

PEDAGOGY IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION



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The Madrasah Context

BY

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Foreword

The book is about increasing our awareness of the spectrum of sensory experiences that shape Islamic pedagogy. We started this book from an Islamic premise of the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred. Islamic pedagogy is represented by the heartfelt interactions between the teacher and learner through orality, facilitating memorisation and the didactic approach towards sacred texts. The book has endeavoured to explore a spiritual approach and this provides the foundation for shaping our understanding of the universal concept of Islamic pedagogy. Al-Ghazali's mystical-theoretical approach towards learning is evident in this research in defining the madrasah as a spiritual rather than social construct.

We have used four broad claims concerning sensory orders, identity, embodiment and spirituality to structure our descriptions of Islamic pedagogy and embodiment. We propose the Islamic approach to the sensoria is different and privileges orality, kinaesthesia and embodiment. We describe the impact of this approach in four areas, each of which affects the others: the use of language to describe the sensorium, moral values embedded in teaching and learning, a madrasah model of embodiment, and ideas about knowledge and the sacred. We provide details of the four areas as a way to explore the madrasah concepts of Islamic pedagogy and how this is represented by embodied actions.

The book is shaped by the four broad claims that explain the stasis of Islamic pedagogy with reference not to dogmatic pronouncements but to local understandings of sensory orders, embodiment, identity and spirituality. In the final parts of the book, sensory insights are interwoven with theoretical insights. We show that Islamic pedagogy in the madrasah is considered a largely spiritual process through which knowledge extant in the potentia is in the heart of the learners and is slowly revealed in the form of embodied actions.

With this book, we hope to contribute to two distinct fields of study. By bringing to bear a variety of Islamic and educational studies research, relative to Islamic pedagogy, this book opens up some new avenues for research into Islamic education. The book will be of particular interest to scholars investigating Islamic education, Islamic pedagogy and embodied learning.

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Preface

The intention and aim of this book is to provide a greater understanding of Islamic pedagogy from a spiritual perspective, which requires empathy with the Islamic premise of the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred. This research supports a need to broaden our understanding of higher education traditions in pedagogy by looking beyond our modern university institutions. Raising our understanding of higher education madrasahs offers one such route. Inadequate understanding of Islamic pedagogy has the risk of not recognising genuine progress in the field of education. As higher education has become increasingly internationalised, with unprecedented cultural and religious diversity, there seems to be a call for a better understanding of educational thought other than 'our own' (Gunther, 2007; Van Crombrugge & Lafrarchi, 2010).

Throughout history we can observe, based on concordant evidence, insights of the frequent tensions between the temporal and spiritual. Even the word 'religion' is often used to denote whatever an individual or a group regards as being true, or that whereby conduct is regulated (Northbourne, edited by James & Fitzgerald, 2008). All religions indicate that in order for this tension to arise humanity move to a position that is quite distant from a primordial understanding of spirituality. Nasr (1987) explains the Islamic understanding of 'spirituality' as being informed by *ruhaniyyah* (Arabic) and *ma'nawiyyat* (Persian). First, *ruhaniyyah* is derived from the word *ruh* that means spirit. This is supported by the Qur'an that states 'The spirit is from the command of our Lord'. Second, *ma'nawiyyat* derives from the word *manna*, which translates to 'meaning', and denotes inwardness, 'spirit'. Nasr (1987) continues by defining spirituality as relating to a higher level of reality than both the material and the physical and directly related to divine reality or the sacred. Hence, these terms from an Islamic perspective refer to 'divine proximity' and are associated with revelation and what is accepted to be permanent, rather than transient and passing.

