


## Article

# Qur'anic Educational Philosophy: Foundational Principles of Education in Islam's Holiest Text

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**Abstract:** This study enumerates the principles of education explicitly taught in the text of the Qur'an. As Islam's only undisputed source of infallible divine direction, the educational principles contained therein constitute a divinely-sanctioned pedagogy. In recent years, much has been said in academic circles about the dangers of essentializing Islam. If academia is to reframe its questions about Islamic educational philosophy to account for its many interpretations, however, a greater understanding of the common text being interpreted, namely, the Qur'an, is essential. Understanding Islamic education in the context of its most central text is lacking, though, as few studies have provided a thorough textual analysis of educational philosophy within the Qur'an itself. To this end, we undertook a systematic linguistic analysis of the Qur'an in its entirety in both the original Arabic and various English translations. From these analyses, we found three main themes, including: first, independent, inferential reasoning; second, orthopractic teleology; and third, memorization and the spoken word. The unique contribution of this article is to provide a strong foundation of strictly Qur'anic educational philosophy upon which further hermeneutical research can investigate how that philosophy has been interpreted and practiced by Islam's various denominations throughout its rich history.



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## 1. Introduction

"Knowledge (*ilm*)," wrote Hilgendorf, "plays a central role in the Muslim's attitude toward life, work and being (Hilgendorf 2003, p. 64)". Such knowledge, together with the teaching and learning by which it is attained, is "repeatedly emphasized in the Qur'an with frequent injunctions (Sabki and Glenn 2013, p. 344)," including, "God will exalt those of you who believe and those who have knowledge to high degrees (Qur'an 58:11),"<sup>1</sup> "O my Lord! Increase me in knowledge (Q 20:114)" and "As God has taught him, so let him write (Q 2:282)". Further Qur'anic passages like these include appeals to pursue knowledge (Q 39:9), the emphasis of knowledge over blind acceptance of tradition (Q 2:170; Q 17:36; Q 6:148) and, perhaps most importantly, that all such knowledge comes from God (Q 35:28). Indeed, "because God is the source of knowledge," wrote Husain and Ashraf, the very pursuit of that knowledge itself becomes in Islam a means of "drawing near to God." (Husain and Syed Ali 1979, p. 11). Even from an historical perspective, Islamic scholars like Nasr maintain that Islam's historic contributions across so many disciplines—including geometry, medicine, chemistry, and philosophy—are primarily owed to its noteworthy emphasis on education (Nasr 1989).

However important such knowledge and its attainment may be to Islam, however, "Without God," wrote Hilgendorf, "there is no true knowledge (Hilgendorf 2003, p. 64)". In order to approach God as "the ultimate source of knowledge," one must first have

<sup>1</sup> All references to passages of the Qur'an from this point will be formatted as "Q" followed by the chapter and verse (e.g., Q 10:1).

faith in God as that source, as any “knowledge divorced from faith is not only partial knowledge . . . [but] . . . a kind of new ignorance (Husain and Syed Ali 1979, p. 38)”. So crucial is this connection between knowledge and the divine in Islam that “the intellect in isolation is believed to have no capacity to understand truth without divine guidance (Al-Attas 1979)”. As Al-Ghazali wrote in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, it is “impossible for the rational faculties to attain to certainty without the help of revealed knowledge and spiritual understanding (Halstead 2004, p. 518)”.

This help for humanity’s otherwise ill-fated efforts to attain knowledge is the Qur’an, Islam’s “primary source of religious learning (Cornell 2005, p. 1),” itself “knowledge par excellence (Al-Attas 1979)”. Seen in this light, Islamic education is “based upon the acknowledgment of the Qur’an as the core, pivot and gateway of learning . . . the spine of all discipline (Husain and Syed Ali 1979, p. 120)” and “the major ‘power’ or force to legitimize, produce, and operationalize truth (Talbani 1996, p. 67; Nasr 1981, p. 49)”. As such, any learning conducted outside the realm of the Qur’an is, in this way, considered, “at best superfluous . . . and at worst dangerous (Halstead 2004, p. 518; see also Leaman 1996, p. 311)”. In short, the Qur’an “contained everything in the way of knowledge needed to ensure salvation, plus the essentials in the fields of belief and rules of behavior (Jolivet 1981, p. 40)”.

It seems clear, then, that education is vital to Islam and that whatever knowledge gained through such education must be attained, transmitted, and maintained in accordance with the principles set forth in the text of the Qur’an. Yet, apart from a few noteworthy exceptions (see, for instance, Tibawi 1957; Al-Attas 1980; Azher 2001), “the long-standing tradition of respect for education within Islam has never been matched by a clear and thorough-going enunciation of the principles on which such education is based (Halstead 2004, p. 519)”. Wan Daud describes much of the scholarship surrounding an Islamic approach to education as being based on “weak theoretical foundations, simplistic interpretation, and intemperate application, which do not do justice to its true ideals and heritage (Wan Daud 1998, p. 24)”.

Recognizing the rich history of educational thought in Islam, this article seeks to address Halstead and Wan Daud’s concerns by uncovering the educational principles explicitly and uniquely mentioned in the text of the Qur’an itself. As Islam’s holiest text and only undisputed source of infallible divine direction, for Muslims, the educational principles contained therein constitute a divinely-sanctioned pedagogy. Far from an effort to inappropriately essentialize Islam, we seek to uncover a bedrock foundation upon which a clearer understanding of Islamic educational thought and practice have been interpreted across various cultures, geographies, and historical periods. In short, we ask the following question: Does the Qur’an explicitly advocate or prescribe specific educational principles and, if so, what are they?

## 2. Literature

This review of literature on educational thought in Islam is comprised of four parts. The first of these outlines what the Qur’anic text itself says about the importance of education generally in order to emphasize the Qur’an’s thorough treatment of education as a recurring theme within its pages. The second focuses on Hadith and classical Islamic writings about education. While this particular body of sources has significant religious bearing in Islam, none of them possess the same degree of superlative sanctity as the text of the Qur’an. As this article focuses specifically and uniquely on the text of the Qur’an, these sources do not play a significant role in our methodology. Yet, such writings are mentioned here to illustrate the prevalence of serious scholarship on education within religious Islamic sources, especially as such material appears at the heart of some of its foundational documents. The third and final section highlights more contemporary academic writings on the role of education in Islamic thought. Although as non-canonical writings this last grouping of literature has little religious significance within a corpus of Islamic jurisprudence, the preponderance of literature it represents serves to further

establish the central importance of education within Islamic thought today. The final section examines several articles that have analyzed educational principles found in Qur'anic texts. As such, it illustrates that, though several noteworthy efforts have been made to outline an Islamic philosophy of education, none have conducted a systematic textual-linguistic analysis of the Qur'an to find the educational principles exclusively within its pages, as this article does.

### 2.1. Education in the Qur'an

Knowledge, teaching and learning are "repeatedly emphasized in the Qur'an (Sabki and Glenn 2013, p. 344)". Günther (Günther 2006a, pp. 200–4) enumerates a comprehensive list of teaching as it occurs in the Qur'anic text. This list comprises various personages acting in the role of both teacher and learner, including God teaching prophets (Q 2:31; Q 2:251; Q 21:80; Q 27:16; Q 12:68; Q 12: 6, 21, 36–37, 101; Q 18:65, 66; Q 5:110; Q 3:48–49; Q 4:113; Q 53:5; Q 2:97; Q 36:69), God teaching humanity in general (Q 96:4–5; Q 2:282; Q 55:2, 4; Q 43:52; Q 2:239; Q 6:91; Q 2:151, 239; Q 4:113; Q 2:282; Q 96:4; Q 5:4), God teaching angels (Q 2:32), prophets teaching (Q 2:129; Q 2:151; Q 62:2; Q 20:71; Q 26:49), humans teaching (Q 49:16; Q 3:79; Q 5:4; Q 16:103; Q 44:14), as well as angels and devils teaching (Q 2:102). The noteworthy quantity of such passages in which teaching plays a central role establishes the significance of education as a theme within the text of the Qur'an.

