CHALLENGES OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN MUSLIMWORLD: HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Issues about Islamic education have gained much attention to various historical, political, and socio-cultural factors. The state of Islamic education is attached to a great extent to local and international developments. Islamic education, like other institutions in the Muslim world, has struggled with challenges of development, modernization and globalization.Islamic education faces challenges from within as well as the challenges that the system poses to communities and societies in the Muslim world and beyond. The challenges explained by categories of its position within the larger educational system, its education process and pedagogy, the efforts of Muslim scholars, and modernization, politicization and militarization of Islamic education.However, improvement of the existing achievements must be a continuous exercise. A certain kind of strategy has to be designed and regularly improved. Through this, Islamic education could be a leading endeavor for the sake of harmonious and safe living for all mankind, irrespective of ethnic and religious orientations, and also could achieve the educational balance between tradition and enlightenment.

A. Introduction

The topics of education in Muslim world, and Islamic education, have gained much attention in the past few years due to the perceived link between those issues and concerns for development and security in the Muslim world and beyond. The development of the current educational systems in all countries of the Muslim world has gone through strikingly similar patterns that were shaped by historical political events such as colonialism and independence movements. The role of Islamic education in those countries reflects cultural patterns and value systems that are the product of a combination of religious, traditional and modern influences.

In order to come to some agreement regarding the challenges of Islamic education in Muslim world, it may be beneficial to firstly elicit a definition of Islamic education. Education in the context of Islam is regarded as a process that involves the complete person, including the rational, spiritual, and social dimensions. In that line, a morecomprehensive definition of Islamic education composed at the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makah in 1977 is in the following words:

> Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of man's spirit, intellect, his rational self, feelings, and bodily senses. Education should cater therefore for the growth of man in all aspects: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively and motivate all aspects towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. The ultimate aim of Muslim education lies in the realization of complete submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large(Ashraf, 1985: 4).

Al-Attas (1979: 104) maintains that the purpose of education for development of Islamic society is not to cram the pupil's head with facts but to prepare them for a life of purity and sincerity.

In Islamic educational theory, knowledge is gained in order to actualize and perfect all dimensions of the human being. From an Islamic perspective the highest and most useful model of perfection is the prophet Muhammad, and the goal of Islamic education is that people be able to live as he lived. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1984: 7) states that while education does prepare humankind for happiness in this life, 'its ultimate goal is the abode of permanence and all education points to the permanent world of eternity'.

By those basic understanding of education in the context of Islam, then we can capture the following discussion about the theoretical review of Islamic education, its challenges, and also the strategies for its improvements.

B. Historical, Political, and Socio-Cultural Review
1. Historical and Political Review (Islamic Education Before, Duringand After Colonization)

There are some factors to consider when discussing Islamic education before the period of colonization. First, the time period being studied spans about 12 centuries, from the time Prophet Mohammed started his prophetic mission in the 7th century, to the end of the 18th century. Second, the Muslim world covered a vast geographical area, which is almost the same area covered today by Muslim nations, extending from the Indian subcontinent to Morocco, and from Turkey and the Balkans to Central and West Africa. In addition, the Muslim world, within such a vast span of space and time, witnessed several political and social changes. Those factors make it difficult to draw convincing generalizations. The challenges become clear when attempting to study a historical system of Islamic education prior to the period of colonization.

There are two approaches on the subject written by Muslim scholars. The first focuses on a description of what is considered to

be the tenants of Islamic education, without a clear consideration of historical gaps.The second approach focuses on studying the causes of what is considered to be the rise and fall of Islamic education institutions.

Historically, as well as in our current era, Islamic tradition has recognized the centrality of education both as a form of worship and as a means to moral, ethical, and cultural socialization of the *ummah* (Muslim community). Especially during the formative years of the Islamic community, education was considered a high and noble ambition.