This book proposes that the two powers, spiritual and temporal, did not originally exist as separate functions. On the contrary, they were two indivisible aspects linked indissolubly in the unity of a synthesis that was at once superior and anterior to their distinction (Nasr, 1989). In its original sense, religion applies only to something which is, above all, not a construction of the human mind. It is viewed as having a divine origin that is exemplified by its supernatural, revealed or mysterious nature. Here 'religion' has a purpose to provide a link between the spiritual and temporal. Islam in this book is always used hereafter as a representation of the original sense of religion. A traditional understanding of religion accepts an unbroken chain of tradition to an authentic

‘prophecy’ that are paths that lead to the same place. ‘Prophecy’ is therefore by definition something greater than anything purely human, including reason. This understanding informs this book and in particular the role of spirituality, and sacred, in shaping the notion of Islamic pedagogy. It is not our intention here to trace everything back to its origins, and most of our references for the purpose of this book are drawn from epochs close to Islam. We propose that the Islamic tradition, represented by the unity of the spiritual and temporal, struggles with the spirit of analysis that governs the development of ‘profane science’. Islam is one of the religious traditions that can be adopted by those who wish to remain in conformity with an intrinsically orthodox religion.

The word ‘tradition’ also suffers from the same kind of vague usage as religion. It is often used to indicate ‘custom’ or ‘style’. Northbourne (edited by James & Fitzgerald, 2008) defined the foundations of ‘tradition’ as lying at the very root of our being. Such a perspective informs this book and provides an insight into what has emerge, for some, as a ‘traditionalist’ school of comparative religious thought. The ‘traditionalist’ school was pioneered by Rene Guenon (1886–1951), Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), Martin Lings (1909–2005) and which continues to be amplified by scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr. A ‘traditionalist’ school accepts both absolute ‘truth’ and infinite ‘presence’ (Lings, 2005). Absolute ‘truth’ is defined as the perennial wisdom (*sophia perennis*) that represents the transcendent source of all the intrinsically orthodox religions of humanity. St Augustine described this as that ‘uncreated wisdom, the same now, as before, and the same to be for evermore’ (Powell, 2001). As infinite ‘presence’ is recognised as the perennial religion (*religio perennis*) that lives within all the intrinsically orthodox religions. The ‘traditionalist’ school of thought presents a viewpoint on the notion of ‘tradition’ that influences this book and underpins the use of the word ‘tradition’. The ‘traditionalist’ school also provides a profound understanding of the spiritual and the temporal in the chains of tradition from prophecy. Such an understanding has helped in philosophically shaping this book in following the intrinsically orthodox religion of Islam.

The book acknowledges the continued influence of philosophy (*hikmah*) and theology (*kalam*) in Islam and identifies some commonality and distinctions between the Islamic philosophical and theological schools of thought. Blackburn (1996) defined philosophy as a way of understanding the world in a universal, comprehensive and conceptual way. The main characteristics of philosophy are its approaches to the process of enquiring, researching, analysing, evaluating, judging and conceptualising truth and reality. Rosenthal is illustrative of a scholar who believes there is no distinction between ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’. From the perspective of the intrinsically orthodox religions of the world, ‘wisdom’ is seen to be something better than ‘knowledge’ and represents a higher level of knowledge in the domain of both philosophical and theological opinion (Rosenthal, 2007). In contrast, Islamic theology (*kalam*) is engaged more with the understanding of the will of God and supporting the fortification of faith (*al-iman*). The main theological purpose is not to deal with the intellect and issues of intuition and seeking ultimate knowledge. Rather the intellect is the domain

of philosophy (*hikmah*) and this is where Muslims can find a methodology of knowledge in Islam. Such an understanding represents the dominant school of Sunni theology, the Ash'arite school, where truth is acknowledged as God's will, and the intellect is identified practically with reason but subservient to the will of God.

In summary, this book is influenced by the philosophical perspectives of Rene Guenon, Martin Lings and Seyyed Hossein Nasr who represent the traditionalist school, the theological perspective of Al-Ghazali and his approach to the Ash'arite School, and the Shafi school of jurisprudence. Gunther (2007) and Winter (2008) elucidate Al-Ghazali's perspective, within the Ash'arite School, as the 'Al-Ghazali mystical—theological approach'. The influence of the Shafi school of jurisprudence on this book is seen through the acceptance of both philosophy and theology as instrumental to the study of Islamic education. By identifying the adopted perspective towards philosophy, theology and jurisprudence, it is our intention that this allows the book to continue unabated. This provides an insight into what defines the 'spirit' in which we write this book and also the 'spirit' in which this study should be read if one wishes to understand its meaning.

