

***Maktab* Teachers and Behaviour Education: Ruminations from a Teacher Education Programme in the UK**

Imran Mogra

Birmingham City University, Birmingham, England.

Abstract

This chapter pioneers in demonstrating the development of Muslim teachers underway in the *maktab* education sector of the United Kingdom. Over the years, Muslim religious institutions and their respective personnel have been subjected to increased deliberation in public discourse. Questions have been raised regarding the role and the various activities undertaken by them in preparing Muslim children for life in the wider society. Nonetheless, within some sections of the Muslim community, a different kind of focus has intensified. This relates to the quality of learning in these *makātib*. Of the many important features, the primary significance relates to how these teachers address the key aspect of classroom behaviour. This novel chapter offers insights elicited directly from these teachers about the value of their services and a reflective account of the nature of the training they had received to enhance their knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills in teaching and learning, with a particular focus on behaviour education.

Introduction

The interest to learn about Islam has experienced an exponential growth in the United Kingdom (UK). There has been a proliferation of Islamic courses which some Muslims are accessing both online and in residential institutes. In addition, many local centres of learning have been

established in various communities offering part-time and full-time courses, some of which are limited to topics or texts whereas others authorise their attendees to graduate as scholars (*‘Ulāmā’*) and *Ā‘limāt*). In this expanding educational landscape, this chapter aims to demonstrate how the *maktab* is also undergoing transformation.

It begins by briefly charting the history of the *maktab*. Thereafter, it highlights its main salient features in the UK, discusses key terms and celebrates some of its main contributions. Insights from *maktab* teachers, trained by the author are then offered. The final section focuses upon behaviour education as part of an original contribution to the still underdeveloped area of research in this important sector.

Maktab Education in Islam

The *‘maktab’* emerged during the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The earliest educational setting was the house of Zaid, son of Arqam, in Makkah. After migration to Madinah, a veranda, called *al-suffah*, was established adjacent to the Prophet’s (ﷺ) mosque for teaching and subsequent venues followed (Boyle, 2004; Mogra, 2004). As Islam expanded, it became necessary to create uniformity in the teachings of Islam and to formalise these settings. Henceforth began the worldwide phenomenon of *makātib*. Muslims in the UK have upheld this uninterrupted tradition and this system continues to exist in many parts of the world in its own local variations with many similar features.

Maktab Education in the UK

The word *maktab* (pl. *makātib*) is derived from Arabic, *ka-ta-ba*, meaning to write. In contemporary usage, it means a place of primary learning. Often, in the UK, *madrasah*, a place for studying (pl. *madāris*), derived from Arabic, *da-ra-sa*, meaning to study, is applied for *maktab*. Hence, due to this interchangeable application, it is important to distinguish it from a *madrasah* when it refers to higher institutes of learning. Furthermore, it is important to note other variants used in other parts of the world, including *Msid* and *kuttāb* (Boyle, 2004), *pondok* (Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, 1989), *malcaamado* (Kahin, 1997) which reflect their respective linguistic traditions.

This chapter prefers the term *maktab* as a collective term for those studies that Muslim children undertake outside full-time mainstream state education. They are held mainly in the evening ranging from 1 hour to 2 hours. Often, children will refer to the *maktab* as a ‘mosque school’. It has been suggested that in the UK, the establishment of the ‘Quranic School’ commenced during the 1960’s (Noh, Tamuri, Abd. Razak, & Suhid, 2014). Some offer community languages such as Arabic, Bengali, Somali, Turkish, Urdu and others (Cherti & Bradley, 2011; Gent, 2018). Many settings are multi-ethnic communities where children and adults gather for worship, education, social celebrations, family events and youth clubs.

There are many variations in these settings. In West Africa, most of the Islamic learning in *maktab* has a narrow focus (Hardaker & Sabki, 2019). In some UK settings, children are taught a more comprehensive curriculum which typically includes, in addition to the Qur’ān and *tajwīd*, the biography of the Prophet (ﷺ), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *aḥādīth* (sayings of the

Messenger (ﷺ), Islamic history (*tārīkh*) and, social and moral values (*akhlāq*) (Mogra, 2007).