Education initially meant learning the Quran and developing a system of piety around it. It was considered one of the central aspects of Islamic tradition since the beginning of the Islamic community, it was later in the first and second centuries of Islam that scattered centers of learning grew up around persons of eminence.(Fazlur Rahman, 1984: 31) states that during this period these eminent teachers would give a student a permit (*ijaza*) to teach and copy down the prophet's tradition and deduce legal points from them.

Education systems in Islam beforethe period of colonization mainly consisted of law and theology.Others were known to religious sciences (*ulumshariya*), traditional sciences (*ulumnaqliya*) and rational or secular sciences (*ulumaqliya*) such as philosophy, mathematics, grammar, logic, medicine, and astronomy were taught and were considered important as Islamic literature flourished in these fields (Alatas, 2006: 169).

In the 400 years of Ottoman Empire rule over the Arab world, there was a stagnation of intellectual and cultural life, and the consequences to the Muslim world were severe, as it fell into deep sleep for almost four centuries. It affected the decline in the quality of education in the Muslim world. For example, classes such as rhetoric and grammar gradually replaced sciences, even at the oldest and most established University in the Muslim world, Al-Azhar. Moreover, original texts of theology, philosophy, and jurisprudence were also replaced with commentaries and super-

commentaries (Rahman, 1984: 37). These developments relied more on memorization learning methods without any deeper understanding of the subjects at hand. Thus the quality of education was severely damaged. Moreover, Islamic education became stagnant and was not able to adapt to the changes in society.

In the 19th century during the Euro-colonial expansion, Muslim communities rediscovered the importance of education when they encountered 'modernity' and Westernization. European powers were expanding their influence in the Muslim world through a systematic conquest for colonies, which began in the late 18th century and lasted until World War I. It is during the period of colonization that the Muslims had to come to grips with Western military, political, and economic superiority. Consequently, Muslim 'backwardness' and ways to modernize became the central issue for Muslim intellectuals of this era.

Modern educational institutions were established as colonial powers continued to penetrate the Muslim world. For example, the British rulers of the Indian subcontinent established a large number of modern schools in which English was often the medium of instruction for teaching such subjects as science and mathematics. As a result, the number of traditional Islamic education institutions (*madaris*) was gradually reduced. Some private and some mosque-based *madaris* survived. Egypt was the first among Arab countries to borrow the French system of education by sending students to study in France and establishing modern schools (Mursi, 1984: 457). The establishment of modern schools in the Muslim world did not mean the elimination of Islamic education institutions, which by that time were only focused on teaching Arabic language and Islamic studies. Instead, a dual system of education was established throughout the Muslim world.

Muslim responses to modernity differed significantly. Some argued that Islam and religious scholars (*ulema*) were responsible for this backwardness and therefore Muslim communities should modernize and secularize at the expense of Islam. Others thought

that it was not Islam but conservative *ulema* and the stagnant education system to blame. With that perspective, they argued for a selective application of modernity and argued especially that the technical aspects of it should be appropriated to the Islamic worldview. They argued that the reason for this backwardness of the Muslim world was the deviation of Muslims from the true, straight path of Islam. They proposed the solution for Muslims to go back to the formative years of Islam and try to reestablish the original Muslim community. Modernization of the education system in the Muslim world reflects these different responses to modernity and revolves around the question of how to modernize Islamic communities.

In that line, (Fazlur Rahman, 1984: 46-47) argues that modern Muslims have adopted two basic approaches to modern knowledge and the education system: (1) acquisition of modern knowledge should be limited to the practical technological sphere, since at the level of pure thought, Muslims do not need Western intellectual products (these Western ideas are detrimental for the Muslim community and the Islamic belief system); and (2) Muslims can and ought to acquire not only Western technology but also its intellectualism, as no knowledge can be harmful.

