EDUCATION FOR ALL THROUGH THE FRAMEWORK OF MAQASID AL-SHARIAH

It is estimated that 10% of children worldwide have some form of learning disability such as dyslexia or autism. Frequently misunderstood by their teachers and friends as being "slow" or "stupid", many of these children develop low self-confidence and poor self-esteem, withdraw from academic and social activity, and become frustrated—which substantially increases the risk of their developing psychological and emotional problems. Highlighting the case of children with dyslexia, this article focusses on the application of maqasid al-Shariah in the preservation of faith *(deen)* and intellect *('aql)*, which would entail the providing of a good, sound education to all members of society, leaving no child behind. However, in catering to the needs of children with with dyslexia, the paper argues that society falls short, as the vast majority of teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms are reported to be ill-equipped to meet their educational needs. Using the Maqasid al-Shariah as a framework to address the importance of providing education for all, the paper discusses the difficulties and challenges that dyslexic students have in reading and learning, the use of evidence-based best practices to help them succeed in reading, and the importance of preparing teachers to address their needs in an inclusive education setting. The paper concludes by emphasising the fact that when viewed from the higher purposes and intent of the *maqasid* of the Shari'ah, addressing the needs of children with learning disabilities is a necessity *(darūriyyah)* and an obligation rather than merely supplementing the existing education system.

Keywords: maqasid al-Shariah; preservation of 'aql; preservation of deen; education for all; children with dyslexia

Introduction

Maqasid al-Shariah, to put it literally, are the objectives, purposes, or principles behind Islamic law and the "divine intents" or the "wisdom" behind its rulings. They also represent the fundamental Islamic concepts such as human dignity, justice, and benevolence—among others—upon which Islamic law is built, and aim to achieve. In addition to addressing the needs of the individual, the *maqasid* are also aimed at addressing those of the community, the *ummah*, and humanity in general in order that 'orderliness, equality, freedom, facilitation, and the preservation of pure natural disposition (*fitrah*) may be maintained (Ibn Ashur, as cited in Auda, 2008, pg. 183). Addressing current and changing conditions, but still within the fabric of the Shari'ah, the *maqasid* also address and respond to global issues and concerns—such as environmental preservation and sustainability, accountability, good governance, and human rights, to name a few—and has evolved from the 'wisdoms behind the rulings' to practical plans for reform and renewal (Auda, 2008). Under the *maqasid*, the benefits are aimed at not only Muslim individuals and society, but also non-Muslims (Kamali, 2012), as Islamic law is aimed at "promoting people's benefit and welfare and protecting them from harm" (Duderija, 2014, p. 2), as evident in the injunctions of the Qur'an and the

Sunnah of the Prophet. The spirit of the Maqasid al-Shariah is summarised by Ibn al-Qayyim (as cited in Auda, 2011, p. 194) as follows:

> *"Shari'ah is all about wisdom and achieving people's welfare in this life and the afterlife. It is all about justice, mercy, wisdom, and good. Thus, any ruling that replaces justice with injustice, mercy with its opposite, common good with mischief, or wisdom with nonsense, is a ruling that does not belong to the Shari'ah, even if it is claimed to be so according to some interpretation"*

Among the goals of the Maqasid al-shariah is the protection of faith, life, intellect, posterity, and wealth from harm, traditionally classified by scholars such as al Shatibi (as cited in Dusuki & Bouheraoua, 2011) as being under the category or level of *darūriyyah,* or necessity. Considered as being essential matters to be addressed by the society or nation, these aspects must be given the utmost priority and not ignored as doing so would cause social disruption and anarchy.

This article focusses on the application of the *maqasid* al Shariah in the protection of faith (*deen*) and intellect (*'aql*) from harm. We posit that this would entail the providing of a good and sound education to all members of society as a good education is crucial in enabling the individual to think and read critically, and ultimately help him or her to discern good from bad, and right from wrong. As asserted by al-Attas, education is the "recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God (Allah) in the order of being and existence" (al-Attas, 1999, p. 26). Hence, as propounded by al-Attas, the purpose of education in Islam is not merely about providing information or facts to the learner but "to inculcate goodness in man as man and individual self" (al-Attas, 1980, pg. 12) while its ultimate goal is to produce a good man.