Many of these *makātib* offer a *hifḍ* class for those wishing to memorise the Qur'ān.

They are held in mosques, community centres, former church halls, school halls which are hired outside regular school hours, or in private homes. Many are registered charities and often run through mosques (Cherti, Glennie, & Bradley, 2011). A large population of Muslim children attend them, although not all do so in all areas. For the community, it is important to recognise that the age profile is much younger (MCB, 2015), and, therefore, continued attention needs to be paid to the quality of provision in the *maktab* sector and to expand these facilities.

Beyond these academic pursuits and, in view of some concerns related to the quality of provisions, attempts have been made in recent years to further enhance *makātib* by providing training on child protection, safeguarding, health and safety and behaviour management (Mogra, 2005; Siddiqui, 2006; Cherti & Bradley, 2011). Among all these collaborations, reforms and research studies, the perspective of the personnel at the heart of these *makātib* has seldom been explored (Gent, 2006).

The subject of improving the quality of the management of *makātib* and their associated classroom practices has been an area of discussion among researchers, practitioners and members of the community for some time (Siddiqui, 2006; Ahmed and Riasat, 2013; Scourfield, Gilliat-Ray, Khan, & Otri, 2013; Mogra, 2018). Moreover, teachers demonstrate various ways of teaching. Teachers in an Irish study act autonomously to some degree in their approaches (Sai, 2018). That said, some have noted concerns about health and safety issues

and the potential risk of being radicalised (Waghid, 2009; Cherti, Glennie, & Bradley, 2011; Ryan, Last, & Woodbury, 2012).

Recently, the UK government proposed to legislate out-of-school settings (Mogra, 2018).

This initiative was not only a concern for some Muslim communities, other faith groups had reservations too. The proposal included: a requirement on settings to register, provide basic information, a power for a body to inspect; and a power to impose sanctions where settings would fail to promote the welfare of children. This could include barring individuals from working with children and the closure of premises (DfE, 2018). However, following a nationwide consultation, the government did not find it favourable. Nevertheless, it proposed a consultation on a voluntary code of practice to set out clear standards for providers so that they could meet their existing legal obligations in relation to child welfare, health and safety, governance, suitability of staff, teaching and financial management (DfE, 2018). Generally, some of the fears about *makātib* are not based on extensive and rigorous research, instead they appear to be based on intermittent reporting and speculation in the media. Thus, Cherti, Glennie and Bradley (2011) expressed the need for better understanding of them. This chapter makes a contribution towards this end.

Contributions of *Makātib*

Maktab education is significant for philosophical and religio-cultural reasons. Elicitation exercises during training sessions with teachers, most of whom were Imāms and '*Ulāmā*', both male and female, from various ethnicities, reveal that they have a deep concern for the faith development, social welfare, and knowledge acquisition of their pupils.

Faith Development

Education in a *maktab* directly links Muslim pupils to God and to their application of the teachings of Islam. An Imām succinctly declared: “If a child does not receive the learning in maktab then s/he will not recognise the teachings of Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ), in fact his/her faith will be in danger then how will he perform his/her worship.” *Makātib* are established as a matter of priority, almost anywhere and everywhere that Muslims have settled. Internationally, they assist in preserving and transforming social, educational, and religious practices (Boyle, 2004; Brenner, 2008).

Environment

In the absence of a secure foundation, some Muslim children would become more susceptible to be manipulated by external pressures and may have their courage challenged in resisting peer and social pressures. Participating teachers recognised the significance of equipping children to be resourceful, self-regulatory and to resist negative influences as best as they can. According to an Imām, a child “will be influenced by the environment and will be involved in all sorts of vice, a means of menace for all”, should they miss out on *maktab* education.

