# Ibn Khaldun Some Basic Aspects on Education

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**บทคัดย่อ**

อิบนุ คอลดูน เป็นนักปราชญ์ในสมัยอับบาสียะฮ แนวคิดทางการศึกษาของท่านมีคุณแก่การศึกษาเป็นอย่างมาก ท่านได้จำแนกศาสตร์ในอิสลามออกเป็น 2 ชนิด กล่าวคือ นิรันตรศาสตร์และศาสตร์ทางสติปัญญา ท่านมีทัศนะเกี่ยวกับมนุษย์ว่า โดยฟิฏเราะฮแล้วมนุษย์นั้นจะโน้มไปยังความดี แต่สังคมมีอิทธิพลในการที่จะทำให้พวกเขานั้นดีหรือชั่ว เพราะในตัวมนุษย์มีทั้งสิ่งที่จะโน้มไปยังความดีและสิ่งที่จะชักจูงไปยังสิ่งไม่ดี ท่านมองว่าการศึกษาจะเป็นกลไกสำคัญที่จะทำให้มนุษย์เป็นคนดีในสังคม สำหรับวิธีการสอนอิบนุ คอลดูนจะมีเทคนิควิธีเป็นของตนเอง และท่านไม่เห็นด้วยกับการลงโทษผู้เรียนที่รุนแรง

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## Introduction

Ibn Khaldun was among the last in the galaxy of scholars of the Golden Age of Islam. This paper is dealing with his thought on education.

His classification of knowledge, unlike the western view, is similar to the classification of knowledge in the First World Conference of Muslim Education held in Mekkah in 1977. His classification clearly shows us that he gives the Devine Knowledge priority to others. He also accepts limitations of human beings, unlike Mu'tazilah who gives the priority to the reason than any others. Aims of education and content of curriculum according to him are discussed in details and social institution is also stated here.

The last part of this paper will concern with his opinion on the severity to children.

### Ibn Khaldun's Life

Wali al-Din Abdur-Rahman Bin Muhammad Bin Muhammad Bin Abi Bakr Muhammad Bin al-Hasan (732-84/1332-82) was born at Tunis. He began his education with learning the Qur'an by heart. He was instructed by his family and other prominent teachers of Tunis. He spent his time to study law, Hadith, grammar, etc. After that he participated in lectures presented by Magribi scholar and perfected his knowledge of logic, philosophy, dogmatic theology, cannon law and other branches of knowledge.

He joined the service of the king of Tunis when he was 21. He used to give lectures in the al-Azhar and there he was appointed as the Qadhi in 1384 by Barquq. He held this post till his death in 1406.

He is generally regarded as a historian and sociologist. Thus his life and work have clearly formed the subject of innumerable studies. His fame rested on his Muqaddimah (Prolegomena) in which he had covered almost all aspects of state and society; and in that, he had also discussed pertaining to education which I will mention in details in the following pages.

**His view on human beings**

He is of the opinion that there are three different positions in relation to the nature of human nature (Rizavi, 1986).

(1) By nature man is good and society corrupts him.

(2) God has created both good and evil tendencies in human beings. If man does not culture his soul by accepting the guidance of religion. He is proved to fall a victim to the evil.

(3) Man is mere inclined towards the Good.

According to his opinion concerning the nature of man, it is not exaggerated to stated that he regards nature as good while society is a corrupting force. To mould in the society, education is very essential. He regards what distinguishes man from other living beings is his thinking capability and inquisitiveness. (Malik, 1983) Man's ability to think together with his curiosity will enable him to investigate, discern and discover. These valuable qualities are necessary for acquisition and advancement of knowledge. Furthermore, it enable him to obtain his livelihood, cooperate with his fellow beings, produce science and technology to utilize the gifts of nature for the necessities and comforts of life. It is his inquisitiveness that creates in him the desire to understand things and acquire more knowledge. (Malik, 1983)

**Social Institution**

Human society is necessary because man is social by nature. It is impossible for an individual to live alone. Hence it becomes necessary for him to unite his efforts with those of his fellow men, (Ibn Khaldun, 1958). Each individual needs help of his fellow men for the purpose of defense. God has given to many brute beats more power than to man; however. He give to man the mind and the hand which, in the service of the mind, can apply itself for self-defense. Thus spears have replaced horns; swords, claws; shields; thick hides; and so forth. However an individual human being cannot resist an animal unless he joins with his fellow men.

And unless he so co-operates with others he cannot obtain the food without which he cannot live, nor defend himself. Therefore, society is necessary to man.

When men are together there should be power and authority to prevent anyone from attacking anyone else. Sovereignty is therefore peculiar to man, suited to his nature and indispensable to his existence. Divine law commanded by Allah and revealed by Him to a man whom He has chosen , He must be obeyed and men must surrender themselves to Him alone.

