

Ibn Khaldoun's View of Knowledge Maturity

Mohammed Awamreh.

Faculty of Arts, Educational sciences Dept, Al-Zaytounah University

Email: Mohamedalawamreh@yahoo.com

Abstract

Ibn Khaldoun had a distinguished cultural vision, especially in anthropology, sociology and civilization. He also excelled in other fields such as politics and economy. In this paper, I will address his contributions to education and related that to modern educational theories. In specific, I will discuss the main features of education that Ibn Khaldun presented, and the concept of 'cognitive maturity' and how Ibn Khaldoun presented it in his educational thought. I will also present the most well-known modern education theories that converge with Ibn Khaldoun's educational thought.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldoun, cognitive maturity, education theories, constructivist, meaningful learning

1. Introduction

Ibn Khaldoun, undoubtedly, occupies a special position not only in the Arab and Islamic culture, but also in the western culture. This is because he had a distinguished cultural vision, especially in anthropology, sociology and civilization. He was also a genius in other fields such as politics, economy and education, which will be our subject in this paper.

Ibn Khaldoun is the knowledgeable Imam Abdul-Rahman bin Muhammed bin Muhammed. He was named Ibn Khaldoun after one of his grandfathers. He was born in Tunisia in 1332. He grew up in a family that combined knowledge and authority. He learnt the Holy Koran by heart when he was very young. His dad was his first tutor. Afterwards, he obtained knowledge from philosophers and Imams of Koran, Hadith, Language and Literature. He excelled in different fields and thus became very famous especially in rhetorics, education and philosophy although he had not turned 20 years old yet (As-Sayyed 2005:180).

Ibn Khaldoun's ambitions, particularly the political ones, had motivated him to travel a lot. Meanwhile, he assumed the highest positions for more than a king or a ruler. However, he used to leave those rulers once he felt some sort of danger or disaffection. As a result, he moved to Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Levantine, the Arab Peninsula, Andalusia and finally settled in Cairo.

Ibn Khaldoun was distinguished for his scientific research. He was most famous for his book '*Book of lessons, record of beginnings and events in the history of the Arabs and Berbers and their powerful contemporaries*' which he wrote in Tunisia. While staying in Egypt he revised the book and made some other additions. The book is considered an encyclopedia of the history of the Islamic countries in the East, history of the ancient, Christian and European countries until the 14th century. In other words, he wrote the history up to his time. '*The book of lessons...*' was well-known for its introduction, which was the first volume of the seven volumes which made up the whole book, known today as '*The Introduction of Ibn Khaldoun*' (Al-Khalidi 2011:322).

Ibn Khaldoun passed away- may his soul rest in peace- in Egypt in 1406. He was then the Head Judge of Malikiya there. It was the highest position one can obtain at that time (Akkawi 1998:28).

2. Importance of the study

The importance of the study lies in the importance of the topic itself which is one of mostly viewed issues in all branches of science especially education sciences and their modern origins. Moreover, the study is important because it displays the Arab-Islamic contribution to the human culture represented by one of its greatest thinkers: Ibn Khaldoun.

3. Study Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the main features of Education that Ibn Khaldun presented?
- What does 'cognitive maturity' mean? And how was this concept presented in Ibn Khaldoun's Educational thought?
- What are the most well-known modern education theories that converge with Ibn Khaldoun's educational thought?

4. Methodology

The current study is a theoretical survey which takes Ibn Khaldoun's '*Introduction*' as a source of data. I adopt the content analysis approach in order to detect all information about cognitive maturity mentioned in the '*Introduction*'. This is one of the leading problems which human thought faces. To understand his theory and vision, it was necessary to dig for Ibn Khaldoun's thought and philosophy through studying his book especially the '*introduction*'.

5. Educational Approach in Ibn Khaldoun

Ibn Khaldoun's educational approach is best seen in the successful method he recommended for teaching students, in the conditions and good manners that teachers and students should have, and in the ways, circumstances and environment of teaching. He clearly assured that learning is a natural process in civilization since man is distinguished from other creatures by the thought that leads him. Man is also eager to obtain information and experience that he does not have; hence, a learning situation arises.

From Ibn Khaldoun's point of view, learning is based on three pillars: the teacher, the learner and the method of teaching. The achievement of the educational and learning goals is contingent on conditions of the learning setting since learning is generally the knowledge and insight which stem from contemplation that seeks truth and facts.

Accordingly, Ibn Khaldoun's education relies on scientific bases that proceed from the following principles (Froukh 1984):

First principle: Human thought

It is the thought that distinguishes man from other creatures. All sciences and crafts spring from this thought since man keeps thinking about himself, his surroundings, world and the hereafter.