Most governments recognise the importance of providing education to its members of society. However, in catering to the needs of children with reading disabilities—that is, those with dyslexia—society falls short, as the vast majority of teachers teaching in an inclusive classroom are reported to be ill-equipped to meet their educational needs. It is important to point out that students with dyslexia do not learn in the same way as their "normal" peers. Their brains process information differently, causing them to learn more slowly. Consequently, they often lag behind their classmates, causing them to have poor academic self-concepts and low self-esteem if accomodations in teaching are not made for the difference in how they learn. In addition, because they are "silent sufferers" of the

condition, many teachers may not know that they are dyslexic and may consider them as being slow or "stupid", contributing further to their feelings of inadequacy. If their condition remains undetected, many of these children withdraw from academic and social activity and become frustrated, which substantially increases the risk of their developing psychological and emotional problems. Given the fact that about 10% of the population worldwide is estimated to have this condition, it is crucial that as a society, this issue is to be taken as being of top priority—and that schools, institutions, and teachers be made aware of the importance of addressing the needs of these students if we are to meet the *'maqsid'*, or objective, of the Shariah in preserving the faith *(deen)* or intellect *('aql)* of the individual or members of the society.

To underscore further the importance of addressing the issue of ensuring education for all in the framework of *maqasid* al-Shariah, we discuss, in the following sections, the importance of reading for the acquisition of knowledge, the difficulties that dyslexic students have in learning how to read, some evidence-based practices in teaching dyslexic students to succeed in reading, and the importance of teacher education in ensuring that the needs of students in inclusive education programs are met.

Reading as a primary means of acquiring knowledge

Islam places the highest importance on the seeking and acquiring of knowledge. The seeking of knowledge has always been emphasized in the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muslims are urged to think, to read, to reflect on, and to interpret His signs. The Prophet is reported to have said that the best form of worship is the pursuit of knowledge, and that an hour of deep thinking is better than seventy years of worship; for worship without knowledge has no goodness in it, and neither is knowledge without thinking (Wan Daud, 1989).

Al-Ghazali, one of the most prominent Muslim scholars and philosophers, views knowledge as a means to know Allah, the Creator of mankind. Man is the noblest creature on earth, and intellect is his noblest attribute, and only through the knowledge he has attained can man be closer to God (Quraishi, MA, 1983). It should be pointed out that to acquire what would be considered as knowledge, man has to read and think critically—to analyze what has been presented in writing and to sift fact from fiction.

Thus, given the fact that reading is a primary avenue for acquiring knowledge, children *must be explicitly taught* how to read in a particular language to gain understanding of its written form, through which much of the knowledge we acquire is conveyed. Unlike spoken language, acquiring the ability to read requires direct instruction and practice (Sprenger, 2013).

The Difficulties in Learning to Read

Learning to read is a fundamental aspect of education and is most crucial for the acquisition of knowledge. When children learn to read, their brains form a network of neurons, which are the cells that learn, when they read and analyse a word several times. The more they see the word in action by pronunciation, spelling, meaning, and other visual representation, the better and more quickly the brain can identify the word. Children become skilled readers only when they are able to recognise more and more words automatically and read any text fluently (Sprenger, 2013). However, not all children are able to acquire the reading skill in a similar way. Some children face an enormous challenge in learning to read and spell. As they grow older, and as the difficulty in reading materials increase, their reading becomes more laborious and slower than their peers. They hardly read for pleasure and tend to avoid reading when possible (Wendling & Mather, 2012).

According to the International Dyslexia Association (2018), these students are recognised as having "a specific learning disability" called developmental dyslexia "that is neurobiological in origin". The use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) by neuroscientists to compare the brains of typical readers with that of dyslexic readers have shown a difference in brain activation patterns, revealing a glitch in the circuitry for dyslexics (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020). Numerous studies all over the world suggest that children with dyslexia utilise different brain pathways than good readers do, which explains the difference in how they process information. As reported by Vander (2017), this condition affects 5-15% of the population, with differing magnitudes of severity depending on the level of complexity of the orthographic system of the respective language.

