# Educational philosophy Imam Al-Ghazali's perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Islam is a divine religion. It is based on divine revelation (Holy Quran) and sunnah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. As a religion it is a complete code of life. It does not deal with worships only but addresses all fields of life. Like Beliefs and worship, Islam focuses on education also. As a last and chosen religion, it motivates human beings to seek knowledge.

The first word of the first revelation (Chapter Al-alaq) starts with Iqra means Read. In first five ayat of chapter Al-alaq, the basic requirement for enhance of education (Read, knowledge and pen) have been mentioned six times. Similarly, the Holy Prophet ﷺ took many steps for imparting education. In this connection, the example of first residential university (Suffa'h) is sufficient.

Imam Ghazali one of the most famous Muslim thinkers discusses the education in his books in detail. He was born in 448 AH (1057 CE) at Tabaran a town in the district of Tus, which lies within the Khorasan Province of Iran and died on 18 December (1111 CE).

In this article knowledge, its classification, stages, curriculum, art of teaching, responsibility of both teachers as well as students have been discussed in the light of Imam Ghazali educational philosophy.

***Keywords:*** educational philosophy, thinker, learning, classification of knowledge, stages of education

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## Introduction

Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad surnamed al-Ghazali was a great scholar, mystic, Sufi, thinker, jurist, philosopher and educationist. He has left an indelible mark on the cultural, religious and educational history of the world. As an educationist, we can rank him with his two great non-Muslim predecessors, Confucius and Plato. He gave much importance to education and wrote as many as one hundred books, out of which seventy eight works are still available.

His greatest work is Ahya-ul-Uloom-ud-din, which reflects his main philosophical and psychological thoughts. In the first chapter of this book, he has discussed the importance of knowledge, curriculum and finally the responsibilities of the teacher and the taught. His philosophy of education represents the high point of Islamic thinking on education. Here, he achieves a synthesis of legal, philosophical and mystical educational thinking. His philosophy is more than an expression of the spirit of the age in which he lived than a response to its challenges. His thinking on education and philosophy favoured continuity and stability over change and innovation.

For Al-Ghazali, the purpose of society is to apply Sharia and therefore the aim of education is to cultivate men so that they abide by the teachings of religion and is hence assured of salvation and happiness in the eternal life of the hereafter.

## KNOWLEDGE AND ITS CLASSIFICATION

### Purpose of Knowledge

The purpose of knowledge is to help man to achieve satisfaction, plenitude and to attain true happiness; [1] the happiness of the hereafter by drawing close to God and gazing upon His countenance. The value of learning lies in its usefulness and veracity. Hence, the religious sciences are superior to the secular sciences because they concern salvation in the eternal life of hereafter rather than this transient world as explained in the Holy book.

﴿وَمَا هَٰذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ ۚ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ ۚ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ [2]

*The life of this world is but a sport and a pastime, Lo!*
*The home of the Hereafter that is life. If they but know*

Religious education contains greater truth than the secular sciences. This is not to say that secular sciences should be completely ignored. They have their uses too and are needed by society. Examples of such disciplines are medicine and linguistics.

## CLASSIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE:

Imam Ghazali has divided knowledge into two parts:

**Beneficial knowledge (Sharai and Science):**

As a scholar and teacher, Al-Ghazali was interested in the problem of knowledge, its concepts, methods, categories and aims. True knowledge in his view, is knowledge of God, His books, Prophets, kingdom of earth and heaven as well as knowledge of Sharia as taught by the Allah and Prophet ﷺ [2]. Such knowledge is

thus a religious science, even if it includes the study of certain worldly phenomena. This encapsulates those sciences that will benefit society and help it to progress, e.g. medical knowledge and mathematics. Accordingly, the acquisition of these sciences and disciplines is Fard al-Kifayyah, [3] (فرض الكفايه) i.e. if nobody acquires it, then the entire Muslim community of a particular locality will be sinful.

**Neutral Knowledge:**

This category encapsulates those disciplines that will not really enhance one's beneficial knowledge but there is nothing wrong if they are studied, e.g. the history of England, Europe and Asia etc.