Second Principle: Teaching and learning is human in nature

This indicates that teaching and learning is natural for humans. Thus, there is no knowledge outside the human society. Scholars found that when a human being leaves his tribe and nature, they lose this human property. What enhances this property is that it depends on thought and knowledge which do not exist outside the human society.

Third Principle: The relation of knowledge and science to the physical world

Theorization stems from what is perceived or assumed . Knowledge is , then, a change of the actual world. Science does not suffice with counting inputs but aims at organizing them. It puts these inputs into certain orders and establishes relationships between their components in order to change them into a subject of science.

Fourth Principle: Theoretical and applied competences

Ibn Khaldoun considers education as a craft or industry. This suggests that one should obtain its theoretical and applied competences through training, practicing, studying and conducting research. Given that education is a craft, there should be a teacher who teaches students the competences, bases, knowledge and techniques of this craft.

Thus, Ibn Khaldoun finds out that one must excel in a branch of science. He, therefore, learns well the principles and rules of this field, thinks about its problems, and creates subfields out of it. This is exactly what is called 'cognitive maturity' in modern educational sciences.

6. Cognitive maturity

Ibn Khaldoun states that "Modernization era was really a success since it could increase knowledge and advancement in meeting life's external and physical needs. However, the price was ridiculously expensive as modernization generated a huge legacy of unprecedented universal problems that seriously threaten the future of man and the Earth on which he lives. A gigantic mass of knowledge was produced by the growth of the exponential information. The bigger this mass became, the more we needed to segment and divide sciences. As a result, there appeared some individuals who excessively focused on tiny parts of the direct, current and reduced reality. They knew less and less about the more and more" (Malkawi 2011).

Cognitive maturity is an issue of intellectual methodology because it is related to intellectual activity, research practice and the way of dealing with ideas. In addition, it is connected with the concept of knowledge unity and integration since knowledge unity forms the logical basis for its integration (Kalpakian 2008:369). This is a general trend that Islamic knowledge and sciences follow in order to avoid disunity and poor knowledge (Al-najjar 2011:146)

Thus, cognitive maturity is concerned with acquiring knowledge perfectly according to active learning processes that can be used and controlled within an individual context and a social interactive framework (Qiyun 2009:2; Ray 2001:4), and practicing scientific learning away from rote learning. This all leads to meaningful self-understanding which enables individuals of acquiring mental thinking processes such as comprehension, coherence and cohesion (Zaytoun and Zaytoun 2003:178), (Yang, Chang, Hsu 2008:528).

Moreover, modern theories of teaching and learning see that knowledge and experiences cannot be acquired through passive absorption. Rather they are acquired through focusing on the learner, the internal factors that affect his learning such as apriority, mental capacity and schemes, the pattern of processing and storing information, motivation and thinking patterns. The goal of that is to enable the learner to create new meanings and project the mental-emotional structures on his surroundings in social, temporal and special contexts. Having all of these promotes learners to a good level of cognitive maturity and meaningful learning.

.7The agreement between modern learning theories and Ibn Khaldoun's cognitive maturity

The educators' attention have diverted to cognitive maturity. Since then, the applied vision of the ideas of the Constructivist Theory and meaningful learning have been enhanced in all aspects of education in a way that makes the learner the center of learning. This, in turn, has contributed to the designing of several learning forms and strategies that seek to enable the learner to build knowledge by himself/ herself through social interaction with others.

Thus, we will holistically address two educational theories that have similar visions to those of Ibn Khaldoun's in terms of cognitive maturity. These are:

A. Constructivist Theory"

A careful look at the principles of the Constructivist Theory reveals an insurmountable match with Ibn Khaldoun's educational views. Both assure the importance of the learner's active role in constructing the scientific knowledge rather than the teacher dictating it directly to him. This can be achieved through the learner's actual intellectual participation in this process in a way that guarantees the occurrence of meaningful learning based on apprehension.

As a theory in cognitive learning, Constructivist Theory is, then, based on a set of hypotheses and principles (Garcia et al 2011:150 Kotzee 2010:180, the most important of which are:

1. Knowledge and understanding are built socially; the learner does not start building them individually from his self-activities only, but he builds knowledge by socially talking to others and interacting with them.
2. Learning is an accumulative, mental and active process. Knowledge and understanding are acquired through the learner's mental and physical activities. He/she discusses subjects with others, argues, sets hypotheses, investigates, and comes to scientific knowledge by himself. Thus, it is him/her who is responsible for learning, not the teacher who has become a mentor, director and facilitator of learning.
3. Learning takes place through real tasks. When the learner faces real tasks or problems that are related to his daily life, it helps him/her to make sense of what they have learnt. It also develops their self-confidence for solving these tasks and problems.
4. Knowledge must be built rather than transferred. Learning is a constructive process through which the learner obtains a conceptual framework that helps him/her to give a meaning to the experiences they have had. When they are exposed to new experiences,

they adjust their conceptual framework or create new frameworks that would help them process information and solve problems.

