

Chapter 3

Education Piety:

Special Reference to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Abdul Rahman Ibn Khaldun

Benaouda Bensaid

Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Turkey

Salah Machouche

International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to explore the crossroads between learning in Islam and spirituality, and also the methods according to which Muslim instructors shape students' experiences in a context of piety development. This study also examines questions pertaining to the concept of spirituality in education, methods pedagogic principles that further merge spiritual discipline with knowledge acquisition. The theoretical research draws on the textual analysis of early works of Muslim scholars, more specifically on Abdul Ibn Khaldun and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, given their prominent positions in the history of Muslim education. This study shows that the Islamic learning has always taken students' spiritual growth for granted and has, despite differences of practices across Muslim regions, always maintained the refining of learners' spiritual character.

INTRODUCTION

Given that learning in Islam is intertwined with the holistic understanding of human nature, its origin, abilities, and faculties, and more importantly perhaps, with its spiritual consciousness and experience, it allocates weight to spirituality in all of

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the branches of knowledge in such a way that it is fundamentally integrated with the Islamic worldview, purposes and higher ends of learning. Having said that, one should note that spirituality does not seek to substitute forms and methods of knowledge building; rather supports and sustains its health, growth and flourishing in milieus of reasoning and thinking. The instruction of spirituality however varies depending on the respective domains of learning inquiry, whether with respect to beliefs and religion, nature or human association (umr'an). Hence, the assessment of the spirituality of learning is held through a number of indexes including students' performance, cultivated discipline, quality of human conduct and moral performance, community engagement, community's interrelationships among community learners, and so forth.

This study investigates the influence of Muslim spirituality on learning. It draws on primary texts to gain insight in the converging areas of spirituality and learning as well as methods of assessment. This study also addresses other questions pertaining to the effective position of spirituality in Islamic learning including the following; how did early Muslim scholars conceptualized and managed the integration of spirituality into teaching curriculum; and further, how did they monitor and assess students' spiritual development while ensuring progress in education. Particularly, this chapter seeks to explore the experience of spiritual integration in learning in the work of the fourteenth Century notorious Muslim scholar, 'Abdul Rahman Ibn Khaldun. In this context, we will discuss spirituality according to Ibn Khaldun, its impact in both learning and personal development; the relationships associating spirituality with various branches of knowledge, in addition to the ways and means according to which instructors interwoven spirituality with learning and were able to assess spirituality in the learning space and on students' overall development. The research on the crossroads between education and spirituality is interesting in view of the fact that latter continues to play a central role in the historical development of Islamic learning. Reference to Ibn Khaldun highlights interestingly relevant themes such the position of belief and religion in the process of learning, as well as the impacts of interrelated concepts like human nature (*fitrah*), divine rules, and orders of thinking, moral values, and so forth.

Concept of Muslim Spirituality

The meaning of spirituality remains notoriously difficult to define with many opinions and (Wright, p.7). Swinton (2001) sees it as 'a personal and social process that refers to the ideas, concepts, attitudes and behaviours that derive from a person's, or a community's interpretation of their experiences of the spirit'(p.20)¹. Elkins et al. define it as 'a way of being and experiencing that comes through awareness of a transcendental dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in

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