Günther (Günther 2006a, p. 203) further outlined the Qur'anic verses which explicitly mention specific pedagogical principles. However, while these principles are certainly related to pedagogic practice, most amount to either recommended dispositions for teachers and students (e.g., patience (Q 17:11; Q 18:60–82; Q75:16), attentiveness (Q:7:204), and courtesy (Q 16:125; Q 29:46)) or techniques so ubiquitous among educators generally as not to offer significant insight regarding a uniquely Qur'anic pedagogy (e.g., reading (Q 4:82), repetition (Q: 38:29), thinking (Q: 87:6), and using evidence (Q:5:32; Q 11:89)). Again, the contribution of the present article to this already thorough analysis is to uncover a Qur'anic pedagogy both unique to the text itself as well as capable of standing independent of extra-Qur'anic sources among Islam's impressive corpus of writings on education.

But the Qur'an does more than simply include education among its myriad themes. It also explicitly speaks of its value to those who engage with it. It records God's promise to exalt those who have knowledge (Q 58:11) and exhorts humanity to not only pursue knowledge (Q 39:9) but continually build upon the lessons given them from God (Q 2:282). It further emphasizes the combining of knowledge with faith as preferable to blind obedience (Q 2:170; 17:36; 6:148) and records humanity's cries that God give them such knowledge (Q 20:114). It even specifically describes God as the source of all knowledge (Q 35:28). By virtue of its connection to God as its source as well as the frequency of its appearance in the text of Islam's holiest book, it can be inferred that the pursuit and propagation of knowledge through teaching and learning are of the upmost sanctity in the Qur'an and so then to Islam generally.

### 2.2. Education in Hadith and Classical Islamic Writings

The corpus of Hadith traditions, or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, further demonstrate the fundamental importance of education to Islamic thinking. In the Hadith collection of al-Bukhari, the Prophet is reported to have said that, "seeking for knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman". The Hadith collections of Tirmidhi and Darimi record that "he who goes forth in search of knowledge is in the way of Allah until he returns". Other Hadith of less scholarly certainty cited by Bahonar tell of the Prophet enjoining his followers to seek knowledge both "from and cradle to the grave" and "even as far as China (Bahonar 2004)". Halstead (Halstead 2004, p. 521) noted three implications from these noteworthy Hadith: first, that learning is a lifelong matter; second, that knowledge can be pursued outside the Islamic world; and third, the obligation to learn applies equally to both men and women. It is significant to the place of education in

Islamic thought that several prominent threads within the Hadith tradition emphasize the ubiquity and importance of education for every Muslim.

Prominent authors of classical Islamic literature describe the importance of education in remarkable detail across a variety of disciplines. This “substantial amount” (Halstead 2004, p. 521) of literature includes detailed discussions on moral education (e.g., Nasir al-Din’s *Tusi Akhlag-i-Naseri* and Ibn Maskuya’s *Taharat al-A’arag*), educational theory (e.g., Al-Ghazali’s *Fatihah al-Ulum*), curriculum, and teaching skills (e.g., Ibn Khaldun’s *al-Muqaddimah*). Other seminal works on education within classical Islamic literature include Ibn Sahnun’s *Rules of Conduct for Teachers* (*adab al-mu-allimin*), Al-Jahiz’ *The Book of Teachers* (*Kitab al-mu-allimin*), Abu Nasr al-Farabi’s *The Demonstration* (*al-Burhan*), Ibn Sina’s *The Book of Salvation* (*Kitab al-Najat*), and perhaps most notable of all, Al-Ghazali’s *The Revival of the Sciences of Religion* (*Ihya ulum al-din*).

Overall, these authors tend to make more specific recommendations for how to approach education than a cursory reading of the Qur’an might provide. Al-Ghazzali, for example, divided knowledge into ‘revealed’ (*wahy*) and ‘acquired’ (*iktisabi*) knowledge, further dividing acquired knowledge into several narrowing levels of distinction (Talbani 1996, p. 69), some of which were sanctified by God’s approval, while others were not. Other statements mention the telos of education and knowledge in general. Ibn Khaldun, for instance, in scorning the man “who knows about tailoring but does not know tailoring” (Khaldun 1967, p. 354 ff.), “emphasizes the importance of the practical application of knowledge. In a similar vein, Al-Ghazali said, “Be sure that knowledge alone is no support . . . If a man reads a hundred thousand scientific subjects and learns them but does not act upon them, his knowledge is of no use to him, for its benefit lies only in being used (quoted in Al-Taftazani 1986, p. 70)”.

The importance of the practical applicability of knowledge is further substantiated by Hujwari who wrote that “knowledge is obligatory only in so far as is requisite for acting righteously. God condemns those who learn useless knowledge (Von Grunebaum 1955, p. 114)”. In such passages as these, classical Islamic thinkers enumerated a myriad of rules and suggestions for how to go about the business of teaching and learning, many times doing so without ever explicitly referring to Qur’anic verses to justify their declarations. Furthermore, “the high esteem that knowledge and education are granted in Islam,” wrote Günther, “is no less evident in countless proverbs, aphorisms, and wisdom sayings, in addition to poetry and prose texts of the Middle Eastern literatures (Günther 2006a, p. 368)”.

However thorough the authors of such literature may have been in their research on education, puzzlingly, they did not present an Islamic pedagogy uniquely based upon the Qur’an, a text they all acknowledged as Islam’s most sacred and immutable scripture. As Islam’s pedagogies continued to expand, its scholars began to cultivate myriad traditional disciplines of Qur’anic study whose methods developed peripherally from the explicit pedagogical prescriptions imbedded in the Qur’anic text itself (Gilliot 2006, pp. 318–39). While we acknowledge and celebrate the historic contributions of classical Islamic thinking on the Islamic educative tradition generally, in an effort to find a core set of pedagogic principles based uniquely on its holiest and most fundamental source, the Qur’an, we do not analyze those contributions in our present method.

### 2.3. Education in Contemporary Islamic Studies

Contemporary scholarship in Islamic studies continues to reinforce education’s central place in Islamic thought. Although Halstead (Halstead 2004, p. 521) listed F. Rahman, S.H. Nasr, S.N. Al-Attas, S.A. Ashraf, Zaki Badawi and I.R. Al-Faruqi as the great contemporary thinkers on Islamic education today, there are many more who contribute to its rich literatures. Nasr laid a significant foundation for a contemporary conceptualization of Islamic education when he articulated the inseparability of the sacred from any aspect of life (Nasr 1993). Bringing this idea to the realm of education and knowledge, Sabki and Hardaker wrote that, “From an Islamic view of *tawhid* (divine unity), knowledge is holistic and there is no categorization of knowledge into religious and secular spheres



(Sabki and Glenn 2013, p. 345)". Instead, "the sacred in the context of Islamic pedagogy development is rooted in what is viewed as 'eternal truths' (Sabki and Glenn 2013, p. 343)". Viewing knowledge as a unity of sanctity rather than as a dualistic division between the sacred and the secular, an Islamic pursuit of knowledge is not so much a matter of sorting facts in search of the sacred as it is as way "to be transformed by the very process of knowing (S.H. Nasr as quoted in Eaton 1982, p. 141)" itself. In this sense, contemporary Islamic educational thought focuses on the transformation that can come to those who treat all knowledge as sacred in its acquisition, transmission, and preservation.