5. Prior knowledge is essential for constructing meaningful learning since prior knowledge is the right basis for meaning. The interaction between new and prior knowledge for the learner is one of the most important components for meaningful learning.

B. Meaningful Learning Theory:

This theory was created by Ausubel, who sees that meaningful learning takes place when the new information that learner acquires with awareness and apprehension are related to the information that is available in his/her knowledge structure. This, in turn, stresses the importance of acquiring knowledge, organizing and storing it in the learner's memory effectively. Ausubel' theory distinguished two types of learning (Ivlie 1998:36-37; Novak 2010:22):

a. Rote Learning:

This is the type of learning which relies on the literal memory of knowledge. It happens when the learner tries to randomly incorporate the new knowledge that he/ she learnt with their knowledge structure without giving themselves the chance to connect this knowledge with the previous knowledge that is present in their knowledge structure. In most cases, this type of learning produces no changes or amendments in the learner's knowledge structure. As a consequence, the knowledge acquired by this way is easily forgotten.

b. Meaningful Learning

This type of learning takes place when the learner consciously connects the new knowledge with the previous knowledge that is available in their knowledge structure. This happens when the learner is mentally prepared for this kind of learning and when the knowledge that they intend to acquire is meaningful. The knowledge should also be logically, not randomly, ordered. This way, they have the opportunity to link the learned knowledge with their knowledge structure in an fundamental way rather than in a coerced one. Accordingly, meaningful learning results in making amendments and/ or changes in the learners' knowledge structure, keeping most of the knowledge they acquired for a long time, and implementing this knowledge in solving the problems they face.

This theory conforms with Ibn Khaldoun's educational theory in which he states:

The learner should first confine himself/herself to studying a certain book until they understand it. They should not mix the book's issues and problems

with issues and problems from other books until they understand the former perfectly. The learner, therefore, attains his/her goals and excels in a field that he/she can use in analyzing other issues and problems. Perhaps the reason behind that is that when the learner attains excellence in a certain science, he becomes ready and equipped to accept the remainder. In addition, he/she obtains a potential to seek more knowledge and go beyond that. Eventually, they master certain aspects of science. By contrast, if they mix things, they become incapable of understanding, their thought wipes out, they become desperate to gain more knowledge and ultimately they abandon learning and science" (Ibn Khaldoun 1988:343).

Ibn Khaldoun also believes that if the teacher is very tough and authoritarian in disciplining his students, this will do them much harm, which in turn will cause them to leave learning or resist it since it no longer belongs to them. He adds, "learners who are educated by tyrant and controlling teachers become lazy, liars and malevolent. They are prone to becoming inhuman and dependent on others. Even worse, they are unwilling to acquire virtues and good morals. This, in fact, what happened to every nation who was in the grip of oppression (Ibn Khaldoun 1988:343).

Moreover, Ibn Khaldoun considers overindulging in science problems and getting deeper and deeper in it as useless science and a waste of time. Commenting on how to illustrate and explain school subjects, Ibn Khaldoun states that "he 'the teacher' should not get in much details and subheadings because that will divert learners' attention. Occupying oneself with that is nonsense and useless. Besides, it is difficult to master that science due to the many fields and details involved in it. Therefore, the overconcentration on these mechanical sciences is time-wasting as well as being useless. In addition, this negatively affects learners since they are more concerned with science itself than with the means of science. And, if they spend their time in getting the means, when will they achieve the purposes?" (Ibn Khaldoun 1988:345).

Ibn Khaldoun also warned that using shortcuts and curtailment will undoubtedly cause miscommunication, and overusing it makes learning defective. For that, he says, "Many of the recent scholars are used to abridge knowledge. They may have summarized the lengthened references so as to make it easier for learners to memorize. However, by doing so, they deprived learners from obtaining the useful experiences and excelling in them. This is definitely some sort of learning corruption and a fault in obtaining it" (Ibn Khaldoun 1988:342).

Ibn Khaldoun insisted that learners must not move from a scientific question to the next before fully understanding the first one. Therefore, teachers must teach up a certain question and make sure that learners have completely comprehended it. This is, in fact, the core of knowledge maturity. Ibn Khaldoun thinks that the learner's thought and view

are directed towards one specific fact. He focuses on it, trains to get things together and puts everything related to that fact in place. Ibn Khaldoun mentions the following reasons for his point of view:

1. Humans are incapable of holding all kinds of sciences, so it becomes a necessity to specialize in one area which, in turn, results in getting a mature experience.
2. Humans are able to learn and they are willing and motivated for it.
3. Mastering and developing arts and representing the motivation of achieving them.

