

Pedagogy of Tafseer genre in Academy The case study of International Islamic University, Islamabad

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Abstract

The commencement of Islamic education in the Mosque dates back to the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The Prophetic Mosque was the center of seeking knowledge, moral training, and providing solutions to the problems people had suffered then. The Prophet (SAW) as the first teacher of his community exerted himself to train his companions by applying multiple techniques and approaches. In later centuries, his approaches were adopted both in religious institutions and academic institutions for formal religious education. The purpose of this research is to explore and highlight the pedagogical approaches and teaching modules adopted in the university setting, specifying it to the department of “Tafseer and Qur’anic Sciences” International Islamic University, Islamabad. Moreover, the paper intends to shed light on the basic features of the department that provide this department a particular and distinguished status at the international level.

Key Words: Pedagogy, Islamic, International, Tafseer

Introduction

Pedagogy is encompassing terminology that indicates the means and ways the instructor or teacher adopts in the classroom to enhance the quality of the educational process. It is defined as the art, science, or profession of teaching¹. Moreover, it is the study of teaching methods, including the aims of education and how such goals may be achieved². The scholars define it as a key lever for bringing about development and improvement in the academic performance of the learners³.

From the Islamic perspective as well, it is quite evident that the Muslim scholars put stress on its importance in the learning process. They are of the view that communication of the faith depends upon the ways it is taught. According to them, it holds meanings similar to the Islamic concept of Tarbiyya⁴. The Quran illustrates various and multiple pedagogies throughout the prophetic stories useful for human learning and moral training. Moreover, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) contains multiple examples of how the Prophet exerted efforts to train his followers effectively. In doing so, he was able to produce a community that acted according to the knowledge it gained.

Not only Muslims but the non-Muslim scholars as well admit the fact that he was the most effective mentor for all the time. It is physiologically proven that it is not the words only that are significant, but the ways and gestures by which the words are conveyed are also of grave significance⁵. By browsing the

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pages of the Sunnah books, many instances of effective teaching pedagogies such as reflective learning, gradual teaching, questioning, and appreciation can be located.

International Islamic University

Al Quran, the fount head of the Muslim society, has been the hub of the devotion and dedication of the Muslim intellectual tradition. Throughout history, Muslim scholars have been investigating the Quran from all perspectives with multiple approaches. The bustle of knowledge, research, and learning starting from the Prophetic Mosque adopted various forms. Mainly, two intuitions, madrasa and university served the cause of Islam operating diverse methods and approaches.

At present, there are various globally renowned universities and madaris catering to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the students. International Islamic University lies among one of the acknowledged universities of the world that was purely established for the cause of Islam.

The renowned late scholar, A, K, Brohi describes the background in the following words;

“It was at the meeting of the representatives of Islamic countries at Fez, Morroco, that the idea to establish an Islamic university was accepted in principle, to develop higher enlightened leadership for the world of Islam in modern times.”⁶

To mark the start of the 15th century of the Islamic calendar, the foundation of this institution was laid on 1st Muharram, 1401. The step was declared as a momentous decision in the educational history of the world of Islam.⁷ The university declares its vision as follows to produce scholars imbued with Islamic ideology and enable them to cater to the social, moral, political, and intellectual needs of the Ummah.

The faculty of Ussuluddin

The faculty of Ussuluddin is one of the founding faculties of IIUI and it truly embodies both its features i.e. international and Islamic. The faculty consists of highly intellectual and dedicated national and international members. A distinguishing feature of this faculty is its bilingual medium of instruction i.e. Arabic and English. Presently, the Faculty runs specializations in Tafseer and Qur’anic Sciences, Hadith and its Sciences, Aqeedah and Philosophy, Seerah and Islamic History, Comparative Religion, Da’wah, and Islamic Culture on bachelor, master and Ph.D. levels. The entire courses in this faculty are designed to accomplish the objectives of the university. The faculty of Ussuluddin is determined to produce well-versed and competent young scholars having the enthusiasm to lead the world and counter the social, religious, economic challenges.