Today, the Muslim world consists of more than 50 states. There are substantial differences in the way the educational systems of these states have developed during the colonial and post-colonial eras. The political, social, and economic experiences of each state have played a significant role in this process. On that note, Fazlur Rahman (1984: 43) identifies four factors that played a crucial role in the different evolution of modernization in the Islamic world. These are: (1) whether a particular cultural region retained its sovereignty vis-à-vis the European political expansion and whether it was dominated and governed de jure or de facto by a European colonial power; (2) the character of the organization of the *ulema*, or religious leadership, and the character of their relationship with the governing institution before the colonial encroachment; (3) the state of the development of Islamic

education and its accompanying culture immediately before the colonial encroachment; and finally (4) the character of the overall colonial policy of the particular colonizing power (British, French, or Dutch). It can be inferred that the same factors have influenced the evolution of the education system in each of these states.

2. Socio-Cultural Review

The educational system naturally reflects social and cultural patterns in any given society. There are three value systems affect Muslim societies; they are religious value system, traditional value system, and modern value system (Abdalla, et.al, 2006: 8).

First, the religious value system that represents the norms, expectations, and rules derived from religion. They affect various aspects of people's lives, such as choices of mates, dress code, refraining from alcohol and gambling, and rules related to marriage, divorce, and death. They also affect the political and social outlook for some.

Second, the traditional value system that is the set of norms and ethics inherited through history from various sources. These norms and ethics influence many aspects of life, such as rituals related to birth, marriage, and funerals. They also provide certain values related to strict family traditions (i.e., patriarchy and limitations on women's appearance and choices), and even blood retaliation. Muslim societies for the longest time were influenced by a mix of the religious and traditional value systems.

And the third value system that arrived in Muslim societies with the Western colonialists was a new significant value system: the modern value system. It is the set of values learned through the interaction with the West over the past two centuries. Examples of these values fall under three categories: secular, such as democratic systems; Westernized, such as individual freedom on the personal level, music, and pop-culture; and civic, such as work ethics and respect for public space.

The merge of those three value systems hadserious implications for the educational systems in Muslim countries. One

obvious influence during the 19th century and most of the 20th century occurred soon after the arrival of the colonialists and the establishment of their institutions. The cultural norms dictating access to resources, power and status shifted not only towards the attainment of Western-style education, but also the adjustment of manners and life style to resemble those of Westerners.Under the model of dual educational systems, the modern general education and the Islamic education, the large mass of elites and middle-class that were ambitious directed their children's education to modern general education institutions, including missionary schools.The modern general education offered that type of access to status and power, while the Islamic education system became more and more limited in what it could offer its graduates. Islamic education institutions became a symbol of backwardness and became associated with poor and rural populations.

The Westernization of the middle class in the Muslim world was the trend until the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this time modern general education gained a strong foothold. However, as Islam remained a constant component of what constituted the Muslim identity and as efforts were made to balance Islam and modernity, the entire Muslim world witnessed a renewal and revival of its Islamic identity due to several political and social factors.

The history of early Islam, as taught to the young at home, school, mosque and in the community, is rich with examples of self-sacrifice, courage, solidarity, love and compassion, justice and equality. Every Muslim seems to be able to identify with this heritage and almost feel a sense of ownership of it. This heritage is not subject to the confusing scholarly interpretations or the abusive institutions that have overshadowed the social and political history of Islam. Rather, it represents to Muslims the pure ideals of their religion.

These ideals also represent a reality that Muslim and this heritage is an integral part. This relationship with their Islamic religious heritage always provided continuity and momentum to

Muslim societies; in spite of political and social institutions that strayed too far from that heritage.Islam offers its followers a wide range of attitude and behavior models applicable in different situations. These models are prescribed in, and extracted from, divine sources.Then, the success of a Muslim is based on her or his striving to model attitudes and behaviors after the ones presented in the Quran and Sunnah. Hence, Islam is a process of modeling. The virtue is measured by one's ability to model all aspects of life after the ones prescribed in divine sources. The major principles emphasized in the divine sources are recognition of monotheism, kindness to others, justice, charity, standing up for the weak, honesty, and belief in the hereafter.