At the heart of this research is a desire to search for greater understanding of pedagogy beyond our modern university institutions. The madrasah is Islam's institution of higher learning focused on the religious sciences and their ancillary subjects (Makdisi, 1981). Madrasahs of higher learning predate Western universities by several centuries (Kinany, 1957; Makdisi, 1981) and some continue to operate and provide an insight into traditional teaching methods. For example, Al-Qarawiyyin University in Morocco (established in 859), University of Al-Azhar in Egypt (established in 970–972), Nizamiyya Academy in Baghdad (established in 1091) and the more recent International Islamic University of Malaysia (established in 1983) provide an insight into institutions that have followed a madrasah perspective towards Islamic education (Bunt & Bernasek, 2008). The tenth and eleventh centuries represented an important period for teaching Islamic knowledge with madrasahs becoming an important place of study. The madrasah continues to be an important institutional type that is created for the purpose of education and typically it has distinctive differences in the context of architecture, organisation, instruction, learning, curriculum and funding sources (Kadi, 2006; Makdisi, 1981).

This research has endeavoured to explore the sensoria of the madrasah¹ from a what was explained earlier as a mystical—theoretical approach (Al-Ghazali translated by Faris, 1962; Gunther, 2007), and this provides the foundation for shaping our understanding of the madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy. We sensed how Islamic pedagogy was being mainly researched and presented from a social rather than a spiritual construct. Al-Ghazali's mystical—theoretical approach towards learning is evident in this research in defining the madrasah as a spiritual rather

¹Madrasah is defined as an Islamic school or dar al-ulum - house of knowledge).

than social construct and is epitomised by the embodiment of learning (Gunther, 2007). We can see the origins and importance of the Islamic education perspective, presented in this book, in particular verses of the Qurʾān. As stated in *sūrah Al-Alaq*, verses 1–5:

Allah says:

Proclaim (Read)! (Iqraʾ) in the name of God thy Lord and Cherisher, who created man, out of a clot. Proclaim! And Lord is most Bountiful, He who taught (ʿAllama) the use of the Pen (Qalam), and taught (ʿAllama) man what he did not know. (Source: Qurʾān 96:1–5)

Muslims know *Iqraʾ*² as the first verse revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad during his meditation in the Jabal Al-Nūr (the mountain of light). The narration explains how Angel Gabriel came and asked him to read the above verses. Prophet Muhammad responded by saying that he could not read. The angel repeated it to him three times but Prophet Muhammad repeated the same response. Following this, the angel recited the above verse, which was then repeated by Prophet Muhammad. Indirectly, this narrative of the interaction between Angel Gabriel and Prophet Muhammad shows the Islamic importance placed upon the teaching and learning process. At the beginning of prophecy, which started the emergence of the Qurʾān, we can observe how the Angel was the teacher and Prophet Muhammad was the learner and a mutual understanding was achieved by means of spiritual practice.

Our understanding of *Iqraʾ* defines the focus on our book from an Islamic premise of the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred. The madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy is defined as the strategies employed by the teacher to spiritually form the human person (Hardaker & Sabki, 2015; Sabki & Hardaker, 2013). This is supported by Al-Ghazali’s mystical–theoretical approach towards learning in his conception of the linkage between the heart and the human being (Al-Ghazali translated by Faris, 1962; Gunther, 2007). Islamic pedagogy is represented by the heartfelt interactions between the teacher and learner through orality, facilitating memorisation and the didactic approach towards sacred texts (Hardaker & Sabki, 2015; Sabki & Hardaker, 2013). For our research into Islamic institutions, this was seen to shape the interactions between the teacher and learner through orality, facilitating memorisation and