**Harmful Knowledge:**

This category comprises of those disciplines which are harmful, such as black magic and gambling. It is therefore Haram to acquire such knowledge in accordance to the saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ

(( وَإِنَّ مِنْ الْعِلْمِ جَهْلًا وَإِنَّ مِنْ الشِّعْرِ حُكْمًا وَإِنَّ مِنْ الْقَوْلِ عِيَالًا)) [4]

"*Some knowledge is nescience, some poetry is full of wisdom and some quotes are burden"*

The Holy Prophet ﷺ seek refuge from these Knowledge

((اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ لَا يَنْفَعُ وَمِنْ قَلْبٍ لَا يَخْشَعُ وَمِنْ نَفْسٍ لَا تَشْبَعُ وَمِنْ دَعْوَةٍ لَا يُسْتَجَابُ لَهَا))[5]

*"O Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from the knowledge which does not benefit, from the heart that does not*

*entertain the fear (of Allah), from the soul that does not feel contented and the supplication that is not responded."*

In the light of the above, one must be obliged to be careful and be responsible in selecting his career. There are many fields that Muslims must take the lead. It is thus important to focus on these disciplines, and parents should ensure that their children study in the proper environment and with the right Islamic mindset in order to obtain the optimum result. Also it is incumbent for a person to learn the Islamic side of the field he is in.

## STAGES OF EDUCATION

### Childhood:

Man is born as "**tabula rasa**" and children acquire personality, characteristics and behavior through living in society and interaction with the environment. The family teaches the children its language, customs and religious traditions whose influence they can't escape. Therefore, the main responsibility for children's education falls on the parents and the teachers who subsequently share this responsibility. Al-Ghazali stresses the importance of childhood in character formation. It is therefore necessary to understand the special characteristics of this period in order to deal with the child in an effective and sound manner.

In the elementary stage, children learn the Quran and the sayings of the Holy Prophet's companions; they should be preserved from love, poetry and the company of men of letters, both of which sow the seeds of corruption in boy's souls. They must be advised

that their friends should possess the intelligence, good morals, good character, abstemiousness and truthfulness.

**Youngster's Education**

It is important that boys should begin to attend ,Maktab, (elementary school) at an early age, for what is learnt then engraved in stone. Those entrusted with the education of the boy at school should be aware of how this motivation develops and interests change from one period to another, followed by a love of finery and appearances (in infancy and childhood) then an interest in women and sex (adolescence), a yearning for leadership and domination (at the age of 20) and finally delight in knowledge of God (at the age of 40). These changing interests can be used by educators to attract the boys to school, by offering first the lure of ball games, then for ornaments and fine clothes, then responsibilities and finally by awakening a longing for the hereafter.

**Level of Education**

Ghazali then divides each branch of knowledge into three levels; elementary, intermediate and advanced and lists the books they may be studied at each level. He thinks that education is not merely a process whereby the teacher imparts knowledge, which the pupil may or may not absorb, after which the teacher and pupil each go their separate ways. Rather, it is an interaction affecting and benefiting teacher and pupil equally, the former gaining merit for giving instruction and the latter cultivation through the acquisition of knowledge.

Ghazali attaches great importance to the climate in which reading takes place, and to the kind of relations that are desirable in

doing so, he continuous and reaffirms the Islamic traditions of education, for him, the teacher should be a model and an example, not merely a source or medium of knowledge. His work is not limited to the teachings of a particular subject; rather, it should encompass all aspects of the personality and life of the pupil. The pupil in turn, has the duty to consider the teacher as a father to whom he owes obedience and respect.

## CURRICULUM

### Types of Curriculum

Al-Ghazali distinguishes clearly between two types of curriculum:

a. **Obligatory sciences** which must be studied by everyone, including religious sciences and related or ancillary disciplines such as linguistics and literature.

b. **Optional Sciences** which are studied according to the wishes and capacities of the student.