Consequently, it is not surprising from a Muslim standpoint to witness this revival of Islam in all aspects of life. The implication for the educational system is that such a revival, especially among the elites and the educated middle class, opened a 'demand market' for Islamic education combined with quality modern education. Thus, a new model of Islamic education institutions is emerging in the countries like Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia. The new model offers a combination of high quality modern education and strong Islamic education. Those new schools are usually privately-run and require high fees affordable only to the upper middle class and elites. Despite that, large segments of the educated middle class and elites in those countries continue to hold fast to their Westernized manners, hence continuing to view Islamic education institutions as symbols of backwardness. However, this pattern is changing dramatically from the dominant trends of the past two centuries.

In brief, the social and cultural views of Islamic education have been influenced by the arrival of colonialism in the 19th century in ways that reduced that education to a mere insignificant institution relevant mainly to the lower socio-economic segments of Muslim societies. However, as Islam continued to exercise its strong sentiment among the masses, across all classes, and due to various political and social circumstances, the Islamic aspect of

identity re-emerged among members of the elite and the middle class, opening the door for the introduction of new models of modern and Islamic education.

C. Islamic Education and Globalization

The concept of globalization is not a strange concept to Muslim intellectuals, when we looked at the context of *ummah* (unity of Muslim nation) we see many indications referred to the whole nation as one *ummah* perspective. Quoting the verse from Quran may shed light on the modern understanding of the concept of globalization, "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other" (al-Hujurat 49: 13).

This concept brought the world into a new understanding that can promote communication within the whole world interchangeably interacting the Islamic world with other to enhance the common values and to strengthen the sense of sharing common values among them. It can work through the term used by Yasushi as 'global society' (Yasushi, 2008, in Kayadibi & Buang, 2011: 87) which means one nation state instead of separated *ummah* nation from other nations which may consist of many different races, religions, cultures like families that create a small state regardless of their religious, ethnical and cultural backgrounds.

Globalization is named in Arabic term as *'al-awlamah'* or *'al-alamiyyah'*. It refers to an openness and enthusiasm in knowing other nations around the world (Hasan, 2007, in Kayadibi & Buang, 2011: 88). As we mentioned and the Quran expressed the globalization is not a far phenomenon from the Islamic thinking when it is considered in terms of interaction between nations to know their cultures, values and knowledge.

In terms of Islamic teaching, the word of globalization is a very welcomed term as Islam always passion to obtain new knowledge and information which is expressed in the Prophet's persuasion, as it is clearly known that the first revelation of Islam started with a word of 'read' that of mentioned in the Quran: "Read

in the name of your Lord Who created, He created man from a clot, Read and your Lord is Most Honorable, He Who taught (the use of) the pen, Taught man that which he knew not" (al-'Alaq 96: 1-5). It gives a sign to whole humanity the importance of knowledge which the globalization persuades to obtain it through easiest and quickest way.

The concept of knowledge ('*ilm*) is not confined to specific matters like other civilizations and cultures applied. Al-Attas indicates that the term knowledge ('*ilm*) has been applied in Islam to encompass the totality of life – the spiritual, intellectual, religious, cultural, individual and social- means that its character is universal, and that it is necessary to guide man to his salvation (al-Attas 1979 in Kayadibi & Buang, 2011: 87).

Whichever nations hold firmly the source of knowledge they would be guided to the way for advancement in developing the humanity, and whoever hold the knowledge cannot be considered as equal to those who do not have. In the Quran the important of science and knowledge of what He created is very often emphasized "Say: Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?" (al-Zumar 39: 9), and those who have knowledge will definitely be increased to high ranks "Allah will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge, in high degrees" (al-Mujadalah 58: 11).