Tafseer and Quranic Sciences Department

The department of Tafseer and quranic sciences enjoys a distinguished and momentous place not only in IIU but among all the universities of Pakistan. Highly qualified national and international teachers and adherence to the Arabic language are eminent features of this department. Moreover, the department has a large number of students in all programs.

Courses offered in this department cover three branches of quranic studies namely Uloom ul Quran, Tafseer, and Qiraat. The courses offered in this department cover multiple dimensions of Quranic studies. Some of the significant subjects sciences of the Quran are the history of Tafseer, methodologies of exegetes, orientalism, contemporary trends in Tafseer, and principles of Tafseer. In dealing with tafseer, texts from classical tafaseer are taught such as tafseer al Tabari, tafseer al Baidavi, Tafseer al Nasafi, Tafsser al Kabeer etc.

While working for the goals, the department accosts various challenges as well. The most crucial is to present the knowledge from classical Arabic sources to non- Arabic speakers and to adhere the students with their traditional roots in the ever-fluctuating World.

Pedagogy of Tafseer

The pedagogy of Tafseer, Islamic studies, or qur'anic studies in madaris and universities is quite diverse. Nevertheless, the academic institutions as well vary in the contents and pedagogies of qur'anic studies.

The Prophetic Mosque was the first educational institution, and the first teacher was the prophet Muhammad saw himself.

It is He who raised a messenger from among the Gentiles; reciting His revelations to them, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and Wisdom; although before that, they were misguided⁸.

Mainly, the Islamic tradition has taken its pedagogical directives from his sunnah in addition to the Quran. As it is evident that every teaching approach is inspired by a specific worldview, it is how a Muslim teacher is influenced by Islamic philosophy and orientation.

The pedagogical principles articulated in the Quran are directed towards producing sound and responsible personalities with a sense of God-consciousness. Moreover, it targets building strong and confident leaders who can play their roles immaculately. The department of Tafseer and the qur'anic sciences has meticulously designed the curricula meeting the aims and objectives of the faculty. Besides, the faculty members exert themselves to meet the standards of the qur'anic paradigm of pedagogy.

The primary objective of the Tafseer department is to connect the students with their holy book Al -Quran and instill in them a sense of relationship with it. The first and utmost tool in this regard is its recitation according to the prophetic way. For this, a proper course of tajweed ul Quran is designed for

them. Through the means of theoretical knowledge and practice of recitation, the instructor ensures the proper learning of the students. Mainly, the students are supposed to recite collectively following the teacher's recitation in the classroom. Moreover, groups of multiple students are formed for recitation learning on a collective level as well.

Another way to link them to the Quran is rote learning. Looking at the grave emphasis on memorization by the prophet Muhammad SAW, the department has made it mandatory for all the students to memorize certain parts of the Quran. To facilitate the students in this regard, hifz classes are scheduled at Dar e Munira, a house dedicated solely to Quran activities within the premises of the university.

The teachers endeavor to espouse wide-ranging pedagogies in the classrooms beyond the traditional chalk and talk method. In this regard, they mostly take direction from the Quran in which major methods and pedagogies are cited including lecture, questioning, demonstration, and cooperative learning.

One of the paramount and utmost goals of the department is to link the students with classical Islamic texts and enable them to read and comprehend the Arabic texts. It is indeed a great challenge for the faculty to enhance the proficiency of non-Arabic speaking individuals from multiple countries such as China, Turkey, Thailand, the United Kingdom, etc. Yet, they put their extreme efforts in this regard and plan various techniques to meet the task. Teachers mostly employ the text reading method in the classrooms to achieve the said task as the scholars strongly promote the idea of books being indispensable tools for learning.⁹

Hence, along with lecturing, a certain part of the coursebook is read in the class as well. In doing so, the traditional educational method namely 'Ard is implemented in this regard as students read the text under the meticulous observation and explanation of the instructor. Thus, in multiple courses of Tafseer and Uloom ul Quran, students are familiarised with various traditional tafaseer and Uloom ul Quran texts.