Society

The social context in which Muslim children are growing up and what it means to be a Muslim has been put under renewed scrutiny in light of national and international events (McKenna & Francis, 2019). Some experience tensions between Islam and secular Western entertainment, whereas others are clear about their Muslim faith, but also enjoy aspects of secular culture without seeing conflicts between the two (Scourfield, Gilliat-Ray, Khan & Otri, 2013). Therefore, these teachers feel that *maktab* education enables some children to see the

“difference between right and wrong.” Some ‘*Ulāmā*’ and ‘*Ālimāt*’ asserted that children may, “disrespect their parents, teachers and others” and experience a “loss of self-discipline.” Some felt children will “remain uninformed and ignorant of the basic information.”

Identity

Some Muslim children live a life of split identities (Ali, 2020), and with the majority (73%) of Muslims seeing their foremost national identity as ‘British’ (MCB, 2015), the establishment of *makātib* serves the purpose of transmitting language and cultural aspects. Thus, the absence of the ‘cultural’ content in the state curriculum is addressed via the structured teachings and socialisation at the *maktab*. This reality seems to be acknowledged by some participants, who are anxious that, without a firm familiarisation with Islam, some pupils “will be affected by the western life more” and the “Islamic identity of the children will be lost.” Specifically, there is anxiety about assimilating in the conditions of their surroundings. Children who spend time in Islamic places (including homes) are likely to have their faith and ethnicity become central to their identity, and, being in a minority, especially when there is some hostility towards Muslims, it may enhance their identification with Islam (Cherti & Bradley, 2011; Scourfield, Gilliat-Ray, Khan & Otri, 2013).

Spirituality and emotional development

Muslim pupils begin to develop a relationship with Allah and gain a sense of purpose in life. In the absence of this, a child, some teachers argue, will have “no sense of direction.” Their spiritual and emotional development may diminish. A female teacher observed, “The *noor* [spiritual light] and the feelings will disappear.” Psychologically, another teacher noted, an “inferiority complex in matters of Islam” could grow. Consequently, “peace will slowly leave

their lives.” Thus, *makātib* are seen as compensators for the failure of state schools in providing an essential part of moral and spiritual education (Gent, 2018).

McKenna and Francis (2019) found that the majority of female students in their study felt the importance of religion in their daily lives. It played a major role when making important decisions and their lives had been shaped by their religious faith (p. 394). Thus, the *maktab* plays an important role in contributing to this religious and spiritual awareness. Indeed, it is the main way for the majority of Muslim children across the UK to access the teachings of the Qur’ān (Noh, Tamuri, Abd. Razak, & Suhid, 2014).

First Steps in Professionalism

There were several motivating factors which prompted the initiation, design and delivery of this training programme. In particular, discussions with some children revealed a need to enhance their confidence to express their learning in *maktab* in their school and other social contexts, and to apply their skills of memorising and intense learning in *maktab* to their school contexts so that they achieved higher in both settings (Berglund & Gent, 2019). Furthermore, Noh, Tamuri, Abd. Razak, & Suhid (2014) noted criticism of some out dated modes of teaching among some Imāms and the need for teacher training in the existing courses which prepare ‘*Ulāmā*’ (Scott-Baumann & Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2017). Specifically, in relation to behaviour, many staff in *makātib* and parents admitted that behaviour is an issue in some mainstream schools. A non-ministerial department of the UK government responsible for inspecting a range of educational institutions judged a third of schools as not having good enough behaviour (DfE, 2019). Behaviour remains a significant challenge for many schools

(Bennet, 2017). Equally, many *maktab* teachers admitted some challenges in addressing inappropriate behaviour.

Synopsis of the Training

A training initiative for *maktab* teachers across the UK and beyond is delivered by the author in an independent capacity. Over fifteen years, several hundreds have attended a variety of training sessions. This chapter is based on selected post-training anonymous questionnaire evaluations received from 410 (Male 303, female 107) participants.