The purpose of Islamic education is to prepare the Muslims to live in this world peacefully and gain the eternal benefits of the hereafter that was outlined in the Quran and then concurrently to reinforce and progress the human society altogether. Therefore, it aims at implanting the principle of Islam in the minds and the hearts of the people at large to accomplish through them the ideal faith of Islam. The purpose of education is not only to fill up the people's mind with single knowledge but also to prepare them for the both life as al-Ibrashi indicated, "to prepare them for a life of purity and sincerity. This total commitment to character-building based on the ideals of Islamic ethics is the highest goal of Islamic education" (al-Attas 1979 in Kayadibi & Buang, 2011: 90). Thus, all

educational institutions and researched based institutions must be induced to operate efficient organizations, to use their intellectual properties efficiently in order to have high strength to compete with the global institutions.

D. An Overview of Islamic Education in The Muslim World

As a result of the massive changes that occurred in the Muslim world over the past 200 years, the shape and design of Islamic education varies from one country to another. Educational institutions in the Muslim world offer varying mixes of Islamic and general education.

The followingsare the explanation of the spectrum of education in Muslim world from the classification of the mix between general and religious education, level of religious education, type of educational institution (private/public), type of students, and the example countries (Abdalla, et.al., 2006: 16):

1. *Exclusively Islamic education*; the institution focus strongly on Islamic education. These are usually informal community-based institutions intended to teach children basic Islamic information and Quranic memorization, in addition to basic Arabic and arithmetic. These are mostly private and low fee, and also intended mainly by a small percentage of students from underprivileged segments of the society. The example of the countries are Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afganistan.
2. *Islamic education with minimal general education;* Thistype of institutionsalso offer a strong emphasis on Islamic education combined with minimal general education. These are mostly private schools and low fee. The *Qawmi Madaris* in Bangladesh are good examples of this type and other schools from Indonesia and Nigeria.
3. *Mixed Islamic and general education;* Thistype combines a stronger general education curriculum and usually follows government regulations. It is attended by a sizeable minority of students mainly from underprivileged segments of the society. These are mixed of public and private schools with

low fee. The *Alia madrasah* in Bangladesh and *Al-Azhar K-12 schools* in Egypt are good examples of this type of education, and followed by some schools in Indonesia and Nigeria.

4. *Mixed Islamic and high quality of general education;* It is a new emerging model combines high quality general education with a strong emphasis on Islamic education. This new trend of schools is usually private with expensive fees and appeals mainly to the growing modern/religious middle and upper classes. The example countries are Bangladesh, Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan.

5. *General education with minimal Islamic education;* The most prevalent type of institution in the entire Muslim world offers mainly a general education curriculum with minimal superficial instructions in religion. These are mostly public schools that follow the general education curriculum strictly and attended by large percentages of all segments of the society. The example countries are Bangladesh, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Nigeria.

6. *Exclusively general education;* Theseare schools that offer only general education with no Islamic education. Those are rare in the Muslim world, as most of these countries insist on some type of religious education. Turkey is the country included in this type until late 1940's, and currently proposed in Egypt.In Egypt, the government has proposed to eliminate all religious education in public schools. The proposal is receiving sharp criticism from Muslim and Christian leaders equally. The leaders argued that canceling the subject of religion from school curricula will have catastrophic consequences on society because everybody should learn their own religion.

7. *High quality general education with some Crostian education;* Theseare schools that offer general education and have traditionally been part of Christian missions. They are usually run by Christian religious figures, and provide Christian education to Christian students. Lately, some of these schools have eliminated religious subjects from their curricula. These

are attended by a very small percentage of students from upper influential class. Some countries followed this type are Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Nigeria.

Based on the review of the content of Islamic education, the followings are the description of the component of Islamic education curricula. Such curricula may exist in exclusively Islamic education institutions, or in institutions that offer a strong dose of Islamic education combined with a general education curriculum:

1. Quranic Interpretation (*Tafsir*): This subject includes reviews of the classic interpretations of the Quran according to several early scholars such as Ibn Kathir, El- Tabari, and Ibn Taymiyya. In some institutions, the interpretations provided by contemporary scholars such as Sayed Qutb and Mawdudi may also be included.

