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AN EVALUATION OF THE CURRICULUM OF HIGHER ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to evaluate and review the curriculum of higher Islamic education in Bangladesh in order to discover its merits and demerits. It analyses and assesses the curriculum to examine whether it is comprehensive, integrated and holistic, and whether it is sufficient to meet the needs of the present time. The researcher employs a combination approach of research methods, namely historical, philosophical analysis, and curriculum criticism. The curricula of two selected programmes were examined; *Fazil* (three-year bachelor) of *madāris* affiliated to Islamic University Kushtia Bangladesh and Bachelor of Arts (four-year honours) in Islamic Studies at colleges affiliated to the National University Bangladesh. This research is conducted on the basis of the philosophical foundation and conceptual framework of higher Islamic education curriculum which comprises of four dimensions: faith (*Īmān*), knowledge (*ʿIlm*), action (*ʿAmal)*, ethics and morality *(Akhlāq)*. The framework has been developed based on three curriculum models of Al-Attas, Rosnani and the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The critical analysis discovers some inconsistencies and demerits of the existing curriculum; mainly that the educational philosophy, aims, and objectives are not clearly outlined, and that the contents and pedagogy are not conducive for the overall development of the graduates. The present study proposes a balanced and sound philosophy, comprehensive objectives and aims of higher Islamic education in Bangladesh, conforming to the recommendations of the World Conferences on Muslim Education, the thoughts of renowned Muslim scholars and the national ideology of the country, which is enshrined in the Basic Constitution. The research concludes that due to the changing circumstances at home and abroad, social demands and emerging technologies, a thorough reform of the curriculum is crucial. Finally, the research offers some necessary guidelines on forming holistic, comprehensive and integrated curricula comprising of Revealed Knowledge, and Natural and Social Sciences.

ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم ومراجعة مناهج التعليم العالي الإسلامي السائدة في بنغلاديش. وذلك من أجل اكتشاف إيجابياتها وسلبياتها عن طريق تحليل وتحكيم صلاحيتها كمنهج شامل ومتكامل ومعتدل لإكمال حاجات الوقت الراهن وتقديم الاقتراحات الواقعية والتوصيات الشاملة لتطوير هذه المناهج. قام الباحث باستخدام المنهج التاريخي والفلسفي والنقد المنهجي والتحليلي في إعداد هذا البحث.وتمت هذه الدراسة بتحديد البرنامجين لجامعتين: وهما منهج مرحلة الفاضل (البكالوريوس لمدة ثلاث سنوات) بالمدارس التابعة للجامعة الإسلامية بكوشتيا ومنهج البكالوريوس الشرف في الدراسة الإسلامية لمدة أربع سنوات بالكليات التابعة للجامعة الوطنية، بنغلاديش. وتم إعداد هذه الدراسة على الإطار النظري والأصول الفلسفية لمناهج التعليم العالي الإسلامي المكونة من الأبعاد الأربعة وهي: الإيمان والعلم والعمل والأخلاق. ويبنى هذا الإطار النظري من ثلاثة نماذج لمناهج العطاس، وروسناني، والجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بماليزيا. فكشف التحليل النقدي عن بعض النقائص الموجودة في المناهج الحالية من جهة الأهداف والفلسفة والمضامين وأساليب التعليم والتقويم وعلى وجه التحديد غياب الأهداف والرؤية الواضحة. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك فإن المضامين وطرق التعليم المستخدمة غير مناسبة لتنمية الخريجين. اقترح هذا العمل مناهج التعليم العالي الإسلامي لبنغلاديش بتحديد الفلسفة الفاعلية والأهداف الشاملة الموافقة لتوصيات المؤتمرات العالمية حول التعليم الإسلامي وأفكار العلماء المشهورين والإيديولوجية الوطنية للدولة المذكورة في الدستور. وقد وصى هذا البحث ببعض التنقيحات والإصلاحات الأساسية في المناهج الموجودة وفقا لنتائج البحث. وأشارت نتائج البحث إلى إمكانية تطبيق هذه الأفكار في معاهد التعليم العالي الإسلامي الأخرى. وختمت الدراسة بذكر أهمية إصلاح المناهج نتيجة لتغيير الظروف عبر العالم، ومقتضيات المجتمع، والإبداعات التكنولوجية. وفي النهاية عرض البحث الإرشادات الهامة لتكوين المناهج الشاملة والمتكاملة والمعتدلة على أساس معارف الوحي والعلوم الطبعية والعلوم الاجتماعية.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degree at International Islamic University Malaysia or other institutions.

Mohammad Nayamat Ullah

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To That Beloved Pious Personality

Who Never Feared Anyone Except Allah

Who Encouraged Me To This Endeavour But

Could Not See Its Realisation For He Returned To Allah

To My Marhum Father Kamal Uddin

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TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

Table of the system of transliteration of Arabic words and names used by the International Islamic University Malaysia.