Hussain and Ashraf more specifically define Islamic education as one "which trains the sensibility of pupils in such a manner that in their . . . approach to all kinds of knowledge they are governed by the deeply felt ethical values of Islam . . . Their attitude derives from a deep faith in God and a wholehearted acceptance of a God-given moral code (Husain and Syed Ali 1979, p. 1)". This further solidifies the Islamic idea that all knowledge not only comes from God but relies upon God in order to be fully comprehended and applied correctly. With this underpinning, Halstead offered three core insights about the nature of Islamic education derived from modern Islamic scholarship: first, that "all knowledge has religious significance;" second, "that the cultivation of faith is an essential part of education;" and finally, that a teacher's "beliefs, character and moral integrity are as important as their academic expertise (Halstead 2004, pp. 524–25)". In short, teaching and learning in Islam are considered of the upmost sanctity and as such are central to an Islamic worldview and daily pattern of living.

Beyond the theological thread connecting knowledge, education, and the sacred in Islam, scholarship in Islamic studies also outlines key dimensions of an Islamic pedagogy. Combining classical Islamic writings with more contemporary academic literature, these include Nasr's focus on the "enduring truths" of education (Nasr 1989), Al-Attas' depiction of knowledge as holistic (Al-Attas 1980), Boyle's view of that holistic knowledge acting as a moral compass (Boyle 2006), and Al-Haddad's view of education's purpose as the "purification of the heart (Al-Haddad 2005)". As for teaching and learning methods, Al-Haddad (Al-Haddad 2005) mentions dhikr and the perpetual act of remembrance, Smith (Smith [1976] 1992) focuses on the relationship between memorization and spirituality, Boyle (Boyle 2006) and Levy-Provencal (Levy-Provencal 1922) on memorization and embodied knowledge, Schoeler (Schoeler 2006) Ibn Qutaybah (Qutaybah 1908) on orality, Sabki and Hardaker (Sabki and Glenn 2013) on learning while sitting in a circle and Makdisi (Makdisi 1981) on supporting one's peers in their learning.

Other Islamic educationalists have highlighted the role of Arabic language and culture to Islamic education (Denny 1989) as well as emphasizing the Qur'an itself as an "aide-memoire" for those who teach it (Sezgin 1956; Ong 2002).<sup>2</sup> Noteworthy scholars of Islamic studies have done significant work in describing the Islamization of knowledge including Rahman (Rahman 1998), Choudhury (Choudhury 1993), Mohamed (Mohamed 1993a, 1993b), Shafiq (Shafiq 1995), Bugaje (Bugaje 1996), Maiwada (Maiwada 1997) and Ali (Ali 1999) (for a complete list, see Halstead 2004, p. 522)). While it is mentioned here because of its importance to Islamic studies generally, as it focuses more on Islamic epistemology than Islamic methods of teaching and learning in the Qur'an itself, it does not directly inform the present study.

#### 2.4. Contemporary Academic Literature of a Specifically Qur'anic Pedagogy

Several noteworthy articles have outlined dimensions of a Qur'anic philosophy of education. Halstead (Halstead 2004, p. 522), for instance, conducts a thorough review of extra-Qur'anic literature of Islamic education, but only adds to these several non-systematic linguistic analyses of educational vocabulary from the Qur'an. Because of their unsystematic treatment, the conclusions which they support are, by derivation, inconclusive. Similar sampling, non-systematic linguistic analyses can be found in the entries on "Teaching" and "Teaching and Preaching" in The Encyclopedia of the Qur'an.

<sup>2</sup> For a more exhaustive outline of contemporary thought on Islamic education, see the table in (Sabki and Glenn 2013, p. 352).

Cornell also catalogues the number of times certain vocabulary are used in the Qur'anic text (e.g., that *dhakara* (to remember) appears 280 times (Cornell 2005, p. 6)) but does so without presenting any systematic methodology by which he does so for all terms related to education in the text. To avoid this kind of limited inclusion of only a scattered selection of educational terms from the Qur'anic text, we include a detailed description of the methodology whereby we combed through the entire text in search of a systematically inclusive list of related educational vocabulary within its pages.

Houstonen's study of Qur'anic learning at a madrasa in southern Morocco arrives at four principles used in that setting (Houtsonen 1994, p. 491). However, his conclusions regarding a Qur'anic approach to learning are the result of ethnographic immersion in that particular learning environment, not from an exhaustive linguistic analysis of the text of the Qur'an itself. Sabki and Hardaker (Sabki and Glenn 2013, p. 343) describe specific principles of Islamic pedagogy in their study of madrasa education but, like Houstonen, focus more on educational practices within a contemporary madrasa rather than those found within the primary source texts of the Qur'an.

Cornell's 2005 article *Teaching and Learning in the Qur'an* outlined the Qur'an as a pedagogy in and of itself—"a sort of 'teacher's guide' to divine pedagogy (Cornell 2005, p. 2)". In conducting his analysis, however, Cornell uses inferential logic to arrive at pedagogic principles which, though connected to primary source passages in the Qur'an, are often only peripherally so. For instance, to justify the inference that the Qur'an advocates a pedagogy of "learning by seeing" (Cornell 2005, p. 3), Cornell cites Qur'an 6:101–106, whose verses primarily describe attributes of God and that "vision does not comprehend" Him. Any connections specifically tying these verses to a pedagogy of learning by seeing are missing from the text itself and instead, again, rely largely on a combination of inference and supplementary passages from Islamic philosophy that lay outside the Qur'anic text itself. The purpose of this article is to avoid such extra-Qur'anic textual influences in order to arrive at a core pedagogy found by exclusive analysis of the Qur'anic text alone which, importantly, is the very method of textual analysis advocated in the Qur'an itself (Halstead 2004, p. 518; Leaman 1996, p. 311).

Furthermore, in his article "Knowledge and Learning" for the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, Walker (Walker 2006, pp. 100–4) argues that, by combining the Qur'an's declarations that God's knowledge is above that of humanity (Q 12:76) and that knowledge comes from the fear of God, he makes the assertion that "knowledge does not depend on study and learning (Walker 2006, p. 102)". The myriad references both within the Qur'an as well as in classical Islamic literature (see Günther 2006b) which explicitly exhort humanity to both study and learn, however, seem at odds with this pronouncement. The findings of this article also suggest that the Qur'an not only admonished humanity to study and learn in order to attain knowledge in conjunction with God's divine help, but that God through the text of the Qur'an thought this injunction so important as to include instructions on how to teach and learn in sacred ways prescribed and sanctified by their connection to Him.