²The word *Iqraʾ* does not refer only to the literal meanings: read, recite, rehearse or proclaim aloud. It also refers to understanding. The words themselves, *Iqraʾ*, *ʿallama* and *Qalam*, in this verse imply reading, writing, books, study, research, reflecting the comprehensive meaning of these words that gives them a universal direction and does not refer only to a particular person (The Presidency of Islamic Researchers, n.d., pp. 1980–1981).

the didactic approach towards the sacred. Islamic pedagogy is dependent on both teacher and student embodiment of the sacred texts and supporting material. From our observations, embodiment has a physical and spiritual dimension where prophecy is retained and is inherent to existence and daily practice. In doing so, it urges us to engage with the physical realm of the seen but also the unseen, as it were, within our heart and soul. Although the transmission of knowledge has long been central to Islamic culture, the institutions and madrasahs through which this transmission takes place have changed over time. This evolution and changes will be discussed throughout the book.

This book is based on research into higher education institutions and such institutions symbolises a diverse global diaspora of loose connections. The Islamic educational institution has sustained the historical significance that has taken Islam to many parts of the world. For example, Tarim is known for its role in taking Islam to Southeast Asia and China, which represented the Yemeni trade routes. We suggest that the key to Islamic pedagogy is about enabling the embodiment of knowledge and this is seen to create an individualistic and personalised learning experience.

In this book, we are dealing with a belief in both knowledge and the sacred and this demands sensory categorisation that facilitates Islamic pedagogy and embodiment. These categories began to emerge through the researcher's culturally specific engagements as part of the research process. For this book, in part, we follow a sensory narrative style in expressing our descriptions. We observed early in our own research that the five-sense sensorium is not universal across all cultures and did not meet the needs of our book. We have used four broad claims concerning sensory orders, identity, embodiment and spirituality to structure our descriptions of Islamic pedagogy and embodiment. This leads to our propositions that the mainstream Western model of five senses is a folk model (Geurts, 2002), and the madrasah model is different and privileges orality, kinaesthesia and embodiment as central to the approach. The impact of this model (or approach) can be seen in four areas, each of which affects the others: the use of language to describe the sensorium, moral values embedded in teaching and learning, a madrasah model of embodiment, and ideas about knowledge and the sacred. The book is shaped by the four broad claims and is influenced, in parts, by a sensory narrative approach. The sensory narrative style is interwoven with theoretical insights.

For the first part of the book, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 that follow, we look back to key moments in madrasah history and their formation, diversity of Islamic institutions, and the notion of the scholastic community. In doing so, the intention is to identify the rise of the Islamic education institutions and the diversity within their formation. Despite the partial disappearance of the spiritual in many Islamic education institutions, we will argue that the spiritual construct is still deeply implicated in the reification of Islamic pedagogy and in the process of embodiment. In the second part of the book, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 that follow, we will draw on unravelling knowledge and the sacred that considers the philosophy of Islam and knowledge, spiritual understanding of Islamic education and knowledge and the sacred as an educational compass. The third part of the

book, Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 that follow, explores the implications of Islamic pedagogy and embodied learning, the universal nature of Islamic pedagogy and reflections for the future.

The book is intended to provide a unique insight into how the seen and unseen are active in the formation of the characterising features of the pedagogical approach and its affiliation to the embodiment of knowledge. As mentioned earlier, the selection of case examples within this book aims to encompass situations that reveal the inextricable paradox of the diversity in the formations of Islamic education institutions.