On this issue, Ibn Khaldoun pinpoints:

"I believe that teaching learners different kinds of science is useful if given gradually. The teacher starts by teaching the learner the most fundamental questions from all arts. He does his best to convey the essence of these issues. He should take into consideration the learners' mental abilities and their willingness to accept what they are taught. The teacher should go over all arts until he completes them all. The learner can, then, attain a certain level in that science, but it is partial and weak. This level makes him/her ready to understand the different issues of art. Accordingly, he returns to art again and thus raises himself to the second level where he receives not only main ideas, but also more explanation and details. As a result, he/she reaches to the extreme end of that art. Then, they excel and master that art. As a result, they start delving in more complicated and vague issues and find solutions and clues to work them out. They reach the highest levels in that art. This is the right and useful side of learning. It happens, as I found out, in three recurrences. For some, it may happen in less than that depending on one's mental abilities" (Ibn Khaldoun 1988:343).

Ibn Khaldoun digresses to develop an idea, which he calls 'knowledge maturity', and explains it clearly saying, "one of the beautiful schools and methods that need to be used in learning is that a learner should not be taught two fields at the same time, since rarely can he/she win any because their minds would be divided and used in one field to understand the other. As a result, the two arts close up and become hard to learn. Thus, the learner gains nothing but disappointment. By contrast, if the mind is occupied by learning only one field, the learner is likely to manage it (Ibn Khaldoun 343).

In addition, the teacher should not force the learner to learn anything unless he/she is capable of learning. The teacher should keep into account the learner's abilities and readiness to learn the material. He should also avoid complications. He also needs to present the scientific material gradually since gradual progression is one of the basic principles for learning success that ends up in meaningful learning.

The teacher should always start with what is obvious before the vague, with the simple before the complicated, with the part before the whole, with practice before theory, with what is tangible and physical before the abstract. He should also explain things with details without leaving any vague or closed questions unexplained. This is, from Ibn Khaldoun's point of view, the true and useful learning. It cannot be fruitful without repetition, follow-up, continuation in learning and avoidance of mixing arts.

Al-Diqs (2001) and Ulaimat (2009) assume that Ibn Khaldoun's vision about learning processes provide the learner with apprehension and excellence in their scientific field and practical experience. This will lead to a high degree of innovation and ingenuity in their field.

Bear in mind that according to Ibn Khaldoun teaching is not equivalent to memorization and learning is not indoctrination. Rather, it is a mix of both of them: utilizing mental abilities and employing time effectively in order to master this science or that. On the other hand, when any of these two matters, or both of them, are absent, individuals and groups will be deprived from winning the time factor in the struggle or competition to gain knowledge (Khalil 2007:62). Mental abilities alone cannot promote learning or programs. However, combining knowledge content, repeated practice, and deep thinking about a certain topic all guarantee success.

8. Conclusion

As a conclusion, we need some education that derives its framework from the Islamic heritage but also based on our status quo. This does not mean that I belittle the value of modern education theories or disparage the importance of them in studying our society. But, education, though universal, has its peculiarities that stem from the nation's philosophy, religion, history and language.

In short, Ibn Khaldoun is really an encyclopedia who addressed various fields of knowledge. His educational views are not less important than what modern education fundamentals have adopted. On the contrary, it can be safely said that he had pioneered many theories especially those that are related to methods of teaching and the principles of educational psychology. He had alerted teachers to follow a gradual and repetitive way when presenting scientific material and to utilize suspense and excitement effectively. However, they need to take into consideration individual differences when teaching any field of science.

His *'Introduction'* did not only have a credit for sociology, politics and economics, it also has a credit for establishing and developing the fundamentals of Islamic education thought, and education thought in general.

It should also be noted that Muslim scholars, like Ibn Khaldoun, were pioneers in establishing the fundamentals of education, psychology and modern teaching methods. This, in turn, indicates the greatness, originality and seriousness of Islamic education thought. Some of the issues that Muslim scholars have set the fundamentals for are: compulsory education, the teacher's personal and knowledge competence, the prohibition of concealment of science, respecting the learner's feelings, the sequence, integrity and continuity of expertise, graduation in the moral and knowledge growth, considering the developmental level of the learner as well as individual differences, mastering teaching, and knowledge maturity. These all indicate that Ibn Khaldoun's originality of thought and creativity in formulating a genuine educational methodology greatly contributed to human knowledge in general.

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