Society will lead to the state and in a state there will be a leader. Then the political institution is formed. The ruler then begins to modify the regulations which have been followed up for example in the military, financial, and provincial administration. (Ibn Khaldun, 1958)

According to Ibn Khaldun, the conditions to govern the institution comprise of four principles as he had included in his Muqaddimah (1980).

"The condition governing the institution of the imamate are four (1) Knowledge; (2) probity; (3) competence and (4) freedom of the senses and limbs from any defect that might affect judgment and action. There is difference of opinion concerning a fifth condition, that is, (5) Qurashite descent." (Khaldun, I ,1980: 395: Imam, 1988: 37)"

Although he does not state clearly about educational institution, we can apply the above principles in our educational institution since he regards education as a social institution.

**Classification of Knowledge.**

Ibn Khaldun is of the opinion that knowledge is of different kinds. There are, therefore, different ways of getting it. Hence he divides all kinds of knowledge into two main categories (1) Naqliyyah (transmitted sciences some call traditional sciences) (2) Aqliyyah (Philosophical sciences or intellectual sciences. (Lunggulung, 1991: 379, 1986: 18: Ashraf, 1985: 33: Rizavi, 1986 : 78 : Quraishi, 1983: 125)

Naqliyyah will refer to religious beliefs and formulate religious obligations. It is consisted of the Qur'an, Hadith, jurisprudence, theology, Sufism (Tasawwuf),

linguistic sciences, such as grammar, lexicography and literature. The Aqliyyah sciences includes medicine and agriculture, metaphysics, magic, sciences of the alphabet, alchemy, sciences dealing with quantity, such as geometry, astrology (see figure 1).

Education by the time of Ibn Khaldun was based on their classification of knowledge. His classification of knowledge is consistent with the classification generated from the first World Conference on Muslim Education held in Mekkah in which knowledge is divided into two main categories (1) Perennial Knowledge, which is based on the Divine Revelation Presented in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah and all that can be derived from them. (2) Acquired knowledge including literature, arts and crafts, social Sciences, natural sciences, applied sciences, and etc. (Ashraf, 1985; 125).

**Aim of Education**

Ibn Khaldun has shown the importance of education. He has declared that civilization is the fruit of human activities in a society. Ibn Khaldun has regarded education as an important factor which affects the life of community. In his view what will differ man from animals is his social attitude, which is achieved through thinking. Therefore, it is necessary for man to be educated from his childhood and be initiated into the intricacies of civilized life. (Quraishi, 1983)

I have already briefly discussed earlier about his classification of knowledge, through which he has given due consideration to sensations and sense perception as well as human intellect as source of knowledge. He further believes in the limitation of human intellect. In his opinion, reason cannot aptly deal with matter like the Oneness of Allah, nature of Prophet hood, nature of Allah's Attribute etc.(Rizavi, 1986 : 105)

Since he is accepted as the most prominent sociologist, he regards education as a social institute as mentioned earlier therefore education will go gradually to suit the needs of the community.

With regard to aims of education, he is of the opinion that there are four aims of education (Rizavi, 1986: 105).

(1) To enable the pupil to plan for action which may promote the interest of society.

(2) To try to go beyond sensory knowledge.

(3) To develop good habits for which religious is essential because it is the civilizer of morals of a spirit of cooperation in society.

(4) To ensure means of livelihood

**Curriculum content**

According to Ibn Khaldun , the curriculum should be varied and mixed i.e., at the same time , broad and specific (Malik, 1983: 75). Both broad and specific refer to producing an educated man and training them respectively. He has clarified what he meant by educated man and scholar. He has given a higher position to educated man than the scholar, the educated man in his interpretation is he who is master of all subjects and able to understand and appreciate the opinions of specialists in any and every branch of knowledge. On the other hand, scholars is one side in his training and mental development, he spends so much time on one subject alone that he is almost ignorant of all others. However Ibn Khaldun recognizes that scholars (specialists) are as necessary for the progress of a dynamic civilization as are "educated man". Therefore, curriculum have to be organized in such a ways in order to fulfill the needs of both kinds of people, educated and scholars.

Ibn Khaldun, furthermore, has suggested that sciences should be divided into two kinds. Firstly, necessary or wanted subjects which include religious sciences of Qur'anic interpretation, mathematics, physical, and biological sciences, and theology. Secondly, auxiliary subjects which include logic, philosophy, and the art. Such classification is essential according to Ibn Khaldun because life is short and we

cannot longer expect to know and learn every thing fully. We therefore should concentrate on the essential studying that are meaningful to us (Malik, 1983: 76).