The programme covers several areas of teaching and learning to enrich their knowledge, skills and lifelong learning. This includes the aims and purposes of a *maktab* in a post-secular and postmodern society, revisiting the teaching methods of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) (Abu Ghuddah, 2017), understanding a Muslim child, considering theories informing modern pedagogies, the use of visual and multi-media resources, being a Muslim teacher from theological, sociological and psychological perspectives, curriculum design, pupil-teacher relationships, nature of the classroom environment and addressing additional learning needs of individual pupils.

Behaviour Education

The Context

Some concerns about the use of corporal punishment in some *makātib* have featured (Siddiqui, 2006; Mogra, 2018). Nevertheless, *makātib* are consistently seen as centres for instilling discipline and a sense of duty in Muslim children. The majority of research participants who had attended a *makātib* felt that the strict environment and religious context led them to monitor and control their own behaviour. Some felt that this instilled a sense of ‘spiritual fear’ which meant they would behave better in the *makātib* than in their mainstream school. However, in a small number of cases, the discipline used within a *makātib* was seen to be detrimental to the welfare of children (Cherti & Bradley, 2011). Thus, a key element of their training development was to critically evaluate the issues of corporal punishment from a theological, historical and Muslim juristic position, coupled with social and legal expectations.

The rest of the chapter provides a reflective analysis of the selected sessions, the pedagogical approaches adopted and their impact.

Behaviour Education and the Qur’ān

Teachers begin to reflect on the broad teachings of the Qur’ān and how some principles and practices for behaviour education are presented therein. Thereafter, a rehearsal of specific *aḥādīth* to assist in delineating appropriate approaches for the UK context is conducted. This stresses ‘the teacher as a model of the Prophet’ concept, so that teachers become concerned not only with behaviour issues, but with all aspects of pupils being a Muslim. To this end, teachers recognise how to respond appropriately to pupils’ physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and social needs and how they can promote healthy bodies, minds and souls.

Behaviour Education and Muslim scholarship

In another session, participants read texts from classical and contemporary scholars as accumulated knowledge to explore the nature of behaviour and the gradual and systematic manner in which they approached behaviour education (Mogra, 2007). This collective reading attempts to create a ‘communities of practice’ within their local areas (Wenger, 1998). From this, teachers learn how to prioritise pupils’ safety and welfare. They review their attitudes, systems and policy. Thereafter, they learn and understand their statutory safeguarding duties and child protection responsibilities as outlined by regulatory bodies in England.

The Challenges

A matrix is used to examine the seriousness and frequency of some behaviours considered to be challenging by these teachers. Consequently, many realise that, generally, the behaviours of some of their pupils in their classes in contrast to some behaviours in mainstream schools, as noted above, is usually better. They conclude that what they consider to be serious is actually low level behaviours, although their frequency is sometimes high. For example, pupils showing “bad attitude”, “coming late in class”, “calling names” and “not doing what they are told”. Following a detailed deliberation, they begin to see their pupils in a new light and review their attitudes to some behaviours and how they deal with them.

Policy

Headteachers bring their behaviour policy to the training session. The aim is to demonstrate the importance of respecting the decisions made by management teams; to evaluate their effectiveness; to examine their contents; and to recognise the importance of having a consistent approach across all classes. The critical analysis involves teachers from different settings studying a single policy. From this, they recognised that:

a uniform policy of behaviour management should be implemented (BHM25E/32).

They also learn that policies can be different for each setting with some similarities. The trainer emphasises that policies need to be reviewed regularly (O'Brien, 2020) and be developed in conjunction with parents. Teachers must respect the policy and not criticise it in the presence of their pupils, otherwise pupils will undermine it.

Rules

Teachers share their classroom rules to demonstrate the commonality and distinctiveness of the number, nature, categories and the process of developing these rules in each setting. Thereafter, they learn the significance of establishing and reinforcing routines which sets the tone of learning. Following the training, some mentioned that they would be more responsive to their legal contexts:

laws and rules are changing day by day in the UK. The *maktabs* need to adapt according to these laws (BHM24E/31).