Perhaps the most thorough treatment of the educational principles of the Qur'an is Sahin's seminal book *New Directions in Islamic Education* (Sahin 2013). Most especially in chapter 7, Sahin specifically describes what he calls, "an urgent need to rethink the theory and practice of contemporary Islamic education (Sahin 2013, p. 179)". This need, he argues, must specifically address those principles at the heart of Islam's sacred texts, lest studies in Islamic education run the risk of becoming little more than an ever-broadening exercise in "ideological reification (Sahin 2013, p. 178)". In describing "the overarching educational and pedagogic character of the Qur'an (Sahin 2013, p. 181)," Sahin emphasizes the Qur'an's message to what he calls its "first audience," that is, those who lived contemporary to the time of its reception (Sahin 2013, p. 181)". In doing so, he focuses on the Qur'an's invitations for "self-transformation" through reflection on its principles (Sahin 2013, p. 186). However articulate his explication of the educational principles in the Qur'anic text, however, it does not include an exhaustive linguistic analysis of educational terms as the present article does. Furthermore, Sahin also calls upon extra-Qur'anic sources to support his assertions

about the educational principles contained within its pages. This is appropriate to his purpose, however, which was to illustrate *tarbiyah* as “the critical-dialogical process of becoming” for a new generation of Islamic youth, whom he addresses at the beginning of his chapter on Qur’anic educational philosophy (Sahin 2013, p. 167). This article makes a different contribution to literature on Islamic education by focusing on those principles uniquely contained within the Qur’an without the peripheral support of extra-Qur’anic texts. This, again, is not to say that such texts are unimportant. Rather, this article represents a preliminary and preparatory step for future research that incorporates such texts by laying an initial bedrock foundation of Islamic educational thought as contained in its holiest and most fundamental text.

### 3. Methods

In our search for the foundational principles of Islamic education, three things became clear: first, much of the scholarship on the subject was localized and time-specific; second, generalized statements about Islamic education often failed to account for the many interpretations of Islam’s various denominations; and third, an understanding of Islamic education that allows for these various interpretations would be well-suited to hermeneutical analysis of the issue within the only universally agreed-upon source of Islamic knowledge, namely, the Qur’an itself.

Yet, there were very few studies about Islamic education which seemed to draw upon the Qur’an for foundational knowledge on the subject. Scholars that did mention passages from the Qur’an seemed to be arriving at them by way of secondary and even tertiary sources rather than by analyzing the text itself. Some larger volumes give more thorough treatment to the text, but even these lacked a holistic and systematic study of the Qur’an. Very few works have discussed the topic in a way that is concise and accessible to any but the most informed scholars of Islam. For these reasons, we decided to undertake a systematic, hermeneutic textual analysis of the Qur’an in order to outline the foundational principles of education contained therein.

Our purpose in limiting the scope of this study to the Qur’an alone is meant neither to bypass nor label as unimportant such seminal sources of Islamic knowledge as the Hadith or foundational commentaries. Further, our exclusion of extra-Qur’anic source in our analysis does not represent an attempt to suggest a solution to what some have called a contemporary crisis in Islamic education and pedagogy (see Sahin 2013, p. 179). Instead, our specific aim in limiting the present analysis to the text of the Qur’an is to illustrate core educational principles at the heart of Islam’s most sacred text. Since even the most *sahih* (Arabic for “correct” or “having a likely accurate chain of transmission”) hadith and the most widely read commentaries are disputed at least to some degree across Islam’s various denominations and communities of intellectual inquiry, we thought it prudent to provide an analysis of educational principles within the Qur’an itself as a fundamental starting point for educationalists to begin to build an understanding of Islam’s rich educational heritage and traditions. It is our hope that this bedrock analysis of educational principles at the heart of Islam’s sacred texts will serve the scholarly community not as an end unto itself, but as a foundational springboard upon which future research in Islamic education might be built, especially research which incorporates the centrally important texts of hadith and classical Islamic literatures into the basic, foundational principles we have outlined here. Far from considering or treating these sources unimportant, laying a foundation in this way for a more thorough study of said sources only further highlights our commitment to their inclusion and thoughtful consideration in studies of Islamic principles of education.

To this end, we collected and analyzed salient Qur’anic passages related to education from the primary text in its original Arabic. We accomplished this by systematically searching keywords related to education in an Arabic corpus of the Qur’an using “The Arabic-English Lexicon” to better understand these words and their uses and to identify more. After compiling these passages into tables according to their linguistic roots, we performed both quantitative and qualitative analyses of what became several noteworthy

clusters of educational vocabulary. In order to grasp the broader context of these passages and to find additional ones, we also read a scholarly English translation of the Qur'an from start to finish, consulting various other translations and comparing the passages we collected with the original Arabic as well as our collection of passages from the keyword tables.

### 3.1. Keyword Search

The first task was to identify a set of passages in the Qur'an that specifically describe methods of teaching and learning. We began by searching the trilateral roots of common words related to methods of teaching and learning on a Qur'an corpus database. This database displays each appearance of a particular root as it appears in the Qur'an in any form or part of speech. We then used this information to create an easily-referenced table to show each appearance of the root word along with its corresponding passage (together with relevant context) in relation to methods of teaching and learning.

To create a more comprehensive list of passages and stories, we sought out more obscure words related to teaching and learning methods. We did this by cross-referencing various English and Arabic thesauri and lexicons. We then searched the roots of these words in the aforementioned online Qur'anic corpus and included them in our reference tables, where applicable. In this way, we identified a large sample of passages from the Qur'an relating to methods of teaching and learning.

We excluded variant verb forms of common trilateral roots that were not related to teaching and learning methods, or that were only loosely or rarely related. For instance, the root علم (pronounced 'alama in English) is often translated in verb form five as "to learn", or "to teach" in form two, and "to know" in form one. The latter form was excluded from our study because the root "to know" along with its various parts of speech do not necessarily shed light on how one learns or teaches, but rather focuses on the existence of one's established knowledge. As such, most passages containing this word were only peripherally related to the purpose of our study and so not included in our tables.

We then gathered these passages into separate tables according to root word, verb form and part of speech and included columns for the verse number (in both Arabic and English) with the keyword highlighted in red. These tables gave us valuable and easily referenced data about methods of teaching and learning set forth in the Qur'an. We used them to determine which words and themes were most commonly referred to in the Qur'an. It was at this stage that we arrived at three major themes regarding educational practice from a Qur'anic perspective. These include invited, independent, inferential reasoning (IIIR), orthopractic teleology and the importance of memorizing and reciting scripture. We decided to focus on those themes for this particular study, and thus we had a lens through which to read the Qur'an itself and gain further understanding of the passages we had, as well as new passages and stories we had not yet considered.

### 3.2. Systematic Reading and Analysis

Our second method of data collection was to read the Qur'an itself in its entirety. As we collected data and analyzed relevant passages in our reading, we gathered additional context about the passages in our tables and added new passages and stories related to methods of teaching and learning. We added these passages and stories to additional tables for each of the three main themes mentioned above then performed additional textual analyses of those additional passages. Reading the Qur'an proved particularly useful in finding stories that explicitly exemplified or encouraged specific practices of education (i.e., the story of Moses and the knowledgeable servant in Surra 18 or David and the litigants), but that did not necessarily use keywords that we had searched in the corpus. Although all analyses were conducted in the original Arabic, references to verses of the Qur'an correspond to the Sahih International English Translation throughout.



