



The Ideal Education in *Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah*

Basma Ahmad Sedki Dajani *

Associate Professor, University of Jordan, Amman 11183, Jordan

Abstract

Ibn Khaldun has been described as the first Islamic scholar to write about the science of Imran 'Urbanism,' and as the founder of the science of human society. He offered a complete history of Arab sciences and literature from the rise of Islam through to the 8th Hijri century. This paper concentrates on Ibn Khaldun's educational background and how it affected his perspective on children's upbringing and education. In his famous book; the *Muqaddimah* (meaning the 'Introduction' in Arabic), Ibn Khaldun wrote significant opinions about education and the most ideal methods of bringing up and instructing children. His views were fully explained throughout several chapters of his *Muqaddimah*. However, chapter six thereof deals with this subject in particular, covering many of its important facets.

© 2015 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Keywords: education, strategies, science, *Muqaddimah*

1. Introduction

For Ibn Khaldun, education is a social enterprise. He classified sciences in what he perceived to be a logical way starting with the most useful ones, and based on his research of the systems prevalent around him and his studies of history. He supported his opinions with examples and enriched the conclusion he reached with a comparative study. Sociology, according to Ibn Khaldun, studies the social phenomena; the general rules and trends that represent the bases of a community. This social phenomenon includes upbringing strategies; that do not depend on coincidence, but like astronomical and physical rules, they work according to firm laws. In fact, the aim of studying these phenomena is to get to know these laws. Ibn Khaldun relies in his investigations upon observing each phenomena and following it historically, especially in places where he had lived and had contacts with people (Wafi, p. 300). He was influenced by scholars who came before him but succeeded in becoming among the world leading thinkers. "His ideas have reflected their importance on the history of universal thought and have not lost their relevance as time passed. Ibn Khaldun has been accepted and commented upon by historians, jurists, theologians, politicians, teachers, educators and environmentalists alike" (Kayadibi, *Ibn Khaldun and Education*, p. 1). His newly invented discipline hugely impressed European thinkers from the nineteenth century. "The *Muqaddimah* can be regarded as the earliest attempt made by any historian to discover a pattern in the changes that occur in man's political and social organization" (N. J. Dawood, p. vii).

The question this paper addresses is: To what extent were Ibn Khaldun's theories of Education benefited from and can be useful in today's strategies of education? As there is a belief that says, "Although an ancient thinker, Ibn Khaldun should be a master to the youth of the Arab and Islamic world, and his prolegomena (*Muqadimmah*)

* Basma A. S. Dajani. Tel.: +96-279-560-1610

E-mail address: bdajani@hotmail.com

should be often read by them, not only to admire his marvellous thought and research, but also to learn from it the methods of expression of many social theories, which otherwise are difficult to express. Not only is the prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun is an inestimable wealth in the intellectual legacy of Arabic literature, it is also an inestimable wealth of Arabic rhetoric" (Enan, Ibn Khaldun; His Life and Work, P. vii).

Ibn Khaldun's upbringing and education

Ibn Khaldun's own upbringing and education greatly affected his philosophical school of thought, his general view of knowledge and of the mind, as well as his devised division of sciences. It is quite evident that Ibn Khaldun's points of view were influenced by his Islamic personality and the historical period in which he lived (born in 732 A.H. / 1332 A.D. and died in 808 A.H. / 1406 A. D.). The environment Ibn Khaldun lived in, as a child, allowed him to grow concerned with political and educational issues as both of his grandfathers were great politicians who held high positions in political office for long terms.

With the help of his father, who was his first mentor, Ibn Khaldun started his education by studying the Qur'an, its seven methods of recitation as well as the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith and jurisprudence. In addition, he studied the Arabic language, physics, mathematics, logic and philosophy at the hands of a number of noted professors in Tunis, which was the center of learning, at that time, in North Africa (Enan, p .8).

When Ibn Khaldun turned eighteen, the great plague befell the whole Muslim world (749 A.H. / 1349 A.D.), and captured many lives, of which were Ibn Khaldun's parents, and many of his notable professors. This led Ibn Khaldun to immigrate to Morocco.