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We offer our acknowledgement and sincere heartfelt gratitude to Allah, Lord of the worlds. Our reflections on our early Islamic studies learning experiences as a child were instrumental in shaping this book. We both acknowledge the research was about following prophetic teaching and connecting with our sensual perception of Islamic education. The intention was clear and the aspiration was for a genuine contribution to Islamic pedagogy that lifted the veils of philosophy to what this actually meant for teaching methods and techniques. We owe a special debt of gratitude to everybody that has let us bring our thoughts to this research and especially those who showed their concern with the concepts of Islamic education and with the integrity of these concepts of Islamic faith, life, education and civilisation within the Islamic context. We are also indebted to everybody that has let us share with them their everyday routines of madrasah life. We are especially grateful to all the teachers that have given their sincere views and thoughts and many whose conversations and comments were invaluable.

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PART 1
ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTION

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Chapter 1

The Rise of the Islamic Institution

There are a number of *hadiths* regarding the learning method in Islamic education. The Prophet Muhammad said that, 'seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim' (Al-Ghazali, 1997). Al-Ghazali referred to engaging in the learning method as the most sincere form of worship (Al-Ghazali, 1997). Knowledge and its quest were of the greatest importance to Prophet Muhammad. With the very first revelation from God through the angel Gabriel, the messages emphasised the importance of learning, particularly reading and writing. From a Muslim perspective, this means the search and obtaining of knowledge is a mandatory duty for all Muslims. Knowledge acquisition is central to Islam and the search for sacred knowledge is an integral part of the process and for Muslims this includes sacred scriptures such as the Qur'an (Anzar, 2003). This illustrates the priority placed on knowledge and also touches upon some of the complexity in researching Islamic education.

Islam is often referred to as 'the religion of the book'. The book here is referring to the Qur'an, which is the revealed scripture of Islam to Prophet Muhammad. Islam believes that the first prophet was Adam, and the final seal of the prophet was Muhammad. The main Islamic sources of knowledge are the Qur'an,¹ *Sunnah*² and *Hadith*.³ Knowledge is seen to be a religious obligation and is comparable with for example prayer, fasting and charity. There are many statements identifying the importance of knowledge and its implications such as 'are those who know and those who do not know to be reckoned the same?' Qur'an (39:9). Education in the context of Islam is regarded as a process that involves the complete person, including the rational, spiritual and social dimensions. Prophet Muhammad explained to people that we do not exist on this planet alone; rather, we live in a society that has a natural order and discipline with our surroundings and the cosmos (Al-Attas, 1980). As noted by Syed Muhammad Al-Naquib Al-Attas (1980), the comprehensive and integrated approach to education in Islam is directed towards the

balanced growth of the total personality [...] through training man's spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses [...]

¹*Qur'an* is a central religious text of Islam which Muslims believe is the word of God (*Allah*).

²*Sunnah* refers to Prophet Muhammad's behaviour and actions.

³*Hadith* means the Prophet's sayings which provide knowledge of how he sees and understands the physical realm.

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such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality.
(Al-Attas, 1979, p. 158)

Islamic education is driven by the motivations of human beings to avoid what is seen to be wrong and the main aspiration is to do what is seen to be right. For Muslims, these two motivations are like two wings by which human beings can fly, providing a way to cross into the 'next life' and reach an Islamic understanding of truth (Al-Ghazali, 1997). Islamic literature reveals that many scholars (e.g. Al-Ghazali, 1997; Suwayyid, 1988) have investigated various aspects of the Prophet's teachings. As time passed, the volume of information on Prophet Muhammad grew exponentially and provided a well-documented account of his behaviour and practice. Different scholars then began to focus on specific content areas to show how these teachings could be applied to particular areas and phases in one's life. Worship of God has always been the cornerstone of every religion and places of worship occupy an important position in the daily life of all religious communities. From an Islamic perspective, the first place of worship to be built was the Kaabah⁴ which was constructed by Prophet Adam. A verse from the Qur'an, the sacred book of Islam, reads that:

The first House (of worship) appointed for men was that at Bakka⁵: full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings.
(Qur'an 3:96)

The word mosque⁶ or '*masjid*' is mentioned in the Qur'an 27 times – 21 times as the singular '*ijaza*' and six times as the plural *masajid*. Both signify a humble place before God and an important part of prayer when referring to the House of Allah (bait Allah), as the following verse from the Qur'an illustrates,