### 3.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

These methods proved useful as a systematic way of locating passages relating to a specific theme within the Qur'an and analyzing those passages. We acknowledge, however, the three principles we present here represent a beginning to what possible future analyses of the Qur'an may glean about Islamic educational thought. Furthermore, Arabic grammar is such that the multiplicity of meanings, implications, and interpretations of the terms within these passages represents more than a single article can include. Further research is needed to more fully understand the depth and breadth of these passages as well as the implications that the Qur'anic educational principles contained within them may have when put into practice, especially as applied by the various denominations of Islam. The methods and findings of this study may prove useful in similar studies of the Hadith, for instance, or in comparing various educational practices in Islam with the principles set forth in the Qur'an and seeking understanding as to how or why these practices have developed in the Islamic world.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

During the course of our systematic study of educational principles in the Qur'an, we compiled hundreds of relevant passages and identified almost as many principles of education. After thinning this list down to those most explicitly stating or exemplifying principles of education and analyzing which principles appeared in the text most commonly, we decided to focus this study on just three of the most common, overarching principles of education in the Qur'an. The first is a theme of the importance of invited, independent, inferential reasoning on the part of the student, which may or may not be facilitated by a teacher. We call this Invited, Independent, Inferential Reasoning, or IIR. Next, we analyze a recurring theme of orthopractic teleology of education—the purpose being to guide the student to better live in accordance with principles of righteous living which constitute Islamic law. Finally, we examine the Qur'an's encouragement to preserve the sacred spoken word of God through the memorization and recitation of scripture. We recognize that these are by no means the only principles of education in the Qur'an, nor are they necessarily the most important to Islamic educators. However, we feel it integral to a hermeneutical analysis of Islamic education to understand what principles of education seem to be encouraged by the Qur'an, and which ones seem more strongly encouraged than others. For these reasons, we have chosen to focus this study on IIR, orthopractic teleology of education in Islam, and the importance of preserving God's word through memorization and recitation.

### 4.1. IIR: Invited, Independent, Inferential Reasoning

The Qur'an encourages a method of education which requires the student to independently infer truth from clues in the natural world and one's lived experience therein. Within the Qur'an, God and the prophets expect learners to construct their own knowledge and wisdom from raw materials around them through a deliberate process of independent, inferential reasoning. This methodology has two conditions: first, a learner's active use of their faculties of inferential reasoning and, second, a teaching experience that does not inhibit the free exercise of those faculties. The Qur'anic text repeatedly invites the learner to gain knowledge and wisdom by observing signs in the natural world (Q 2:164; Q 3:190; Q 6:97; Q 13:3–4; Q 16:11–12, 67, 69; Q 30:24; Q 36:37; Q 39:21; Q 41:10, 53; Q 45:5; Q 67:19), life experience (Q 2:266; Q 7:167; Q 10:24; Q 12:24, Q 13:4; Q 30:20, 28; Q 31:31; Q 45:13), and the failures of past civilizations (Q 17:59–60; Q 50:12–13; Q 54:9–42; Q 69:4–12; Q 89:6–14; Q 91:11, Q 14–15), among other things. In other words, as illustrated in both didactic stories and explicit exhortations, while the Qur'anic texts invites this type of learning, it does not use and even warns against the kind of over-explanation that can inhibit this type of independently-enacted learning. More specifically, the Qur'an endorses these methods of learning and teaching both through the implications of exemplary stories and explicit commands from God.

The ability to learn through inferential reasoning is a clear prerequisite to the kind of learning which the Qur'an advocates. God reprimands many in the text for not learning certain lessons<sup>3</sup> when there are an abundance of clear signs and evidence for "a people who use reason (Q 2:164; Q 3:118; Q 13:3–4; Q 16:12, 67; Q 29:35; Q 30:24, 28; Q 45:5)," "those who give thought (Q 3:191; Q 10:24; Q 13:3; Q 16:11, 69; Q 30:21; Q 39:42; Q 45:13)," "those who ask (Q 12:7; Q 41:10)," or for a "thankful person (Q 14:5; Q 31:31; Q 34:19; Q 42:33)". In essence, God is understood to have given humanity the experiential and evidentiary clues necessary in order to gain knowledge and wisdom if they will but exercise their faculties of reason, perception, and discernment to do so.

The text also discourages the learner from seeking for signs (in other words, explicit explanation or proof of the intended lesson or principle), as all the necessary signs for inferring those intended lessons are already readily available (Q 2:55, 67–74, 118–121, 260; Q 4:153–155; Q 5:102; Q 13:27; Q 20:133). This theme illustrates that the responsibility to learn the lessons embedded in the scripture fall first upon the student and not upon the teacher. The sheer number of passages<sup>4</sup> alluding to IIR, the variety of audiences to which these verses are addressed, and the first-person voice in which God makes such declarations all suggest that this is a learning method both decreed and sanctioned by God in Islam's most central and holy text.

This was the case for Joseph of Egypt. In the twelfth surra<sup>5</sup> of the Qur'an, God tells Muhammad about Joseph's dream of the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down before him. After Joseph's father, Jacob, hears of the dream, he indicates that it is "about how the Lord will...teach you...interpretation (Q 12:6)". God interjects here in saying that "there are lessons in the story of Joseph and his brothers for all who seek them (Q 12:7)". He does not explicitly state these, but warns the listener that there are clues here from which one might infer true principles applicable to one's lived experience.

The story continues when Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt. God declares that "we established Joseph in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of events (Q 12:21)". Joseph is given a series of tests of his character,<sup>6</sup> which he passes and from which he gains "judgement and knowledge (Q 12:22)". He is eventually able to interpret the dreams of his fellow prisoners and the Pharaoh. After his brothers return to Egypt the third time and realize who he is, "they all bowed down before him and [Joseph] said, 'Father, this is the fulfillment of that dream I had long ago...My Lord... You have taught me something about the interpretation of dreams (Q 12:100–101).'" This is noteworthy, considering the conspicuous absence of any explicit instruction from God to Joseph during this period of time. It can be inferred, then, that Joseph learned to interpret dreams not through explicit instruction, but by faithfully enduring and wisely learning from life experience. Likewise, the student of this story is expected (according to God's previously mentioned preface) to seek lessons from it that are not explicitly stated. Thus, both Joseph and those hearing his story are encouraged to apply the IIR method of Islamic education by inferring these lessons through their own efforts.

At the end of this surra, God comments that the Qur'an itself is a "detailed explanation of all things (Q 12:111)". Critics and believing Muslims alike might wonder how this is possible, considering that many subject areas lie outside the scope of the Qur'anic text. If the Qur'an is seen as a sort of instruction manual, though, and the learner possesses the skill of inferential reasoning and willingness to apply the IIR method, the Qur'an does not need to explicitly teach anything in minute or obvious detail. Instead, it explains "all things" by presupposing that the learner has all that is needed (i.e., God's word and the

<sup>3</sup> In particular, God's status as the one, true God, the reality of the resurrection, and belief that Muhammad is the messenger of God. These are recurring themes in almost every surra of the Qur'an.

<sup>4</sup> We found over 40 as a part of this study. Among those already listed, a few more key passages include Qur'an 3:190–191; 6:97, 151; 7:176; 10:6; 16:11–12, 47, 69; 17:1; 30:21; 36:37; 39:21, 42; 41:53; 43:48; 45:13; 50:37; 59:21.

<sup>5</sup> Arabic word signifying a chapter, or individual revelation, of the Qur'an.

<sup>6</sup> Including Potiphar's wife's efforts to seduce him, and a trial of patience in prison.

abundance of material provided through natural phenomena and life experience) to infer an understanding of “all things” through faithful, inferential reasoning extrapolated from the invitations embedded within the text itself.