## THE ART OF TEACHING

Among the principles governing the art of teaching al-Ghazali stresses that;-

a. Teaching should be linked to concrete situations and emphasizes the need for various types of knowledge and skills. Whenever a particular knowledge or skill is needed, it should be taught in such a way as to meet that need should be functional. He also stresses that learning is only effective when it is put into practice, and is aimed at inculcating the right habits rather than simply memorizing information. He comes close to the idea of "proficiency learning" when he recommends that the teacher should not move on from one

subject matter to another without first ensuring that the pupil has mastered the first subject matter and to the concept of the " complementarily of sciences". He advises that the teacher should pay attention to the interconnectedness of knowledge and the relations between its various branches.

**Religious education**

With respect to religious education, Al-Ghazali recommends an early introduction to the fundamentals of religion through inculcation; memorization and repetition, thus he feels no need for understanding at first. A subsequent stage involves explanation understanding and conscious practice. Here too, he continuous the Islamic traditions of education, in which the Quran was first to be memorized without being explained, the fundamentals of religion inculcated without clarification and practice was enjoined before the emergence of commitment rooted in conviction.

**MORAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS**

**Ethico-psychological principles**

Ghazali has propounded some of the most fundamental ethico-psychological principles for the teacher to be followed very honestly and faithfully by all while imparting education to the deserving ones. A teacher who generously and benevolently imparts education to others without being aware of getting any kind of remuneration in cash or kind from his taught is like the sun which is bright and showers its light on all without discrimination and will never be exhausted. A selfless teacher is like a rose full of fragrance and gives it to other people also. Any teacher who is niggardly in imparting that which he possesses to the deserving ones is an

intellectually miser and as such not teaching other he is committing a crime against humanity. The principles which must be followed by the teachers are:-

a. The teacher should cultivate an imaginative commiseration with his taught.
b. The teacher should teach and bring up his disciple just as his own son. Allah Almighty, on the Day of Judgment will adequately give the reward in accordance with the ayat

﴿يٰقَوْمِ لَآ اَسْـَٔلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ اَجْرًا ۭ اِنْ اَجْرِيَ اِلَّا عَلَي الَّذِيْ فَطَرَنِيْ ۭ اَفَلَا تَعْقِلُوْنَ﴾(6)

*O my people! I ask of you no reward for it. Lo! My reward is the concern only of Him who made me have you then no sense*

a. No stone should be left unturned and efforts spared in the reformation, education and correction 0f the student. Education is nothing if it does not revolutionize the out-look of the taught on life in a moral, intellectual and spiritual style.
b. By love and sympathy, the attention of student should be diverted towards the studies and not by force or any ilk of coercion.
c. While teaching certain branch of learning, the teacher should not belittle the importance of other faculties of knowledge. For instance, while teaching philosophy, the teacher should not minimize the significance of tafsir or fiqh etc, because it perverts the mind of the student and narrows down his vision.

d. The teacher should speak keeping in mind the intellectual level of the taught so that he may grasp what the teacher is saying.

e. A dull student should be tackled in such a way so that he may not feel awkward in the company of his intelligent fellows otherwise the former may suffer from inferiority complex which may undo every effect of education.

f. The teacher should be just and fair with all. He should not betray his weakness of liking a few and disliking the others.

g. The tutors must devote attention to religious education. They must be taught everything they need to know about the percepts of religious laws, and must learn not to steal, eat forbidden food, act disloyalty, lie, utter obscenities or do anything that children are prone to do.

h. If the boy obeys his tutors, has good morals, shows excellence and makes progress in his studies, he should be honored and praised in public so as to be encouraged and to incite others to imitate him. If he makes a mistake, but appears to be aware of it, tutor should not mind, for the boy may have understood his mistake and be determined not to repeat it. If however, he commits the same error again; his tutor should give him a small reprimand in private. The teacher may sometimes need to punish his pupils with a light beating, the purpose of which should be chastisement rather than physical injury.

i. The teachers should take into account the difference in character and ability among pupils, and deal with each one of them appropriately. The teachers should not push the pupils beyond their capacity, nor attempt to bring them to a level of knowledge, which they cannot absorb, since that is counterproductive. In a Hadith, the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) says:

