fraud, corruption, injustice, oppression, moral and spiritual degeneration, etc. There is therefore the need to reorient our educational system by ways of deemphasizing the materialist posture that is its major characteristic. In this way the clamour to obtain a certificate, which will subsequently earn one a white collar job will be minimized in our education system. Knowledge will then be sought for its own sake, not essentially for its material value. The human intellect actually has a more cherishable value that is beyond the quest for material satisfaction. Confining it to that aspect alone really relegates man to the position of animals. But man is above animals only when he makes use of his intellect in ways that transcend animalistic pursuits.

Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to bring to light the Islamic perspective of cognitive development. The implications of this perspective to education have also been highlighted. Among other things it has been discovered through this research that if a thorough investigation is carried out on the Islamic scholastic and intellectual legacy a tremendous volume of knowledge about cognitive psychology will be obtained. Along this line, a comprehensive and exclusive Islamic cognitive psychology could also be formulated. This fact is clear from the works of early Muslim scholars (only few of which were reviewed here) as well as from the Qur'anic postulations about human cognitive development which have been expounded in this paper.

References

- Al-Bukhari, M.I. (2002), *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Damascus: Dar Ibn-Kathir.
- Al-Ghazzali, A.M.M. (1982), *Ihya'u 'Ulum al-Deen*, Beirut, Darul Ma'afat.
- Al-Hashimi, A. (1981), "On Islamizing the Discipline of Psychology" in Al-Faruqi, I.R. *Social and Natural Sciences: Islamic Perspectives*. Jeddah, King Abdul-Azeez University/Hodder.
- Al-Hawali, S. A. (1987), *al-'Ilmaniyya: Nash'atuha, wa Tatawwuruha, wa Atharuhah Fil Hayatil Islamiyyah al-Mu'asirah*, Kuwait, Darus-Salafiyyah.
- Ali, A. Y. (1978), *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation.
- Al-Mawardi, A.M. (1955) *Adabud Dunya wad Din*, Beirut, Darul-Fikr.
- Al-Qardawi (no date) *Ar-Rasul wal'Ilmu*.
- Bruner, J.S. (1956), *A Study of Thinking*, New York: J. Wiley.
- Dhaouadi, M. (1992), "An Exploration into the Nature of the Making of Human and Artificial Intelligence and the Qur'anic Perspective", *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 153-172, Herndon, International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Farhan, I. (1989), "Islamization of the Discipline of Education", *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Pp. 307 – 318, Herndon, International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Hamid, R. (1977), "Reflections on a Balanced Islamic Personality" in *from Muslim to Islamic: Proceedings of the First Symposium on Islam and Psychology*, Vol. 1 (1977), Indianapolis, AMSS and American Trust Publications.
- Hearnshaw, L.S. (1987), *The Shaping of Modern Psychology: An Historical Introduction*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Ibn al-Jawzi, A. A. (1985), *al-Azhkiya'u*, Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi.
- Ibnu-Kathir, I.A.I. (1990), *Tafsirul Qur'an al-Azim*, Cairo, Darul – Hadith.
- Ibnu-Khaldun (1978), *The Muqaddimah*, Translated by Franz Rosenthal (1978), London, Rutledge and Kegan Paul.
- Ibnul-Qayyim (1987), *Tuhfatul Maudud bi Ahkamil Maulud*, Cairo, Maktabul-Qur'an.
- Ibnul-Qayyim (1993), *Miftahu Daris-Sa'adah wa Manshuri Wilayatil "Ilmi Wal Iradah*, Beirut, Darul Kutubil 'Ilmiyyah.
- Muhammad, Y. (1995), "Fitrath and its Bearing on the Principles of Psychology", in the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Herndon, International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Muslim, I.H. (2006), *Sahih Muslim*, Riyadh: Dar Taibah
- Nejjatiy, M. U. and Al-Sayyid, A. M. 2008(Eds), *Ilm al-Nafs fi al-Turath al-Islamiy*, Cairo: IIIT/Dar al-Salam.
- Pickthall, M. (no date), *The Meanings of the Glorious Qur'an*, Karachi, Taj Company.
- Yunus, M.K. (1986), "Al-Ghazzali's Theory about the Human Nature", Unpublished Seminar Paper, Department of Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano.

Article history

Received: 11/10/2013

Accepted: 03/06/2015