Moreover, Ibn Khaldun proposes that the childhood, learning reading, writing, and arithmetic come first and then will be followed by religious studies when they have grown up and shaken off the yoke of authority, they should be initiated to study of science because scientific investigation requires independent thinking.(Malik, 1983: 76)

**Mental Operation**

The basic of knowledge is sensation through the five senses (Khaldun, 1958). Now all animals, whether rational or not, share equally in this form of apprehension, but man is distinguished from the other animals by his grasp of general concepts which are abstracted from percepts (Khaldun, 1958). Ibn Khaldun is of the opinion that animals apprehend by sensations: there apprehensions, however, are not connected, for connection takes place through thought (Khaldun II, 1980)

> *"...God distinguish man from all other animals by an ability to think which He made the beginning of human perfection and the end of man's noble superiority over existing things." (p.411).*

Man's ability to think, according to Ibn Khaldun, there are several degrees namely (1) discerning intellect; (2) experimental intellect; (3) speculative intellect; (4) pure intellect; and (5) perfective soul (Khaldun II, 1980: 412-413). Discerning intellect is the first degree of man's intellectual understanding of the things that exist in the outside world in natural or arbitrary order, so that he may try to arrange them with the help of his own power. This kind of thinking mostly consists of perceptions (Khaldun II, 1980). The experimental intellect is the ability to think which provides man with the idea and the behavior needed in dealing with his fellow man and in leading them. It mostly conveys perceptions which are obtained one by one through experience until they have become really useful. The speculative intellect is the ability to think which provides the knowledge, or hypnotically knowledge, of an

object beyond sense perception without any practical activity. It consists of both perceptions and apperceptions. Then, they are again combined with something else, and again provide some other knowledge. The end of this process is provided with the perception of existence as it is, with its various genera, differences, reasons and causes. By thinking about these things, *man* achieves perfection in his reality. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun (1980) refers knowledge of human beings as having three worlds (Khaldun II, 1980: 419). The first of them is the world of sensual perception. We become aware of it by means of the perception of the senses. The second world, we become aware of the ability to think which is a special quality of human beings. We learn from it that the human soul exists. This knowledge is necessitated by the fact that we have scientific perception in ourselves which are above the perception of senses. And the last world, we find it exists in our hearts. This world is the world of spirits and angels.

Ibn Khaldun believes that the world of human beings is the best one because it is existential and attested by our corporeal and spiritual perceptions. The world of the sense is shared by us with the animals, but the world of the intellect and the spirit is shared by us with angel (Khaldun II 1980 : 412)

**Theory of Teaching and Learning**

Ibn Khaldun (1980) has outlined his own method of teaching, in order to be successful in his profession teacher should understand the nature of his pupils and should bear in mind their innate capacities. He should begin the education of a child with simple things so that later on he may be able to understand and learn difficult and complex problems. Teaching, according to Ibn Khaldun is of two kinds, direct and indirect (Malik, 1983 : 72). The formers is exemplified by the lecture method alone. It is one way teaching because the teacher presents and selects all things, Teacher in this sense seems essential while the student is a merely passive recipient. On the other hand, the indirect method of teaching included intimate, informal conversation and companionship between teacher and pupil. Deliberately studying the

method used by Ibn Khaldun , I am not hesitating to say that he prefers indirect method of instruction.

Effective teaching, according to him, should be gradual and proceeds step by step. A good teacher should know that preparedness for the receptivity to scientific knowledge and understanding grow gradually.

Moreover, in Khaldun's views, teaching should be gradual and proceeds step by step. For a majority of students subject requires threefold repetition and explanation (Ibn Khaldun III, 1980: Syaibani, 1991). The first stage in a particular subject should deal only with important issues and general explanations. The purpose of this first-stage is to expose the student to the whole field. This stage will deal with a general outline, then the same outline will be repeated for the second. This time the instructions are at a higher level. More generalities are avoided, issues are discussed in greater detail and depth, and differences in interpretation or opinions are taken fully into account. In the third stage , students should be guided to achieve mastery of the subject. Nothing is to be omitted, all obscurities and matter of controversy are treated exhaustively; little remain unexplained (Khaldun, 1980: 292). This kind of teaching, threefold repetition" is clearly stated in his book Muqaddimah III, 1980:292).