Characterized by a problem in recognising words accurately and/or fluently, dyslexia is identified by poor spelling and decoding abilities. Children with dyslexia encounter problems in associating the sound of the letter to the symbol (decoding), comprehending

what they have read or both. Wilmshurst (2015) asserts that dyslexia affects "the acquisition of basic reading skills from simple phonological processing (sound–symbol association) to word identification and passage comprehension" (p. 122). Dyslexics' reading fluency is significantly weakened and they face increased difficulty in consolidating the information that they have read because of their effortful, slow, and laborious reading (Christo, Davis & Brock, 2009). The lack of fluency in reading may transfer to the lack of reading in individuals, resulting in long-term problems in comprehension and poor vocabulary development (Wilmshurst, 2015). People with dyslexia often face a lifelong struggle in accommodating themselves with the demands of modern times, especially in the area of formal education.

The Challenges of Being Dyslexic

In the last few decades, there has been a surge in support of inclusive education, where schools are moving towards accommodating the needs of learners with differing abilities. Inclusive education is based on the fundamental concept that *all* children are capable of learning, although they may learn at different rates and levels; and that they will benefit from an inclusive programme *regardless* of their differences (UNICEF, 2014). Hence, inclusive education involves, among other things, placing children with learning disabilities—such as those with dyslexia—in mainstream classrooms where they will be learning alongside their "normal" peers.

In a number of countries, actions have been taken to determine and remove the barriers to learning for those identified to be at risk of failing. Yet, execution and enforcement may be lacking as students with dyslexia continue to face all sorts of challenges because of their learning disadvantage. Because their brains process information differently, they take a longer time than usual to read, leading their peers and even their teachers consider them as being "slow". Dyslexic children in schools are constantly being exposed to "messages that there is something wrong" with them and that they are "a failure or stupid" (Hart, 2017, p. 10). Furthermore, they are often ridiculed and bullied by other students when they are asked to read aloud in class (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2016). Some children in mainstream schools have even experienced humiliation or criticism by their own teachers (Humphrey, 2002, as cited in Riddick, 2010). The shame, confusion and

resentment that they feel may continue throughout all their adult lives if they fail to be diagnosed and given intervention treatments. Often identified as being "illiterate, mentally deficient, or unable to learn", some adult dyslexics struggle to hold jobs, form relationships, and maintain a good health (Hart, 2017, p.10).

Riddick (2010) suggests that the needs of dyslexic children must be met by the time they reach 10-12 years old or else the negative consequences that are often associated with frustration and demoralisation, such as social withdrawal or aggression, will become apparent. However, children with dyslexia display characteristics that vary from one child to another, which means that there is no 'one size fits all' approach in teaching (Reid, 2011). The most crucial thing for teachers, then, is to make sure that they are well-prepared with the proper knowledge to address the different needs of these children at different formative stages of their lives.

Meeting the Needs of Dyslexic Students with Evidence-based Best Practices

Fortunately, we have come a long way in identifying dyslexia accurately and establishing the necessary course of action so that affected children can learn to read, as well as to enjoy the process of reading (Sprenger, 2013). Many evidence-based interventions are available that can benefit students with dyslexia by decreasing the performance gap between typical readers and those who struggle with reading (Mather, White & Youman, 2020). In 1997, the Unites States Congress formed an independent panel of experts led by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to review existing research on teaching reading with the goal of identifying essential components for best practice (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020). In the United Kingdom, the findings of a report with a similar objective of reviewing the practice of teaching early reading, also reinforced the former recommendations (Reid, 2009). Other subsequent reports gathered from other parts of the world also support the need to raise the standards of reading in schools by providing comprehensive literacy instruction.