Others suggested that they would improve by introducing:

reward systems for well-behaved children (OM2E/358).

Teachers are taught that class rules are a means for religious, moral, social, spiritual and personal development, and, as such, they ought to be used to serve the purposes for which they have been designed, otherwise, they should be changed and not be treated as ends in themselves.

Sometimes, it transpires that some settings do not have routines. Thus, from this analysis, they learn various ways of establishing routines in and out of classrooms which creates orderliness, calmness and minimises the repetition of instructions by teachers.

The Powerful Language

Teachers must understand that language is a powerful tool for their teaching and behaviour education. Participants examine the kind of language used in various settings by sharing some terms used to describe pupils, their work, effort and behaviour. These are listed under a positive and negative heading respectively. Following this, a deeper analysis of the frequency of positive and negative phrases is undertaken to illustrate the dominant feature and, significantly, the nature of these phrases is scrutinised. Thereafter, the potential emotional and psychological impact of using these terms is highlighted. A teacher wrote that they would:

show love and mercy, no abuse, ... (BDM27E/68).

The power of language also lies in bringing about the desired changes in a classroom. To facilitate cognisance of this feature, attendees are provided with a set of sentences to interpret and conduct textual analysis. Thereafter, they are asked to offer alternative phrases to use in their own classes. Moreover, they practise these phrases with each other to appraise the potential impact of positive and constructive phrases. This activity made some participants:

more conscious of words used when addressing children (BDM24E/68).

Others suggested that they would enhance their quality of teaching by:

Listen[ing] to their problem, try[ing] to understand them, if anyone does anything mention what he has done, not him (OLM46E/394).

Consistency and Integrity

Some pupils are acutely alert to matters of fairness. Thus, it is vital for teachers to be consistent in their use of language, recognition and sanctions. Some pupils are apt at noticing favouritism, which can sometimes manifest in the different manner in which a teacher might rebuke or praise two pupils for an identical misdemeanour or effort. Thus, these teachers discuss and receive feedback on how they could improve their responses and feedback to their pupils in a consistent manner. A teacher declared they would show:

more love and affection and have a discussion with 'd' children (BDM28E/72)

Moreover, teachers ascertain that their language should be a means to influence pupils' resilience, resourcefulness and self-belief about their capacity to succeed. They are reminded to ensure that all have the opportunity to experience meaningful success through positive reinforcement and praise and celebration of their achievements, efforts and personal development. When asked what changes they would introduce after the training, a teacher recorded:

build pupils' self-esteem by praising them occasionally (DWF2E/89).

The message to give attention to individual pupils resonated with some teachers who suggested that they would:

talk to children individually (BHF3E/3).

Consider Life Experiences

Teachers need to understand the importance of developing a positive and predictable strategy to manage excessive talk and disruptions. Thus, they predict what they would expect to be the main concern in the minds of their pupils as they arrive to the *maktab* following a win by their local football team, for example. Teachers discuss how they would manage the inevitable excessive discussions. They offer examples such as: “remind them of rules”, “tell them not to talk about the game”, “separate them from their best friend” and so forth. They are then informed that, first of all, they must be prepared for the obvious; i.e., unavoidable discussions about the game (or any other important event to pupils). They should consider giving pupils time at the start of the lesson to talk about the matter and to join in their conversation. Thereafter, expectations should be set for the rest of the lesson. This helps to explore their emotions and build good relationships as pupils see that their life experiences are understood, and the teacher is interested in what happens in their life.

On return to their classes, some wrote they would now:

make them laugh (share a joke) (BDM25E/69).

I intend to change my attitude and behaviour and attention towards my pupils. Also I intend to help them through making it easier for them (DWF7E/94).

[create a] friendly atmosphere (OLM62E/410).