B	=	ب	z	=	ز	f	=	ف
t	=	ت	s	=	س	q	=	ق
th	=	ث	sh	=	ش	k	=	ك
j	=	ج	ṣ	=	ص	l	=	ل
ḥ	=	ح	ḍ	=	ض	m	=	م
kh	=	خ	ṭ	=	ط	n	=	ن
d	=	د	ẓ	=	ظ	h	=	ه
dh	=	ذ	‘	=	ع	w	=	و
r	=	ر	gh	=	غ	y	=	ي

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Education is the overall development of the human personality ranging from intellectual, physical, mental and behavioural to innate, spiritual and moral so that s/he can perform the responsibilities and duties of being servants and vicegerents of the Almighty Allah. Education refers to a life long process of transmission and transformation of the beliefs, values and ideologies of a particular nation from one generation to the next. Human prosperity and progress since the beginning of human creation depends on education. At the outset of human creation, the Creator established this reality by bestowing upon human beings a superior status over all other creations by way of equipping them with knowledge. Global history witnessed that no nation could gain significant ascendancy without commensurate superiority in education and intellectual performance. Likewise at the very beginning of revelation to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Allah sent down the command to read, which forms the foundation of education. Throughout the globe, education has been considered the most vital discipline, while curriculum, the most important sub-discipline of education, has been called the queen of the educational studies.

Needless to say, the soundness of any education system depends upon its curriculum. Accordingly, the curriculum is the pivotal and effective means to reflect the faith, action, culture, civilization, philosophy, worldview, ideology and needs of a nation. The objectives and contents of education are intimately related to the philosophy of the society we live in. The curriculum of an education system is the manifestation of the culture and historical legacy of a country and it largely influences

the younger generation in respect to character building and preparation of sound future leadership.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country and the majority of its population wholeheartedly believes that Islam is a complete and comprehensive way of life. Although they are religious in spirit, they are unable to practise Islam in all spheres of life because of the dominating and influential secular system of education prevailing in the country ever since the British colonial period. Due to several shortcomings, particularly in terms of curriculum design, Islamic education does not effectively serve in respect to both individual and social needs.

After independence in 1971, the people of Bangladesh hoped to establish a country of righteous citizens to give the younger generation a golden future, despite the fact that the secular intelligentsia tended to misrepresent the aspiration of the majority of the people. Their expectation was to form a fair and sound society where everybody would have an equal right to live a happy life. The Constitution (2008, p. 2) mentions,

> "Further pledging that it shall be a fundamental aim of the State to realise through the democratic process a socialist society, free from exploitation a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social will be secured for all citizens".

But unfortunately, corruption, human rights violations and injustice have reached sickening heights. As the local Daily Star reports (March 27, 2013), "Corruption is spreading like cancer in the country's public and private sectors and it will be irresistible if politicians and other actors do not come forward to check it".

With the influence of materialistic philosophy and technological advancement, Azharul Islam & Habibur Rahman (2003) demonstrate that life has become complex and corrupt. Members of the young generation are threatened with secularism, modernity, globalization, and un-Islamic culture and values. Consequently, the country is losing many of the traditional values and manners which are largely based on Islam. In order to address these crises, the society demands an all-round and well-balanced development of its entire student community. However, the authorities have not yet been able to introduce any such system of education which may lead the country and its population towards the right direction. It was solely due to this reason of imbalance as stated above that the products of the *madrasah* system of education are not generally regarded as proper useful citizens. On the other hand, the products of the secular education system are mostly ignorant of their own religious values and moralities (Ibrahimy, 1990).

The overall quality of higher education in Bangladesh, especially higher Islamic education with respect to curriculum is not satisfactory. According to Ashraf (1985), the curriculum always reflects the concept of human being that the society believes in, the ideology and culture that it inherits or has acquired or intends to preserve and the goal that it wants to achieve. It should preserve the values of Islamic culture. Education is a total process encompassing all aspects of one's life and is not merely intended to fit a person for a job or a trade. The aim of education should be to instil in the minds of the youth of the country a sense of idealism, the spirit of nationalism and an awareness of and love for the history, culture and the Islamic heritage of Bangladesh. Islamic education in Bangladesh should also have a broad vision and should reflect the knowledge of the world and the advances that have been made in various fields most vitally affecting human life. Immediate steps for

enhancement and upgrading the quality of higher Islamic education should be taken through curriculum reform.