Based on the evidence on the science of reading collected thus far, the following elements were found to be present in any effective reading program that benefits beginning readers, especially those with dyslexia:

Instruction in Phonemic awareness

As mentioned previously, children with dyslexia tend to have more difficulty in the area of phonological processing. Defined as the ability to analyse and manipulate phonemes (the smallest units of sound in a language), phonemic awareness can strongly predict the reading outcomes for young learners (Mahfoudhi & Haynes, 2009). This particular ability is purely auditory and is unrelated to letters or print. Pre-readers must master the skills of blending sounds together to form spoken words and know how to separate the individual sounds within those words (Robbins & Kenny, 2007). For example, the word *cat* is made up of three units of sound (/k/-/a/-/t/), and children must be able to differentiate the three individual phonemes before they can progress into linking those sounds into the alphabetic pattern for *cat* through phonics.

Systematic Phonics Teaching

A number of studies have also shown that explicit instruction in phonemic awareness combined with systematic phonics teaching produced significant outcomes that were consistent over time (NICHD, 2000). While phonemic awareness is the knowledge of how "sounds of spoken language are combined to form words", phonics is knowing the "relationship between letters and sounds" in the writing system (Sprenger, 2013, p. 87). The understanding of how to match the written symbol (grapheme) to the sound (phoneme) of spoken language is crucial as this allows readers to decipher and read words that they have never encountered in a text before. Hence, systematic phonics programs must be delivered appropriately so that students with dyslexia can master the grapheme-to-phoneme correspondences that contributes to fluent reading (Selikowitz, 2012).

Work on Fluency

A skilled reader is able to rapidly read a text with accuracy and prosody, or good intonation (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020). At this stage, the brain has established a neural circuitry for recognising a particular word by a glimpse which automatically merges its orthography, phonology, and definition, making it easily identified. Struggling readers

must devote all their attention to decoding the words—which slows down the reading process and leaves little cognitive resources for them to interpret the meaning of what they have read. Therefore, the next step after being able to accurately decipher words in print is to work on fluency through honing their skills with connected text. Practices in the classroom that facilitate repeated and guided oral reading with feedback have been shown to increase fluency and reading achievement (NICHD, 2000).

Direct Instruction on Vocabulary

Shaywitz and Shaywitz (2020) have observed that "children with the largest vocabulary tend to be the strongest readers" (p. 259). In contrast, learners with a limited vocabulary are "at risk of reading failure" and must be assisted with "explicit instruction and meaningful, repeated exposures to the words in different contexts" to expand their background knowledge (Ganske, as cited in Robb, 2014, p. xiv). Thus, direct instruction and word study in the classroom must make up for the deficit that struggling readers have when they encounter words that are not in their listening vocabulary. By encouraging them to actively use the new words often, stronger neuronal connections can be made in the brain, helping to retrieve the words easily for better comprehension.

Teaching Comprehension Strategies

Proficient readers are able to utilise specific strategies to understand what they are reading, constantly adapting the different cognitive skills mentioned above and more. To encourage independent learning among students with reading difficulties, teachers should model how expert readers use metacognition, which is "the ability to think about one's own thinking" in trying to make sense of a complex text (Sprenger, 2013, p. 147). When a particular sentence seems incomprehensible, a reader makes sure that nothing was skipped by reading it again. The reader may proceed to read the previous sentences to ascertain how the problematic part fits into what the writer is saying thus far. This particular comprehension strategy and many others contribute to the steps in overcoming dyslexia and must be taught in the classroom.

The crucial components in comprehensive literacy instruction mentioned above benefit all readers, especially dyslexic students, as the systematic approach provides a concrete method that all children can gradually grasp as they progress to become better readers. This is vital because good readers are able to obtain more information about many topics than poor readers since the ease with which they read provides a strong foundation for learning. Thus, increasing gaps in knowledge can exist between good and poor readers over time (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020).

Hence, studies have shown that evidence-based reading intervention benefits dyslexic students in an academic setting. Using these strategies, teachers can help struggling readers overcome the barriers to fluent reading. However, a disconnect between actual science and educational practice still exists in language classrooms today.