Moreover, the instructors put forth their efforts to boost the ability to write in the Arabic language. Assignments and small tasks are designated to the students for the attainment of their proficiency. At the end of BS and MS levels, students are supposed to submit their projects and thesis respectively in the Arabic language.

The pedagogy of teachers varies from time to time looking at the nature of the courses. Mostly, it is teacher-centered where they use the method of lecturing. This is mainly considered a traditional Islamic way of learning where the center of learning is the teacher's personality as he is the knowledge transmitter.¹⁰ In the modern education system as well, it is of paramount importance. By listening to the teacher lecture in the Arabic language, the

student's comprehension skill is augmented gradually. Moreover, focused observation of the teacher's personality equips them to absorb the ethical behaviors too.

While on the other hand, to increase the responsibility and accountability on the part of the students, a student-centered approach is also implemented. They are designated various activities such as reflection, inquiry, and discussion to make them active learners rather being passive. This provides them opportunities for higher-order thinking and boosts their self-esteem. Besides, this method enables them to connect the material to real-life and seek solutions.

Another method of grave worth is cooperative learning. Contemporary pedagogical strategies put great stress on the usage of this technique. Moreover, numerous allusions in the Quran to cooperative learning can be located. The systems of prayer, Hajj, Zakat at the congregational level are some fine examples in this regard. Normally, groups of students are formed for the attainment of specific goals that help them to groom intellectually.

Moreover, as questioning is an important evaluation tool in learning, the teachers endorse it in their classrooms. As it is a widespread practice in the education system, they inculcate in the students the spirit to ask and explore. Moreover, they try to build a healthy and cordial teacher-student relationship to develop an inquisitive environment. Gradually, with this method, the instructors attempt to grow critical thinkers who can see beyond the information and showcase their problem-solving ability.

Memorization is not only an important feature of Islamic educational pedagogy, but the modern educational systems have also acknowledged its significance. It is considered as a fuel that sparks interest and creativity.¹¹ Moreover, it is a key steppingstone in the acquisition of knowledge.¹² Hence, students at this department are invigorated to learn the basic terminologies of Tafseer and Quranic sciences by heart. Besides, they are encouraged to rote specific classical and prophetic texts for higher learning. This is in addition to comprehension that confirms that the students have grasped the knowledge.

Another matter of grave importance is the inculcation of open-mindedness, tolerance, and impartiality in the students. The intense need for these qualities is quite evident in the present scenario. The department of Tafseer ensures objectivity and neutrality in students through the teaching of multiple Tafseer works. The teachers do not bound the students to follow any school of thought or some specific traditional scholars.

In brief, the teachers endeavor to create an atmosphere of love, affection, care, and respect in the classrooms to make the learners more responsive to the knowledge. Moreover, following the character of the Prophet, they attempt to treat every single student individually keeping in mind the diversity of human minds and natures. In addition, the faculty members make significant efforts to

keep the Islamic pedagogical tradition alive while refining those methods in response to cultural changes.

Suggestions

In the end, the author holds that as no human endeavor is perfect there is always room for betterment and progress. Hence, here are some suggestions for the department

- To achieve the tasks succnewly, the faculty can schedule formal orientation programs for the newly inducted faculty. The orientation programs and professional faculty training activities are of grave significance to better equip them with skills while embarking on the intellectual journey.
- An exchange of faculty members to other renowned national and international intuitions for a specific period can be proposed as well to enhance the research and teaching collaboration.
- Looking at the significance of the technology, the faculty can work further to ensure the availability of multimedia and other devices in the classrooms. The use of multimedia and its facilitation in the classrooms can facilitate the instructor to involve the students and learn more effectively.

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