It naturally follows, then, that the Qur’an encourages teachers to invite and allow independent, inferential reasoning among their students. The principle is that although the student is given the responsibility to wade through ambiguity and uncertainty, he or she does so unencumbered by the strictures of explicit, second-hand answers. As mandated by God, the teacher’s duty is to present the pupil with the necessary information and experience and to allow them to learn the intended lessons free from over-explanation, commentary, or sometimes even by answering questions. God himself, as the greatest teacher in the Qur’an, teaches most often by simply listing facts about the natural world (Q 2:164; Q 3:190; Q 6:97; Q 13:3–4; Q 16:11–12, 67, 69; Q 30:24; Q 36:37; Q 39:21; Q 41:10, 53; Q 45:5; Q 67:19; Q 88:17–20), life experience (Q 2:266; 7:167; Q 10:24; Q 12:24, Q 13:4; Q 30:20, 28; Q 31:31; Q 45:13), or the failures of past civilizations (Q 17:59–60; Q 50:12–13; Q 54:9–42; Q 69:4–12; Q 89:6–14; Q 91:11, 14–15), and pointing out there is a sign or lesson in this thing, often without explaining further. God quite consistently avoids providing a level of information that would inhibit the learner’s inferential reasoning ability and thereby impede IIR altogether.

The story of Moses and the knowledgeable servant (Surra 18) also exemplifies this methodology within the Qur’an. While traveling, the prophet Moses comes across a servant of God who had been “taught... a certain knowledge (Q 18:65)”. Moses humbly asks if he might follow and learn from the knowledgeable servant who agrees on the condition that Moses refrain from asking questions of any kind (Q 18:70). The two then embark on a mystical journey that symbolizes the principle of IIR in action (Q 18:71–77).

The servant first takes Moses to a boat on a large river, in which he immediately strikes a large hole. Moses immediately demands to know why this was done. Reminding Moses of his promise, the servant continues on their journey. The companions soon come across a young boy whom the servant slays without a word. Moses again objects and questions the servant’s actions. After a stern reminder of his commitment not to pose questions, the pair continue on. The knowledgeable servant then leads Moses to a large city in which he asks for food and is denied. As they leave the city, the servant of God repairs a wall which was nearly crumbling. Moses suggests to him that he should have requested payment for repairing the wall (possibly for the purpose of buying food). At this point, the knowledgeable servant promptly loses patience with Moses and ends the journey. His final words are a reluctant and short explanation of the experience: “the ship...belonged to poor people working at sea. So I intended to cause defect in it as there was after them a king who seized every [good] ship by force...as for the boy, his parents were believers, and we feared that he would overburden them by transgression and disbelief. So we intended that their Lord should substitute for them one better than him...And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure for them...So your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord. And I did it not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience (Q 18: 78–82)”. At this point, the narrative of this story abruptly ends.

The knowledgeable servant is a bold example of a teacher who unapologetically withholds explanation and commentary in favor of allowing the pupil to infer wisdom independently. Ultimately, due to Moses’ constant questioning and apparent inability to infer true principles from the raw materials of his environment and the experiences given him, the servant deems him an unworthy pupil. Though, in the end, he explains the answers to every one of Moses’ questions, the servant does so with a marked reluctance and disappointment in his student, leaving him with a rather thought-provoking, though short, explanation of his actions. Importantly, however, there is no further commentary or reference to this story within the Qur’an. It is not clear whether or not Moses learned a lesson, or even what the intended lesson was. To learn from this short, poignant journey required a great capacity for independent, inferential reasoning which Moses, at the time,

apparently lacked. This story is itself an invitation to IIR and illustrates the ideal, perhaps even inherent discomfort that accompanies this type of teaching and learning. There are many lessons that could be drawn from this story, but the proper role of student and teacher participating in IIR is one of its more clear implications.

The prophet Mohammad is no exception to this mandate for teachers. He is repeatedly encouraged in the text not to waste time explaining things and interpreting facts to those who do not immediately grasp their true meaning. God declares that one who spends time trying to teach those who do not possess the faculty of independent, inferential reasoning “is like that of one who shouts at what hears nothing but calls and cries cattle or sheep—deaf, dumb and blind, so they do not understand (Q 2:171; see also, Q 10:42; Q 27:80; Q 30:52; Q 43:40; Q 80:1–16; Q 87:9)”. The implication is that the prophet should not spend his time teaching those who do not have the ability to learn truth through IIR.

Ultimately, God expects all members of the Islamic community to learn and teach through this process. The faithful student possesses and is responsible to use the faculty of inferring life’s most important lessons from the many natural signs which God has given, from life experience, and from the words of the prophets—without asking for explanation or signs. This principle closely resembles Sahin’s “Cloud-Grass” principle of Qur’anic pedagogy wherein “nature itself has the capacity to educate (Sahin 2013, p. 182)”. However, IIR takes this idea further in that it involves not only one’s innate capacity to learn from nature, but also the pedagogue’s role in first inviting such reasoning and subsequently refraining from over-interfering with it by avoiding those very explanatory signs prohibited to the prophet Muhammad in the Qur’an itself. Teachers, then, including God, prophets, and other messengers, are therefore reasonably expected to both invite and facilitate the conditions that lead to this type of self-directed, inferential reasoning, and at the same time not interfere with it. Deeply embedded in the text of the Qur’an is the idea that the truths we need to learn are all around us and that through a deliberate application of IIR one may attain wisdom through the refinement and correct application of this divine principle of learning.

#### 4.2. *Orthopractic Teleology: Developing Moral Character through Action*

Through various stories and their respective themes, the Qur’an suggests that the highest end of education is to help the student to develop moral character. With knowledge of the laws of God, comes the responsibility to follow them. Thus, a teacher has a duty not just to convey information, but to help the student improve conduct and character. This trend manifests itself early and often in the Qur’an as God, prophets, angels, and the revelations themselves teach truth and then invite the learner to change and more closely follow the law.

While it is difficult to define the exact requirements of salvation within a tradition as complex as Islam<sup>7</sup> many verses make it clear that following a “straight path (Q1:6–7; Q2:142, 213; Q3:101, Q4:68, 175; Q5:16; Q6:39, 87; Q24:46)” of righteous action (Q 13:20–22; Q 33:35; Q 47:12; Q 48:20; Q 61:11–12; Q 70:22–35; Q 74:38–48; Q 98:7–8; Q 101:6–11; Q 107:1–7) and even repenting of evil deeds (Q 4:26; Q 11:114; Q 39:53–58; Q 41:19–24, 27; Q 46:15; Q 63:10–11; Q 66:8; Q 67:10–12; Q 71:10; Q 85:10; Q 110:3) is necessary for a Muslim to be admitted into paradise in the hereafter. A major function of the Qur’an is to define that behavior which is “lawful” and that which is “unlawful” (Q 4:26; Q 5:4; Q 7:169; Q 9:37; Q 33:4) according to divine law, or Sharia, as it has come to be called. Indeed, the followers of Mohammad often asked him very specific questions as to the lawfulness of certain behavior (Q 5:4; Q 2:189, 215–222; Q 7:187; Q 8:1; Q 17:85; Q 18:83, Q 20:105; Q 79:42). God’s answers to these questions, as recorded in the Qur’an, establish a binding legal precedent for Muslims. God clearly expects obedience once the law has been taught

<sup>7</sup> Many tend to limit the requirements of Islam to only the five pillars (testimony, prayer, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, alms-giving, and the pilgrimage to Mecca), but the Qur’an also suggests a need for good works, repentance, and other actions in order to gain salvation (for instance, see Q 13:20–22 and 36:54).