[Lit is such a Light] in houses, which Allah hath permitted to raised to honour; for the celebration, in them, of His name: In them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, [again and again], by men whom neither traffic nor merchandise can divert from the remembrance of Allah, nor from regular prayer, nor from the practice of regular charity; Their [only] fear is for the day when hearts and eyes will be transformed [in a world wholly new [...]]. (Qur'an 3:96)

⁴The cubicle building first built in Mecca that has remained a place of pilgrimage.

⁵*Bakka* is the ancient or early name for the site of Mecca/Makkah.

⁶*Masjid* or *masajid* (plural) is the Arabic word for mosque.

According to the *hadith*, Prophet Muhammad encouraged the building of mosques by emphasising the great spiritual rewards. He said that ‘whoever builds a mosque, God will build for him a similar place in paradise’ (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*).⁷ In Islam, once a mosque is built, it does not belong to any human and its owner is God, not figuratively but legally under Islamic law, and all Muslims have equal rights to use the mosque. In the early periods of Islam, the building of mosques was a social obligation of rulers as the representatives of communities and tribes. But as Islam grew, this obligation became more mainstream in Muslims communities. As a consequence, this developed the mosque further in taking on responsibilities for general community needs. It then became the heart of the community serving the role of a spiritual, educational, social, governmental and administrative institution (Winter, 2016). This research is particularly interested in the context of a mosque in its support for educational development where knowledge and the sacred were one. The mosque and its role in education also provides an insight into how education developed over time and the centrality of the sacred in all aspects of teaching and learning.

1.1. Definition of Madrasah

Historically, the emergence of madrasahs was a response to the social, political, cultural and religious issues of the time. They emerged as an alternative to the existing institutions and often complemented them, and this will be discussed later in this chapter. The related institutions of learning were clearly well established in Islam but it was the fifth century when the madrasah as an institutional type became recognised (Anzar, 2003). The rise of these institutions can be seen in eleventh-century Baghdad and this was a pivotal place for the development of madrasahs in the Muslim East. Baghdad was a major centre of learning in the Muslim East and scholars from all parts of the Muslim world visited this location of the Abbasid Caliphate where the central government was based in Iraq. It was a regular place to visit for Muslim scholars on their way to or from their pilgrimage to Makkah (Makdisi, 1970). According to Makdisi (1970), the madrasah originated from the word ‘dar’ which means the teaching of sacred law but they were also known to teach ancillary subjects. The Arabic terms *madhab* and *madrasah* are usually translated into English by the single term *a school or a place of study*. This convergence of terms needs to be understood in the context of the former, referring to the *schools of jurisprudence*, and is best understood as referring to a *school of thought*, while the latter refers to the school as an institution that relates to buildings or structures in which educational activities take place. The madrasah was a physical institution, in addition to being an educational community, and it was one among many such institutions in the

⁷Sahih Al-Bukhari is one of the six canonical hadith collections of Sunni Islam collected by the Persian Muslim scholar Muhammad ibn Ismail Al-Bukhari, after being transmitted orally for generations. It is one of the three most trusted collections of hadith.

same city, each independent of the other, each with its own endowment (Makdisi, 1970). Both the *madhab* and *madrasah* had a long evolution as institutions. Makdisi (1970) explained how the *madrasah* was a natural development from previous institutional types. For example, the *masjid*⁸ operating not as a house of worship but as a college of law, with its nearby *khan*⁹ acting as the residence of the law students in attendance. Makdisi (1970) explains this development in three stages: the *masjid*, the '*masjid-khan complex* that is essentially a law college, and finally the emergence of the *madrasah*.