Monitoring Emotions

A role play is used to stress the importance of self-regulating emotions which can affect pupils in various ways. The Qur'ān expects control of anger (Ali-'Imrān, 3:134). Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) advised against becoming angry (Al-Bukhārī, 8:76:137). In the role play, a teacher, representing a child, pretends to arrive late. The trainer, representing a teacher shouts, insults the whole family for such behaviour, loses control and seeks no explanation for the lateness. Thereafter, teachers analyse all aspects of the behaviour of both. They examine the character exhibited and the potential physical, psychological, social and emotional impact on both parties. They explore the options available for dealing with late comers, the importance of modelling good etiquettes and of asking for explanations for their lateness. Some teachers professed that they would avoid:

Shouting, calling them in bad name, i.e., donkey etc. (OLM51E/399).

Sanctions which could lead to inferiority (DWF3E/90).

Since recourse is made to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, other felts, that

child behaviour needs to be studied and seen in the eyes of our religion
(DWM6E/100).

Attractors and Distractors

A *maktab* should be a place where pupils feel that they belong. To understand pupils' sensitive nature and to find multiple ways of encouraging their attendance, love for their *maktab* and their engagement in lessons, participants from different settings work collaboratively. They create a list of factors which they think attract and distract Muslim pupils. The trainer facilitates an evaluation of these features. They learn to improve their setting by establishing a positive, supportive and inclusive classroom with a clear system of rewards and sanctions. The ensuing discussion is then taken deeper to examine the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for learning and behaving. They think about how they could move pupils from needing extrinsic motivation to being motivated intrinsically.

A significant shift was detected. Some teachers envisaged to make:

enjoyment factors for children (BDM24E/68).

give them some time during the lesson to do what they want (WF3E/79).

don't avoid and neglect their thoughts but try to be part of them and talk to them about their thoughts (OLM37E/392).

try to understand the child's problems (at maktab/home) and take necessary steps (OLM47E/395).

Conclusion

In general, teachers are under continuous pressure to deliver the elementary educational programme of Islam to Muslim children within various constraints. In this context, the dedication of teachers and Muslim communities to arrange essential faith based religious education for their children is praiseworthy.

This chapter makes an original contribution in outlining an innovative training programme designed to enhance the professionalism of *maktab* teachers in the UK. The programme shifts their theorisation and praxis of being a didactic pedagogue to one of being collaborative, reflective and transformative. They recognise their curriculum and methodologies are a means to serve the pupil, rather than exclusive ends in themselves. They begin to view the Muslim child as an active learner rather than solely being a *tabula rasa*. They grapple with the affective, cognitive and spiritual aspects of learning as well. Teachers come out of their silos and recognise the importance of networking and involving parents and the community in nurturing Muslim pupils to become faithful, lifelong learners and good members of society.

Recommendations

These findings provide lessons at three levels to assist Muslim teachers around the world to improve their *makātib*. To begin with, with regards to the welfare of children, all *makātib* should have health and safety, mental health and well-being, safeguarding and child protection policies. These should be enacted at their local contexts. The curriculum on offer must cater for their holistic development. This means, it should go beyond knowledge and

rituals and incorporate explicitly the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development and, also be responsive to their lived realities. To this end, teachers should receive regular training facilitated by organisations and management boards.

In terms of behaviour education, teachers should reflect upon the Qur'ān to derive theories, principles and practices to enhance their behaviour management and understanding of children. They should be well-versed with the manners in which the Prophetic-teacher (ﷺ) interacted with his Ṣaḥābah as learners. Teachers should be familiar with their scholarly traditions to inform their on-going reflections to enable them to be responsive in their own cultural contexts. Importantly, they should use respectful language and enact their policies in a fair and consistent manner.

Specifically, in terms of teacher development, it is recommended that teachers are involved in a continuous cycle of reflection to improve their practice. Teachers should reconceptualise their role and become mentors and agents of transformation in addition to knowledge transferers. Muslim teachers should recognise that their accountability in relation to the treatment meted out to their pupils lies with Allah and extends beyond their employees and community.

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