Teacher Preparedness

A perusal of the literature will illustrate that teacher preparedness has always been an issue of concern when it comes to the teaching of students with dyslexia. A global study conducted by Mather, White, and Youman (2020) on reading disability revealed a number of published research articles supporting a lack of teacher knowledge about dyslexia. All around the world, one of the most common topics related to the learning disorder is the difficulty in finding teachers who have the proper understanding of the support and instruction needed for dyslexic students. The study also discovered that pre-service teachers had more misconceptions of dyslexia than in-service teachers, such as visual deficits being the cause of the disorder. A survey conducted in Greece on ninety-four English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers by Lemperou, Chostelidou and Griva (2011) note that the majority of the participants felt that their lack of knowledge of the best teaching approaches for dyslexics resulted in their inability to adequately provide for struggling readers in their classroom. In a similar study on pre-school teachers, Ramli, Idris, Omar, Harun, Surat, Yusop and Zainudin (2019) discover that most of their respondents, regardless of their academic qualifications, understand dyslexia more at the level of general knowledge and not of the symptoms, diagnosis and the interventions. This lack of knowledge of evidence-based approaches to teaching reading resulted in the teachers' using methods that are

inconsistent with what is known about human cognition and development, which, inadvertently, put their students at risk of reading failure (Seidenberg, 2018).

Framing Teacher Education Through Maqasid al-Shari'ah

The problem of teachers' being ill-prepared to teach students with dyslexia—or those with other learning disabilities—studying inclusive classrooms—may be overcome through the enactment of proper legislation to ensure that all teacher preparation programmes prepare teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach students to master reading in a positive and motivating learning environment. We are of the view that it is not enough to only have a basic or general understanding of dyslexia. All teachers should be able to provide the required reading instruction that all students need to improve their abilities. Pre-service teachers, regardless of their subject matter, must be trained on evidence-based methodology in teaching reading and literacy that would benefit all students, including dyslexics. Similarly, in-service teachers should be given the opportunity to attend professional development courses in differentiated teaching to help them improve their instruction in their current classrooms. When viewed from the higher purposes and intent of the *maqasid* of the Shari'ah, preparing teachers to teach students with dyslexia is an *obligation* rather than merely supplementing the existing education system.

Islam places a great deal of emphasis on justice. Students with dyslexia will always be at a disadvantage if proper thought and care are not being put into their education. Despite the availability of information that is strongly supported by science in helping dyslexics reach their highest potential, it is not being advocated widely in schools, especially in developing Muslim countries. More worrying, in many Arab countries, an increase in the rate of illiteracy has been observed (Abu Hammud & Jarrar, 2017). Hence, it is crucial that all teachers be subjected to a more rigorous preparation for the teaching of reading—and this should not be seen as either a refinement or simply complementary to the existing educational practice, but rather, a necessity (*darūriyyah*) that must be upheld and practiced in pre-service teacher education as well as in in-service teacher professional development courses.

Conclusion

The preservation of everything that matters to the human self must be supported through proper education and attainment of wisdom as espoused by Islam consistently in the Qur'an. The reality that the Qur'an is "the final authority that confirms the truth in our rational and empirical investigations" (al-Attas, 1980, p. 7) may not be able to be fully understood and appreciated by those with dyslexia is a travesty. Furthermore, the many Qur'anic revelations that exhort people to think and to apply their reasoning illustrate how important it is to enable all members of society to acquire knowledge. And because this is particularly difficult for people who struggle to learn because of their reading disabilities, it is imperitive that policies that would enable them to improve their situation and seek for knowledge should be enacted.

The failure in providing teachers the support and relevant training so that they may understand why a child behaves in a particular way and intuitively carry out positive strategies to bridge any educational, emotional, and social gaps would lead to the deterioration in the quality of education we provide. As adult dyslexics who were not fortunate enough to have received the needed interventions to help them become better readers continue to suffer because of their illiteracy, we have failed in protecting people from harm and in preserving the sanctity of the mind *('aql)* and faith *(deen)*. Actions must be taken to ensure that all teachers have the tools they need to help all children succeed in reading. And they can succeed, as they are capable of learning. Therefore, the move towards adopting a stronger stance in preparing teachers with the essential and practical knowledge needed to succeed in an inclusive classroom must be expedited so that all children, especially those with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, can benefit in the long run. Armed with the knowledge and understanding of the best-practices in teaching students with dyslexia, teachers can ensure a successful and rewarding education for all.

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