In Fes, Ibn Khaldun studied about the scholars who had moved to Morocco from Andalusia, and Tunisia. At the time (in the second half of the 8th c. A.H, the 14th c. A.D.), the Arab world was politically divided into two major parts: the East and the West. However, culture and literature were the uniting bond between Arabs. This cultural unity was a key factor in the rise of Ibn Khaldun to fame. He would teach at the Great Mosque of Granada, at the Qarawiyeen mosque and university in Fes, at the Qasaba mosque in Bijayah, at the Zaytouna mosque in Tunisia and at Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo. He also interacted with scholars in the Adeleya School in Damascus (Al-Hossary, Sate', Studies on Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah, p. 490).

Ibn Khaldun was appointed in a political position in the court in Algeria in 766 AH /1365 AD. During his tenure, and upon the Sultan's request, he was invited to become a preacher at the Qasaba mosque. In Egypt in (784 A.H. / 1382 A.D.), people found Ibn Khaldun's lectures innovative and enthralling. Thus, the Egyptian society assigned him as the supreme judge at the Maliki school of thought. He was given the title of 'Wali' (a religious governor), which is one of the most refined educational and lawful ranks in Egypt (Wafi. Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah, p. 287).

Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of education

Education is the key imperative for human development. It has always been a critical issue for scientists and governors that they keep studying new strategies for more progress in human aspects. The question of achieving better education has been/is troubling parents as well as scientists and philosophers. Ibn Khaldun viewed the case of education and children's upbringing from a social thinker's perspective. He investigated the origin of science and education and concluded that they were natural things that existed in humanity: "It is Thought" that distinguishes man from animal, which helped in establishing science and crafts (Muqqadimah, p. 287).

Ibn Khaldun integrated the educational programs with the behavioural ones in a way that all sciences became a combination of both. As he believed in the influence of the behavioural education, he assumed that learning leads to a stage of transition in both; the individual mind and the individual manners. For instance, Ibn Khaldun advised that children should first be taught calculation: "The best method of instruction is to begin with calculation, because it is concerned with lucid knowledge and systematic proofs. As a rule, it produces an enlightened intellect that is trained along correct lines. It has been said that whoever applies himself to the study of calculation early in his life will as a rule be truthful, because calculation has a sound basis and requires self-discipline, soundness and self-discipline will thus become character qualities of such a person. He will get accustomed to truthfulness and adhere to it methodically..." (Muqaddimah, p. 376).

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun started by dividing sciences into two categories; one that man realized by instinct (ascribed primary sciences) while the other is acquired through education (acquired – secondary sciences). He explains; “God had offered man two beneficial things that man should make use of: the mind through which we can obtain the most useful, lasting needs and the senses through which we can gain knowledge.” Following this, he further divided the ascribed – mental – sciences, which are called the sciences of philosophy and wisdom. They comprise four different sciences or as they are called the intellectual sciences:

1. **Logic** is a science protecting the mind from error, and in the process of evolving unknown facts, one attempts to know from the available known facts.
2. **Physics** is the study of the elemental substances perceivable by the senses, namely, the minerals, the plants, and the animals which are created from (the elemental substances), the heavenly bodies, natural motions, and the soul from which the motions originated and other things.
3. **Metaphysics** is the study of metaphysical and spiritual matters.
4. **Measurement** comprises four different sciences, which are the "mathematical sciences"; geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy.

After his classification of the sciences, Ibn Khaldun explained each one, defined it, identified its different subjects and clarified its aim. To prove his narrative, he provided explanatory examples and showed what had been written previously about the issue. He went on to present the practical matters that were derived from these sciences.

Ibn Khaldun classified education and children’s upbringing into three different types: the psychological information on which education and rearing theories were based, the historical information that explained the used means of education and bringing up children in different countries, and the practical instructions that identified the rules that parents and teachers should follow. That is in addition to the theoretical principals which were the bases for such instructions.