(Q 2:285; Q 3:130–132; Q 4:13, 46; Q 24:46–47; Q 62:5). In this way, the Qur'an suggests at least one main purpose of teaching should be to help the student to develop moral character.

The Qur'an makes it clear that God expects Mohammad to maintain this purpose in his teaching, sometimes at the expense of teaching principles such as faith. Many passages argue that faith is a virtue which cannot be taught (Q 2:6–7, 171; Q 6:25; Q 27:81; Q 30:53; Q 26:1–9; Q 36:10). Just as God discouraged Muhammad from teaching those who cannot use reason, he often exhorts the prophet not to bother with those who disbelieve in the Qur'an or his call as a prophet. After all, "they have already denied" and one "cannot guide the blind away from their error (Q 26:6; Q 27:81)". God even reprimands the prophet for ignoring a humble Muslim man while trying to convert a group of arrogant unbelievers (Q 80: 1–11). It is clear that God sees it as a poor use of time to try to convince the others to believe or change their behavior. Instead, the teacher of Islam should focus on instructing those who have already shown a willingness and aptitude for applying learning. Rather than be weighed down with grief (Q 26:3) that some will not believe in the message, God invites the prophet to focus on simply delivering the message (Q 5:92, 99; Q 13:40; Q 16:82–83; Q 24:54; Q 26:3; Q 42:48; Q 64:11; Q 87:9–13; Q 88: 21–25) and guiding the people "to a straight path (Q 42:52; Q 81:27–28)". This counsel from God to his prophet sets a precedent that goals of prophets and teachers of the law within the Islamic tradition should be to help the believers develop moral character.

God also expects the learner to recognize this requirement and to improve conduct as a result of the information and wisdom gained. The Qur'an teaches that learning and improving conduct is more noble than simply studying. In Arabic, the root most commonly signifying study connotes reading a text repetitively for the purpose of memorizing it (see Lanes Lexicon, root *درس*). Interestingly, the root appears only six times in the Qur'an (see [corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary) root *درس*), and even then the practice is most often attributed to non-Muslims (Q 6:105; Q 7:169; Q 34:44; Q 68:37–38). It is clear that a study of God's word in and of itself does not provide the kind of education that edifies and strengthens moral character.

Other prophets, the Qur'an, angels and messengers, and even God maintain this purpose of education. These various types of educators are frequently described as guides (Q 2:2, 97; Q 3:3–4, 73; Q 4:26; Q 5:44–46; Q 6:91, 161; Q 16:64; Q 17:2; Q 19:43; Q 24:46; Q 28:43; Q 29:69; Q 42:52; Q 72:2; Q 79:19). In fact, derivatives of the two most common trilateral roots meaning to guide or lead aright appear over 300 times (see [corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary) roots *هدى* and *رشد*) within the text. In contrast, the word for teaching appears in the Qur'an only forty-eight times, and to instruct only thirty-two (see [corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary) root *علم* form II, and root *وصى*). The modern Arabic word used for teaching, which means to cause one to study in the repetitive reading sense mentioned above, is not used at all within the Qur'an (see [corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary) root *درس*, the absence of form II, meaning "to cause one to study or to teach," according to Lane's Lexicon). The Qur'an refers to itself and others scripture as a guide at least twenty times (Q 2:6 97; Q 5:44, 46; Q 6:91, 154, 157; Q 7:52, 154; Q 12:111; Q 16:64, 89, 102; Q 17:2; Q 24:46; Q 28:43; Q 32:23; Q 34:6; Q 39:23; Q 40:53, 54; Q 42:52; Q 46:30; Q 72:1, 2). We also found no less than twenty-four passages explicitly describing God as a guide (Q 1:6; Q 2:26, 70; Q 3:103; Q 4:26; Q 5:16; Q 6:87, 144, 161; Q 10:25; Q 13:27; Q 14:12; Q 16:121; Q 19:43; Q 24:46; Q 29:69; Q 33:4; Q 37:118; Q 39:57; Q 40:38; Q 42:52; Q 48:20; Q 49:17; Q 76:3). This suggests that one of the most important roles of an educator in Islam is that of a guide to righteous action—being a lecturer or teacher is simply not enough.

One story which illustrates this idea is a variant retelling of a well-known story from the TaNaKh, or Old Testament, in which Nathan censures King David for his sin in sending Uriah to the front lines of battle in order to take his wife, Bathsheba, for himself. In the Biblical narrative, Nathan tells David a parable of a wealthy man with many flocks who



took an impoverished man's only ewe-lamb to entertain his wealthy guests. After David exclaims that such a man should be killed, Nathan boldly declares, "Thou art the man" and declares curses upon David and his house for his wickedness (2 Samuel 12:1–7). In the Qur'anic narrative of the thirty-eight surra, the story is told quite differently (Q 38:21–26).

God reveals this story to Muhammad in a way that serves to emphasize both the purpose of developing moral character, and the value of IIR. Two unnamed "litigants" somehow sneak into David's private quarters to seek his ruling on a legal dispute. A poor man with only one ewe-lamb asks David to "judge... fairly" and tells the king that his wealthy brother standing next to him, a man with ninety-nine lambs and great wealth, intimidated him<sup>8</sup> into giving up his only lamb. David immediately rules that the wealthy brother was in the wrong. He then has a profound realization. With no clues from the mysterious 'litigants,' "David became certain that We [God] had tried him and he asked forgiveness of his Lord (Q 38:25)". David's recognition of his sin despite the lack of explicit allusion to it is a clear example of the successful implementation of IIR. David's immediate repentance, though, reflects the true purpose of the exchange. God promptly forgives David and directs him to: "judge between the people in truth and do not follow [your own] desire, as it will lead you astray from the way of [God] (Q 38:26)". The apparent purpose of the lesson was to invite David to improve his conduct.

It is important to note that teachers of the Qur'an do convey information and teach doctrine. As mentioned earlier, Mohammad teaches the principle of monotheism perhaps more than anything else<sup>9</sup>. That being said, God's frequent advice to Mohammad to avoid trying to teach people to have faith, but to focus on simply delivering the message and teaching them the law leaves a strong precedent for teachers in the Islamic tradition. God, the Qur'an in its mentioning of itself, as well as angels and prophets within the holy text are most often described with words related to the idea of guiding to a path of action. Education as set forth in the Qur'an is most often a process which develops moral character, rather than simply conveying information. This is reflected in its recommended methodology of both teaching and learning.

#### 4.3. Methodology of Memory: Active Listening, Memorizing, and Reciting

Perhaps the clearest educational method that the Qur'an encourages is the act of memorizing and reciting scripture. The very title of the book, the Qur'an, is itself a noun that connotes an uninterrupted recitation of a text (see Lane's Lexicon, triliteral root قرأ, word قرآن). Beyond this self-declared name<sup>10</sup> which emphasizes recitation, the Qur'an explicitly establishes the act of memorizing and reciting as a vital tradition of teaching, learning, and preserving truth for future generations. However, there is more to Qur'anic recitation than the audible repetition of the revealed word. Taken together with other divinely-sanctioned learning methods in the text, actively listening to, memorizing, and reciting the Qur'an serve as gateways to both the lived application of belief and the development of moral character. Seen specifically in conjunction with the previous two themes (i.e., loosely facilitated inferential reasoning and developing moral character), Qur'anic recitation and memorization together comprise a holistic methodology that strengthens both mind and spirit.