((أمرت أن أخاطب الناس على قدر عقولهم))[7]

*I have been ordered to talk to people according to their wisdom.*

To feed someone with the right food is to give life to burden someone with what is not right can only cause ruin.

j. In addressing the arts and artistic education, he deals with the general principles of education. He begins well by defining beauty and goodness as the perception of a thing in its entirety, but his Sufism quickly gets the better of him and he condemns listening to music and singing because they are associated with gatherings where wine is drunk. The only kind of singing to be allowed, in his view, is that of religious and heroic nature, or those sung at official festivities. Since such songs revive one's spirits, rejoice the heart and help one to carry on the work of this world and the next. However, an excess of music and singing should be avoided like medicine they should be take only in prescribed dose.

**Moral responsibilities of the taught/student**

Just like the teacher, Ghazali has prescribed some very hard and fast rules for the seekers of knowledge also. As the end of education is very sublime, therefore, the means to acquire it should also be very fair and noble, the efforts should be sincere and mothering should be spared to get knowledge. He advises students (especially those in higher education) to divide their days in the following manner, spending from dawn to sunrise in invoking God's blessing and private worship. From sunrise to mid-morning seeking knowledge from their professors, from mid-morning to mid-afternoon in writing notes and making fair copies, from mid-afternoon to sunset in attending learned gathering or in performing rites of invocation, begging forgiveness or glorification of God. The first third of the night should be spent in reading, the second third in prayer and the final third in sleep. In short he stressed on extreme efforts as mentioned in the Holy book

﴿وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾ (8)

*Those who strive for us, we surely guide them to our paths and Allah is with the good*

Finally, he proposes a "code of ethics" (9) where student should:-

a. Ensure that they are spiritually pure before they undertake the quest for knowledge.
b. Divert themselves of their worldly possessions, detach themselves from hearth and home and devote to the search for knowledge and the pursuit of the hereafter.

c. Respect the rights of their teachers and behave in a civilized manner.
d. Beware, especially at the beginning of their studies, of paying too much attention to doctrinal controversies.
e. Master the fundamentals of the praiseworthy sciences (linguistics, tafsir, hadith, fiqh and kalam) and then specialize by studying one or more of those sciences in greater depth.
f. Choose useful subjects in which to specialize, especially those that are not conducive to salvation in the hereafter.
g. Study each subject thoroughly before going on to another bearing in mind the logical sequence and interconnected-ness of various disciplines.
h. Have as their main goal in their search for knowledge the cultivation and perfection of the innermost set in this world and proximity to God in the hereafter rather than the attainment of high office or the acquisition of wealth or fame.

**The impact of Al-Ghazali Philosophy**

Al-Ghazali died at the age of 55, after a life that was not as long as it was productive, wide-ranging and influential. He is rightly considered to be one of the most important and profound Islamic thinkers, who were aptly called, the "renovator of the fifth century A.H. his influence may be witnessed by a number of factors such as:-

a. The profundity, power and comprehensiveness of his thought contained in some fifty different works, which are still studied today.
b. The fact that his view were well suited to his age and milieu and were more a reflection of that age than a response to its needs and requirements they constituted more an element of continuity and conservation that a factor renewal and change.
c. After Al-Ghazali, Islamic society and thought entered into a long period of stagnation and decline producing few great minds. Al-Ghazali thus remained alive and influential.

# CONCLUSION

Al-Ghazali's writings on education constitute the high point of thinking on the subject in the Islamic world. The theory of education he elaborated is the most complete edifice relating to the field. It clearly defies the aims, lays out the path and means whereby the objectives can be achieved. From 12-19$^{th}$ century (A.D), Islamic educational philosophy was heavily influenced by him. Indeed, theoretical and practical educationists, with few exceptions, hardly did anything other than borrow from Al-Ghazali and summarize his ideas and books.

Education is not limited to training the mind and filling it with information but involves all aspects i.e. intellectual, religious, moral and physical of the personality of the learner; it's not enough to impart theoretical learning, that learning must be put into practice. True learning is that which affects behavior and where by the learner makes practical use of his knowledge.

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