Concerning the psychological information, Ibn Khaldun’s theory of “the human self” in his *Muqaddimah*, was related to his theory of education and was part of the general opinions of Islamic scholars at the time. He related the role of the mind to the role of the hand and explained the main job of the hand in serving the mind by manufacturing the machines that were used instead of the human body. Obviously, every action, whether materialistic, spiritual, mental or physical had to leave an influence on the human self. With the repetition of this action, it would become a habit which in return would become a specialization (Al-Hossary, Sate’, p. 424).

Ibn Khaldun followed the process of investigating the specialization in various fields starting from behaviour, to sciences, to crafts and to worship. This theory of “specialization and perfection in learning” was one of the bases for Ibn Khaldun’s opinion on education and rearing. He said: "The perfect way of conveying ideas is eloquence. They say that eloquence is conformity of speech to the requirements of the situation. After the requirements of a given situation have thus been indicated, there come the diverse ways in which the mind moves among the ideas with the help of different kinds of (word) meanings. The different ways the (mind) moves around in this way also have their conditions and laws, which are like rules. They were made into a (special) craft and called the (science of) style" (*Muqaddimah*, p. 453).

Nevertheless, Ibn Khaldun did not limit his realistic observations to individuals only, but he studied the psychological effect of groups and societies especially in some main conditions as '*Asabiyah*, wars, teaching and learning. "Ibn Khaldun proposed the idea of '*Asabiyah*, which means 'a sense of solidarity.' In the pursuit of '*Asabiyah* as an ideal, the leader strives to identify psychological, economic, environmental and social factors that contribute to the advancement of human civilization" (Majali, p. 1).

In section 37 in chapter 6 (teaching sciences), Ibn Khaldun defined some of the main principles for education in general without shedding light on the subjects itself – while in section 39 (teaching children), he explained the adopted methods in teaching children in the different countries, and comparing and discussing the used systems and subjects. He also used the word “first and second education” in the chapter. He referred in the first stage of learning to the period before adolescence and in the second stage to what is learned later on.

Ibn Khaldun had put forward several principles that served as guidelines to education and he summarized his main remarks concerning these standards of conduct as follows:

- a. Education should be taken gradually in order to be useful.
- b. A student, who specializes in a specific science efficiently, will be ready to learn another easily.
- c. The process of education should be done permanently and within fixed periods so that children would not forget what they had learned.
- d. Different sciences must be taught at different times.
- e. Being hard with students would lead to negative results such as weakening the students' enthusiasm and leading to laziness, encouraging lying and teaching dishonesty and wickedness.
- f. Travelling in order to seek knowledge, education and to meet with scholars would increase people's learning because each one would add to his/her own means of research and investigation.
- g. Basic sciences such as Shari'a, Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, Physics and Theology should be studied more and investigated. On the other hand, the secondary sciences such as Logic, Arabic, and Mathematics should be studied as complementary courses (AlHossary, Sate', p. 458).

These remarks are very useful for contemporary education as suggested by Majali recently in a lecture about leadership who said; "Leaders will not learn much by having knowledge imposed but by being exposed to their seniors and peers – exposed vertically and horizontally. The best education is the interaction of minds, between people of different professions, different religions, different civilizations, and different social sectors. This is a foundation of ethics in decision-making by future leaders" (Majali, 2014)

In classical Arabic literature, Imam Shafei (150 A.H. – 204 A.H. / 767 A.D. – 820 A.D.) emphasized poetically the importance of travelling for educational reasons among others, when he said: Leave your home for the sake of success for there are five benefits in travelling; amusement, earning a living, education, manners, and good companionship.

Ibn Khaldun uncovered a strong relationship between sciences and crafts; as he clarified in a section of chapter five (crafts and life issues) that crafts had to be taught: "Crafts would be completed with the progression of civilization, exactly as sciences would be. Besides, as crafts are considered means for earning incomes in societies, so is the need for learning. It helps people to gain more and to improve their life styles. Opening the minds with high level of education would lead to civilized societies and increase better opportunities for living."

Ibn Khaldun emphasised that the aim of education was not to have specialists in limited or narrow subjects, but was mainly the desire to provide students with sciences that would help them to live a good life. It is worth saying that some of Ibn Khaldun's main ideas on this matter were reflections of his supervisors.