2. Prophet's Sayings and Practices (*Hadith*): This subject addresses the processes used to ensure the authenticity of stories and statements related to the Prophet Mohammed, and review of the collections compiled by earlier scholars such as Bukhari and Muslim.

3. Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*): This subject includes the methodologies used by various scholars, especially those representing the major four schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam (Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali), and their rulings on a variety of subjects, usually cataloged under categories such as prayer, marriage, divorce, charity, and jihad.

4. Islamic Basic Beliefs ('*Aqaid*): This subject focuses on the fundamental Islamic beliefs such as unity of God, existence of angels and satan, Day of Judgment, heaven, and hell.

5. Arabic Language: As Arabic is the language of the Quran, almost all educational institutions that focus on Islamic education providing education in the Arabic language. Proficiency in Arabic is usually regarded highly in such institutions.

6. Islamic Rituals: This subject deals with how Muslims should perform their rituals such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca. *Fiqh* books include elaborate volumes on those

subjects.

7. Islamic History: This subject focuses primarily on Islamic history from the time of Prophet Mohammed to the present.

8. Islamic Manners and Values: This subject includes focused education especially for children on proper Islamic manners as preached and practiced in the formative era of Islam; an era regarded by most Islamic scholars as a golden age from which many positive lessons and models may be drawn. In educational institutions that offer primarily a general education curriculum, the subject of religion usually includes elements of Islamic manners and values (Abdalla et.al. 2006: 17).

E. Challenges of Islamic Education in The Muslim World

The previous review of educational systems in the Muslim world and the position of Islamic education within them show wide variations in terms of how different countries allow Islamic education to be included, regulate its institutions, integrate it with general education, and recognize its degrees.

Islamic education faces challenges from within as well as the challenges that the system poses to communities and societies in the Muslim world and beyond. These challenges are presented here in the following categories.

1. The Position of Islamic Education Within the Larger Educational Systems

The variations of the position of Islamic education in different countries, different regulations, different integration with general education and different degrees resulted from different development processes in each country since the time of Western colonization. But the challenges emerge when Islamic education results in negative outcomes. There are some negative outcomes and the challenges they produce, they are:

a. Students in Islamic education institutions find themselves in dead-end sub-systems. It provides mainly memorization-

based religious information. This happens more often in the early formative years. One problem with such sub-systems is that they narrow the knowledge that students attain to a sort of religious education that limits their chances for development and their work choices. Due to poverty, many students end up not continuing their education beyond that formative memorization-based stage. Consequently, they miss out on educational, vocational and professional growth opportunities.

b. The educational system does not recognize Islamic education institutions' degrees or limits their usefulness. Often the graduates of several Islamic education institutions find themselves restricted to further religious education, without a choice to pursue other types of education, vocations or professions.

c. The educational system limits access to Islamic education in general education schools. Since September 11, 2001, there has even been discussions in some Muslims countries to eliminate that one class altogether. The problem with those approaches (limitation or elimination) is that they do not recognize that people will always seek alternatives to receive Islamic knowledge. This has led in the past, and may very well continue, to lead to increasing the pool of individuals who become vulnerable to extremist, intolerant and violent religious teachings.

d. *Madrasah* management presents a challenge.Beginning in the early 1950s, most government establishments in Muslim countries, in order to 'control' Islamic education, created special Islamic education boards the purpose of which was to regulate this sector. These religious education boards often operate under the auspices of a Ministry of Religious Affairs, although some belong to Ministries of Education (Abdalla, et.al, 2006: 41).