> *"Preparedness for and receptivity to scientific knowledge and understanding grow gradually. At the beginning, the student is completely unable to understand any but a very few (points). (His under-standing is) only approximate and general and (can be achieved only) with the help of pictures (muthul) derived from sensual perception. His preparedness, then, keeps growing gradually and little by little when he faces the problems of the discipline under consideration and has them repeated (to him) and advances from approximate understanding of them to a complete, higher knowledge. Thus the habit of preparedness and, eventually, that of attainment materialize in the student, until he has a comprehensive knowledge of the problems of the discipline (he studies). But if a student is exposed to the final result at the beginning, while he is still unable to understand and comprehend(anything) and is s still far from being prepared to (understand), his mind is not acute enough to (grasp them). He gets the impression that scholarship is difficult and becomes*

*loath to occupy himself with it. He constantly dodges and avoids it. That is the result of poor instruction, and nothing else.".*

According to Ibn Khaldun, the above method is considerably the best method of teaching because the student is gradually led into the subject and his former of comprehension are tasted beyond endurance. This kind of teaching is clearly meant to save a child from much confusion in acquiring a new discipline, because the subject matter is presented step by step. Besides this Ibn Khaldun recommends the methods "questioning and answering" (Khaldun, 1980). This method is resorted to develop the student's power of comprehension and analytical thinking. The assignment will be given to student to practice at home and he is to judge, examine and criticizes all its aspects concerning language, style dictate and thought. The next stage in this method is 'disputation' students have to play a significant role in this stage. Their performance will enable the teacher to judge their intelligence and ability correctly, disputation in a daily examination of the student, Ibn Khaldun believes that "the easiest method of acquiring scientific habit is through the ability to express oneself clearly in discussing and disputing scientific problems and that scientific habit is not identical with memorized knowledge. (Quraishi,, 1983)

It is not surprised to note here that Ibn Khaldun as a modern psychologist, has his own laws of learning. He suggests that only one subject should be studied at a time. One subject must be mastered before another is begun. The most important that subject matter should be studied step by step; moreover, he suggests in his Muqoddimah (1980) to avoid prolonging the period of instruction in a single discipline or book, by break in the session and long intervals between them. According to him psychological principles have to be implemented in learning and teachers have to deal with students according to their capacities.

**Method of Instruction of Children**

He recognizes that instructing children in the Qur'an is a symbol of Islam. Because it will imbues their hearts with a firm belief in Islam and its articles of Iman (faith) which are from the verses of the Holy Qur'an and certain Ahadith

(Khaldun, 1980). He also regards Qur'an and Hadith as the basis of instruction, by giving the reason that the things taught in one's child will take root more deeply than anything else because the first impression the hearts receive will be strong stuck and become the foundation of habits (Khaldun, 1980)

The method of instructing children in the Qur'an , according to him, is different from the methods of Maghribi, Spanish. The people of Ifriqiyah, and the people of the East.

He is of the opinion that Arabic as well as poetry should be taught first. From there, the student should go on to arithmetic and study it until he knows its basic norms. Then he should go on to study the Qur'an because it would be easy for him to study it after having his previous preparation.(Khaldun, 1980)

**Severity to Students.**

Before I go further into details concerning the severity to students, I would like to quote a very valuable words from his book "Muqaddimah"(III, 1980:305) in which he mentions:

> *"...Severe punishment in the course of instruction does harm to the student, especially to little children,; because it belongs among(the things that make a) bad habit. Students, slaves, and servants who are brought up with injustice and (tyrannical) force are overcome by it. It makes them feel oppressed and causes them to lose their energy. It makes them lazy and induces them to lie and be insincere. That is, their outward behavior differs from what they are thinking, because they are afraid that they will have to suffer tyrannical treatment (if they tell the truth.).*

From the above saying of Ibn Khaldun, it clearly shows us that severity will does harm than good and it will bring about the bad outcome and it is demoralized of humanity.

He is of the opinion that a teacher must not be too severe toward his pupils nor a father toward his son (Khaldun, 1980). Thus we, according to him, have to prevent teachers from beating or doing any severe damage to the young pupil too much.

**Conclusion**

Ibn Khaldun' view on education is worthy for studying by Muslim educationist in particular and all Muslims in general. He judges several facets of education and gives his verdict on them. It is he who emphasizes the significance of understanding the matter by the students. Furthermore, he suggests the teacher should not ignore the child nature and his innate capacities and adjusts his matter and method to the needs of students. Besides this, he condemns severity to pupil and regards it as a bad thing.

As far as his classification of knowledge is concern, he divides the knowledge into two categories which are quite similar to the classification of knowledge derived from the First World Conference of Muslim Education Held in Mekkah in 1977.

**Knowledge**

| Naqliyah(transmitted sciences) | Aqliyah (Philosophical or-<br>Intellectual sciences) |
|---|---|
| -Qur'an | -Medicine |
| -Hadith | -Agriculture |
| -Jurisprudence | -Metaphysics |
| -Theology | -Magic |
| -Sufism | -Sciences of the alphabet |
| -Linguistics sciences- | -Sciences of dealing - |
| -Such as grammar | -with quantity such as - |
| -Lexicography | -geometry, arithmetic, - |
| | -algebra, commercial transac- |
| | -tion,music,astronomy,astrology |

**Figure 1** Classification of Knowledge according to Ibn Khaldun.

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