The Failure of the Traditional Islamic Education System

Ahmad, Professor and Pro-Vice Chancellor of International Islamic University, Chittagong, Bangladesh (2005) observes that "the characteristics of the *Madrasah* Education System are Islamic in nature but it has failed to meet the requirements of the present day" (p. 316). It has been found that the traditional system of Islamic education has a lot of problems. They include a lack of uniformity of syllabi among the two streams of *madrasah* education, namely *ʿĀliya* system and *Qawmī* system, the use of outdated books from the past, outdated subjects, lack of adequate infrastructure, lack of co-ordination of trained people, all of which resulting in the majority of graduates being unable to write and speak fluent Arabic and are largely unemployed (Alam, 2002).

In addition, any sort of science education is neglected in the *Qawmī madrasah* system. One can find the negative effects of these half-baked systems of education. The prevailing Islamic education system does not fulfil the national aspiration as the graduates are not granted sufficient scope to equip themselves with the modern arts and sciences, and thus remain unaware of modern knowledge and techniques. At the same time, *madrasah* graduates do not have in-depth knowledge of Islamic disciplines; they are also not well aware of the philosophical thoughts that are influential all over the world such as socialism, capitalism, secularism, Marxism and Darwinism. No curriculum has yet been developed to familiarize the students with the ideological, political and social impacts caused by these 'isms' over the last century throughout the world (Azharul Islam& Habibur Rahman, 2003).

The Crisis of Modern Secular Education

The decline in morality is a major problem of Bangladeshi society. The society is now fully immersed in corruption, hypocrisy, bribery and other immoral acts. Unethical attitudes and immoral activities among the people have become a big barrier for sound development. In the perspective of Bangladesh, Islamic worldview has always been the driving force for a moral based education system. However, due to the onset of secularism, there has been a decline in Islamic values in the society. Along with a lack of good governance, this has contributed to further deterioration in social values. The annual reports of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) on corruption (Table 1.1) provide explicit evidence as Bangladesh is represented as the most corrupt country of the world. The prevailing modern secular education system more possibly has failed to uphold morality in the society. The graduates of this system, to a great extent, are concerned merely with their individual material gain, but do not acknowledge their own Islamic culture and legacy or spiritual aspects. The system of education has been divided into the so called secular education and Islamic religious education but in fact Bangladeshi people are deprived of true Islamic education (Ibrahimy, 1990; Hasan, 2004).

The Need for an Organized Curriculum

There is no alternative to spreading Islamic moral values by uplifting Islamic education for the eternal peace of mankind. In order to get rid of all sorts of corruption, extremism and internal ethnic conflicts, we are to take shelter under the umbrella of Islamic Ideology. Islamic education should be compulsory for all people because it has a formative effect on the mind, character and physical ability of an individual. Islamic education helps people to judge what is right or wrong, to build up

their character and life. Real education means education with morality and simplicity and it is true that happiness lies in simplicity. This cannot be achieved without a balanced and an organised curriculum for Islamic education. In order to assure the *madrasah* graduates' contribution to the society, Alam (2002) argues that *madrasah* curriculum should be reorganized by including science, engineering and vocational education.

Table 1.1The Growth of Corruption in Bangladesh between 2001 and 2013

Year	Position in Corruption Perception Index (CPI)	Countries Survey Conducted	Remarks
2001	1st		Top most Corrupt Country
2002	1st		Steady
2003	1st		Steady
2004	1st		Steady
2005	1st		Steady
2006	7th		Improve
2007	7th		Improve
2008	10th	180	Improve
2009	9th	180	Improve
2010	12th	178	Steady
2011	13th	183	Improve
2012	13th	176	Decline

Source: (http://www.ti-bangladesh.org/ beta3/index.php/en/ communications/publications Retrieved 10 February 2014)

The Structure of the Education System in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a developing and democratic Muslim majority country in South Asia. It is located at the north-eastern part of the Indian sub-continent (Figure 1.1). It is flanked by India on three sides; west, east and north with a small common border with Myanmar in the south east. In the south its only outlet is provided by the Bay of Bengal. The total area of the country is about 147, 570 sq. km (56,977 sq. miles). It is

one of the most densely populated rural areas in the world with an average population density of 1,400 persons per sq. mile, or 1,237.51 persons per sq. km. The capital city Dhaka was established in 1608 AD during the reign of Mughal emperor Jahangir (1605-1625) by his provincial governor Islam Khan. Dhaka, known as the city of mosques, is situated on the bank of Buriganga. The country is divided administratively into seven divisions: Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, Barisal and Rangpur (Statistical Pocket Book Bangladesh-2013).

Figure 1.1 Map of Bangladesh
Source: (www.bdwebguide.com/bdgov.htm Retrieved on 5 February, 2012)

Like most of the Muslim countries of the world, there exist today two parallel systems of education in Bangladesh; one is traditional Islamic education and the other is western or modern secular education. At present, both systems are operative in Bangladesh. In terms of curriculum however, there are actually four types of