Even though the intended purpose of the religious education boards was to keep tabs on Islamic education, creation

of special boards was viewed as 'legitimization' of this stream of education by the religious establishment (for example in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia and othercountries). The complete dichotomy of religious and general education streams in some countries has unintentionally resulted in total marginalization of Islamic education and somewhat a greater autonomy for the religious schools in those countries (especially in South Asia).

2. Islamic Education Processes and Pedagogy

Islamic education at the present time suffers to a great extent from centuries of stagnation. Islamic scholars agree that methods of memorization, imitation, and lack of creativity have dominated Islamic pedagogy for centuries. Thus, the *madaris* were not providing relevant education to the Muslim society.

At least the following challenges exist with Islamic education processes and pedagogy.

a. In some religious circles, a belief continues to exist that religious education is The Knowledge (*'ilm*).

b. Memorization seems to be a dominant method of Islamic education. In non-Arabic speaking countries, children often memorize sections of the Quran, or the entire Quran, without understanding what they memorize.

c. Punishment of students in Islamic education institutions is almost a chronic problem in the entire Muslim world.

d. Teachers need to be better prepared. As a result of ages of stagnation, teaching methods in Islamic education institutions have not seen improvement. Most teachers are the products of the *madrasah* system itself and have no or minimal exposure to the alternative ways of teaching or encouraging their students to ask questions about what they are being taught.

3. Efforts of Islamic Scholars

Since the arrival of Western colonization, some Muslim scholars have embarked upon the task of reforming Islamic education in order to keep up with modernity. It is apparent that

the attentive efforts of Islamic scholars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were behind the reforms that took place in the Muslim world at that time. Those reforms created the current models of Islamic education and contributed significantly to its modernization,but they also faced challenges. Two reasons for these challenges are colonization on the one hand and strictness of the religious establishment on the other hand.

However, the challenge to Islamic education today is different with the challenges of the past two centuries. Muslim countries are no longer colonized. Thecurrent challenges are to keep up with modernity and globalization which poses new challenges to education in the Muslim world in general, and to Islamic education in particular. Besides, the threat of militancy and terrorism in the name of Islam as a response to perceived injustices, and radical fundamentalism as a response to cultural changes, are troubling.

Unfortunately, in the face of those challenges, modern Islamic scholars concerned with Islamic education seem to fall short in providing effective guidance to address them. This is because modern scholars often use approaches that reflect:
  a. Rhetoric often feeds radical, negative views of non-Muslims.
  b. Informal approaches to the study of Islamic sources on education and *tarbiya*provide biased views.

The important thing today is to see what Muslim scholars can contribute to help Islamic education effectively respond to current issues such as development, globalization and militancy. It is new challenges that Islamic education scholars concerned about the state of Islamic education in the world must address in a realistic manner. Continuing to guide efforts for Islamic education reforms via the siege mentality and the praise for the past time would be fruitless if they do not counter the new cyber-spread of hate, chauvinism, and superiority and similar current issues.

4. Modernization, Politicization and Militarization of Islamic Education

In most Muslim countries, especially those that implement a dual system of general education and Islamic education, there are common negative assumptions among members of the educated elites and upper middle class that Islamic education institutions are backward and that their graduates are somewhat useless to the modern economy and workforce.

After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, media in West formulated a singular image of Islamic education institutions by focusing on children memorizing the Quran and shouting '*jihad'*. This resulted in presenting the system as one that is backward, oppressive to children, and used as a seedbed for militancy and extremism.

Those negative views of Islamic education institutions misrepresent several aspects. First, the vast majority of these institutions provide more than just mechanical Quranic memorization; they offer a wider range of religious education in addition to modern education. Second, they serve millions of children; girls and boys in the Muslim world who otherwise could be deprived of any education. Third, these institutions in many countries of the Muslim world provide invaluable social services to the communities by offering shelter and education to orphans. Finally, most of those institutions are moving forward with modernization plans.