The Qur'an encourages the development of memory and the ability to recite information throughout the text. In the second surra, for instance, we learn that Adam was made ruler over all creation precisely because he was the most adept at remembering and reciting

<sup>8</sup> The text of verse 23 says that the wealthy brother "overpowered [his brother] in speech" which seems to imply some sort of unfair verbal agreement, possibly involving threats.

<sup>9</sup> While the use of this theme was difficult to quantify with our methods of keyword searches and reading the text, we were hard pressed to find a single surra that does not mention the importance of believing in just one God. The very word for God in Arabic, *Allah*, literally means *the* God, or the only true God—see Lane's Lexicon, root الله, word الله.

<sup>10</sup> The Qur'an refers to itself and its individual revelations as Qur'an constantly throughout the text. For a few examples, see Qur'an 2:97; 30:58; and 85:21

what God had told him (Q 2:29–34). After teaching the hosts of heaven the names of all things, God invites the angels to recite them back to him. Only Adam is able to do so, and God commands all other beings to bow before him (Q 2:34–35). In other words, the lived realization of this divinely-sanctioned methodology of learning is precisely what elevated Adam above even the hosts of heaven. This implies something of a two-fold sanctity with regard to this method: first, that recitation and memorization are sacred because of their prescriptive source (i.e., God’s voice in the Qur’anic text), and second, because of their capacity to sanctify those who use them properly (e.g., Adam raised above the angels of heaven). In this sense, the story elevates the skill of remembering and reciting above other, more quotidian learning methodologies to a higher plane, namely, a divinely-approved and prescribed way of participating in a sacred process and being sanctified thereby as well.

Not only do God and his angels model this sacred practice themselves (e.g., Q 5:110; Q 6:91; Q 55:1), but they expect Muhammad and other messengers to possess and develop this skill, as well. In the twentieth surra, Mohammad is censured for being too eager to repeat a revelation back, before it has been fully recited to him (Q 20:114; Q75:16–19). The methodology of teaching the Qur’an to Mohammed was, apparently, as follows: the angel Gabriel recited the revelations to the prophet, who was then asked to repeat them back (Q 75:18; Q 7:204; Q 87:6; Q 96:1–4) as a way to prove that he was ready to repeat them to the believers (Q 2:129, 151; Q 5:83; Q 6:151; Q 7:2; Q 17:106; Q 62:2; Q 84:21). Other prophets, including Moses and Jesus, had this same skill and responsibility (Q 2:87–92; Q 57:26–27). God warns the prophets and people quite seriously about the consequences of failing to teach the scripture and to maintain it in its purity for future generations (we found over forty examples of this warning, including Q 2:76–81, 87–92, 113; Q 3:7; Q 5:13; Q 10:15; Q 16:64; Q 42:16). Those who fail to meet this responsibility will be made a “companion to the fire” and receive “the severest punishment (Q 2:75–81, 85)”. This is a requirement for teachers of Islam and suggests that God expects them to possess the faculty of memorizing and reciting scripture in its purity to the pupil.

The text of the Qur’an also places value on the learner’s ability to listen, remember and apply the recitation of scripture to current circumstances in order to learn. Though the act of listening intently to the recitation of the Qur’an is both sacred and sanctifying (Q 7:204), the text most often describes it as a necessary, though not entirely sufficient condition for the sanctity of sacred learning (Q 57:16). In order for this type of attentive listening to contribute to the sanctity of the educative process, it nearly always must be followed by further audible recitation (Q 69:38–42), actionable application (Q 62:5), or reflective pondering (Q 4:82; Q 23:68; Q 38:29; Q 47:27) on the part of the learner. As with the methodology inferential reasoning, the Qur’an places the ultimate responsibility of learning from the recited word of God upon the student.

The Qur’an consistently reinforces the idea that listening, recitation, and memorization are not ends in and of themselves. Rather, their purpose is the development of moral character through the use of this methodology. In one passage, after inviting the children of Israel to remember the great things he has done for them in their history, God invites them to better keep their covenants (Q 2:40). Later in the text, God warns: “Woe to every sinful liar who hears the verses of Allah recited to him, then persists arrogantly as if he had not heard them (Q 45:7–8)”. God’s punishment is great for those who do not, after hearing his word, make an effort to change their character (Q 62:5–8; Q 72:17; Q 84:21–25). This implies that the change of character that results from recitation and remembrance is perhaps of greater importance than the recitation and remembrance themselves, though the former is unlikely to occur without the latter.

The Qur’an places heavy emphasis on the value of listening to, memorizing, and reciting God’s revealed word. The teacher of Islam is expected to be quick and adept at memorizing and reciting new information, while a student is expected to listen actively, memorizing as much as possible, and apply the information to current circumstance to gain wisdom and develop moral character. The sacred act of teaching God’s word

through memorization, recitation and active listening is, therefore, a methodology which presupposes the student's faculties of inferential and is rooted in the educational purpose of developing moral character.

## 5. Conclusions

When Muslims read from or listen to the words of the Qur'an, wrote Cornell, they consider themselves engaged in no less a sacred act than hearing the living word of God (Cornell 2005, p. 1)". Seen not just as the source of religious knowledge, but as "the ultimate source" of all knowledge, the words of God as contained in the Qur'an are treated as infallible, eternal, immutable and universal (Husain and Syed Ali 1979, p. 38). Given this unique capacity to teach truth in any and all realms of human knowledge or endeavor, it is no wonder that whatever knowledge attained without a direct and living connection to God's word in the Qur'an is considered "at best superfluous . . . and at worst dangerous (Halstead 2004, p. 518; see also Leaman 1996, p. 311)". Simply stated, without looking to the Qur'an as its foundation, the human intellect and pursuit of knowledge "have no capacity to understand truth" without the approbation of Heaven and the divine guidance which accompanies it (Al-Attas 1979)".

The case of education, itself among the most sacred of the recurring themes within the Qur'an's (see Q 58:11; Q 20:114; Q 2:282; Q 39:9; Q 2:170; Q 17:36; Q 6:148), is no exception to this rule. Without looking to the Qur'an for divinely-sanctioned approaches to the attainment of knowledge, it would be "impossible for the rational faculties to attain to certainty" of how to teach or learn (Halstead 2004, p. 518)". In order to begin to understand an Islamic approach to educational practice and philosophy, one must begin by looking to the text of the Qur'an. Yet, many scholarly attempts to outline just such an Islamic educational approach do so without first beginning with a systematic review of educational principles outlined specifically in the Qur'anic text itself (Wan Daud 1998, p. 24). This has been the purpose of this research, namely, to systematically examine the text of the Qur'an to uncover principles that could inform a fundamental, bedrock basis for understanding an Islamic perspective on education.

Having asked the question, "Does the Qur'an explicitly advocate or prescribe specific educational principles and, if so, what are they?", we discovered three themes: first, invited, independent, inferential reasoning; second, orthopractic teleology; and third, memorization and the spoken word. When combined, these characteristics of Islamic education, by virtue of their having originated in the text of the Qur'an, form what amounts to a divinely-sanctioned foundation for Islamic pedagogy and philosophy of education. As such, they provide a strong foundation of strictly Qur'anic educational philosophy upon which further hermeneutical research can investigate how that philosophy has been interpreted and practiced by Islam's various denominations throughout its rich history.

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