At the time, education was characterized by the absence of regulations. There were free methods of teaching and learning as everyone chose the place where he/ she would be educated without governmental interference. So, there was no official observation and the only interference was through the wealthy people who offered the schooling requirements. Studying time was not scheduled however, the hosting time for students in their schools was determined to be 16 years in Morocco and 5 years in Tunisia. Ibn Khaldun explained that this long period in Morocco resulted from the bad methods that were followed. According to Ibn Khaldun, child education in Islamic countries as a whole was based on teaching Qur'an and on forcing children to memorize the Qur'anic verses by heart. However, some Islamic countries taught other subjects beside the Qur'an, such as Hadith, Islamic Law, calligraphy, poetry, literature, phonetics and mathematics.

From then, the variation in educational systems started among the Islamic countries. Ibn Khaldun presented four different systems in four different countries; Morocco, Andalusia, Africa (Tunis) and the East.

- In Morocco, children learnt only Qur'an until they either became professionals or they dropped from studying. That is why Ibn Khaldun said: "They used to be the best in memorizing the Qur'an."
- In Andalusia, children learned Qur'an with Arabic poetry, grammar and writing.
- In Africa, Tunisians resembled Andalusians because some Andalusian sheikhs (teachers) settled in Tunisia and transferred their educational methods.
- In the East, children learned some subjects such as the art of writing, besides the Qur'an.

Finally, Ibn Khaldun compared these methods and found the best way for perfection in Arabic speaking language and described the system, which was suggested by the judge Abu Bakr al Arabi who said that: “In his point of view, Ibn Khaldun preferred the latter system except for the fact that it neglected the inherited cultural reasons concerning education that start with teaching Qur’an.”

So, have Islamic and Arab societies learnt from the founder of sociology as to how to introduce knowledge in schools and universities?

Many education specialists in the Islamic world have addressed this issue. Zou'bi for example says that, “Today in the Islamic world, it is fair to say that a mindset of ‘Science Unappreciation’ exists raising the prospect of a multi-fold challenge for the science education community.” He and others raise the question of capacity building, i.e. how to get school teachers trained and qualified to deliver science/ science education in a clear, concise and exciting manner and indeed with the required enthusiasm? Another important challenge that must be addressed by developing countries is the language in which science subjects are taught at schools. Would it be the local language or a universal language? This gives rise to the question of the availability of books and teaching material etc. in local languages.

Many experts wonder as to how can the impact of science education strategies be assessed quantitatively and how can the impact of science education on students and societies be measured?

Thirdly the question is raised of when to move from Inquiry-based science education (IBSE) to inquiry-based education (IBE)? This seems to be a real practical problem. For how can young children who have, for example, just enjoyed a non-conformist IBSE class to switch back to a traditional mode of learning in a subsequent history or language lesson, for example. Shouldn't the trend be to start thinking of turning most of our education into Inquiry-based Education (IBE)? (Zoubi, 2014).

References

1. Cheddadi, Abdesselam. (1994) Ibn Khaldun. Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education. UNESCO, Paris: International Bureau of Education. Vol. XXIV, no. ½. P. 7 – 19.
2. Enan, Mohammad Abdallah. (1953) Ibn Khaldun, his life and his intellectual legacy. Masr press, Cairo.
3. AlHossary, Sate'. (1953) Studies of Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah.
4. Ibn Khaldun. (1978) The Muqaddimah. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Introduction by N.J. Dawood. St. Edmunds Press Ltd. Great Britain.
5. Kayadibi, Fahri. (2001) Ibn Khaldun and Education. The Hamdard Islamicus. April – June.
6. Majali, Abdel Salam (2014) Ethical decision-making: Towards Solidarity within a Global Civilization. Amman, Jordan: Islamic World Academy of Sciences.
7. Wafi, Ali Abdel Wahed. Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah. Human Hereditary Encyclopedia. Vol.1. Cairo. P. 286.
8. Zoubi, Moneef. (2014) Science Education in the Islamic World: A Snapshot of the Multilayered Role of Academies of Sciences and the Academe. Amman, Jordan: Islamic World Academy of Sciences.