Therefore, Islamic education institutions in Muslim world are moving forward to reform and modernize Islamic education. This is clearly one challenge faced of them because such views add a pre-established negative notion about Islamic education that makes it difficult to attract funders and educators to participate in such efforts.

Similar to this, it is unfortunate that governments and militants, in the Muslim world and the West, have on several occasions exploited those Islamic education institutions to advance their own political agendas. The problem with the policies is that

such indoctrination and utilization of Islamic education institutions as centers for Islamic Jihad International do not stop to exist once the purpose they were initiated to address is fulfilled.

The indoctrination and the militant society live beyond the fulfillment of the immediate purpose. The violent force associated with them continues to affect the entire world in an extraordinary wave of terror. Undoing militant indoctrination may prove more difficult than anticipated, given several political and social disturbances that seem to give belief to such ideas in the Muslim world. When this is coupled with the 'credible' cyber-hatred, efforts to bring normality to Islamic education institutions may appear.

F. Strategiesfor Improving Islamic Education

There are several approaches and strategies provided for improving education in Islamic schools, they are society-related, government-related, and institution-related approach.

1. Society-related Strategies

    Based on the society-related, there are some approaches could be applied to the improvement of Islamic education:
    a. Encourage, rather than hinder, community ownership of Islamic education institutions.
    b. Promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence.
    c. Provide equitable education for girls.
    d. Counter negative perceptions about Islamic education.

2. Government-related Strategies

    Based on the government-related, there are some approaches could be applied to the improvement of Islamic education:
    a. Support Islamic education, especially in public schools.
    b. Monitor, not mandate, Islamic curriculum content.
    c. Governments in the Muslim world must provide careful supervision of the Islamic education institutions and curriculum.

    d. Monitor curriculum for education quality and negative messages.

3. Institution-related Strategies

       Based on the institution-related, there are some approaches could be applied to the improvement of Islamic education:

    a. Encourage the infusion of general education into Islamic education institutions.

    b. Support new student-centered, action-oriented classroom instruction.

    c. Spread the word about successful new models.

After all, the problems of Muslims are attributable to distortions in their ideological vision, cultural motivation, intellectual approach, and educational discourse (Abusulayman, 2007: 5). Thus, the substance of the renewal of the Islamic thought and Islamization of knowledge is by reconstruction and reformation of the Muslim mind as well as restoration of its connections with the Quran and the Sunnah (Al-Alwani, 2006: 7). It is believed to be one of the ways in realizing the progressive strategies for improving the Islamic education.

G. Conclusion

This article has emphasized that understanding issues surrounding Islamic education must take into consideration to various social, cultural, and political-historical factors. The state of Islamic education is attached to a great extent to local and international developments. Islamic education, like other institutions in the Muslim world, has struggled with challenges of development, modernization and globalization.

Ithas also offered a sight of hope that Islamic education institutions are not resistant to positive change and modernization. Despite the many negative aspects related to that education, several Islamic education institutions have demonstrated the willingness and ability to change to the needs of today's world. However, addressing the challenges facing Islamic education will require

much more than the good will and action of those responsible for them; it will require the support and action of states, the media, and various members of civil society. More profoundly, the success of efforts to address challenges facing Islamic education will require manner changes on the part of those responsible for that education, and those who continue to view it with fear and suspicion. Such transformation is possible as long as its significance and necessity are recognized.

Certainly, Islamic education has attracted many Muslims to deal with and endeavor its realization. Certain aims of the Islamic education, somewhat, have been accomplished. However, improvement of the existing achievements must be a continuous exercise. A certain kind of strategy has to be designed and regularly improved. Through this, Islamic education could be a leading endeavor for the sake of harmonious and safe living for all mankind, irrespective of ethnic and religious orientations. Through this too, according toWilna Meijer (2009: 16) who is a famous Dutch education philosopher, the Islamic education even in the West has a conceivable and justifiable future in the current modern western context, achieving the educational balance between tradition and enlightenment.

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