The most striking difference of the early *madrasahs*, compared to Western places of learning, was that the *madrasahs* focused on an individualistic and personalised approach. Owing to the complexity of the early *madrasah* structures, most remained autonomous in their operations in Islamic cities and this was reinforced by many institutions being led by the *ulama*¹⁰ (Makdisi, 1970). Another significant difference in the early Islamic *madrasahs* was how certification was integral to the education process and provided an opportunity to gain a licence to teach: the *ijaza*, or authorisation. This certification remained a personal matter, rather than state controlled, and it was strictly between the master teacher and student. The master granted an individual the right to teach a particular book or specific subject and this was by an *ijaza* that authorised the student to transmit his knowledge. The master's teacher who authored the teaching of a book was either its author or a person duly authorised to teach it and typically having received his authorisation (*ijaza*) through a transmitter or chain of transmitters leading back to the author. The *ijaza* was a personal matter and the sole entitlement of the person granting it. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, this new environment of teaching Islamic knowledge that was established as a '*madrasah*', a school or a place of study, was very significant and was acknowledged as an extension to the practices of the mosque. As we have explained, the mosque and *madrasah* differ in terms of their purpose. To reiterate, the *madrasah* is an institution created for the purpose of education and hence it is different in the context of architecture, organisation, staff, students, curriculum and funding (Kadi, 2006). The Al-Azhar,¹¹ Egypt, and Al-Qarawiyyin,¹² Morocco, are widely accepted as the first degree-granting higher education institutions and are instrumental in the rise of *madrasahs*. In particular, Al-Qarawiyyin remains an educational institution rooted in the traditions of a *madrasah* teaching style. It is important to see how the *madrasah* developed as an institution with a specific

⁸ *Masjid* is a place of prayer or mosque.

⁹ *Khan* served as travelers' and student hostels.

¹⁰ *Ulama* are the leaders of Islamic society, including teachers, Imams and judges.

¹¹ Al-Azhar is today the most important religious university in the Muslim world with as many as 90,000 students studying there at any one time. It was built originally as a mosque in 969 AD by Jawhar the Sicilian, commander of the troops sent by Fatimid Caliph Almuiz to conquer Egypt.

¹² Al-Qarawiyyin mosque remained, until the twentieth century, the foremost educational institution in Fes, Morocco.

mode of teaching and certification that is shaped by a personalised approach to the teaching and learning process.

From an Islamic perspective, the scholar who teaches in a madrasah is an heir of the prophet and this reinforces the importance of learning from teachers that have a clear chain of transmission from Prophet Muhammad. The significance of madrasah teachers is exemplified in the influence of Nizam Al-Mulk in Iraq (d.485/1092) who made the madrasah institution a mainstream institution in the central provinces of the Islamic empire, especially in Persia. Nizam Al-Mulk was the influential *vizier* (leader) of the *Seljuq*¹³ sultan and was one of the earliest rulers that donated to the establishment of madrasahs in a way that involved the state in this educational development of institutions. In Iraq, this led to madrasahs becoming an important function of the Islamic State. His approach motivated other ruling classes to contribute generously to similar madrasah initiatives. His foundation became a model for all the later Iraqi madrasahs, as well as for those established in Syria. Nizam Al-Mulk remains known for his support for the Nizamiyyah Academy, Baghdad, which is associated with the prominent scholar Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali.¹⁴ Al-Ghazali is a major Islamic scholar who learned all the religious sciences and a wide range of ancillary subjects (Tibawi, 1972). In 1091, Nizam Al-Mulk appointed Al-Ghazali as the principal professor in the Nizamiyyah Academy, Baghdad, where he worked for four years. Al-Ghazali attracted a major following through his teachings at Nizamiyyah Academy (Al-Ghazali translated by Faris, 1962). Another significant development of madrasahs was in 1095 when Al-Ghazali underwent an emotional and spiritual crisis that rendered him unable to teach. Al-Ghazali had become increasingly aware that he was teaching others because it brought him prestige and status rather than a compulsion to share sacred knowledge with his students. This provides a key moment in history of the centrality of the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred in madrasahs. He felt himself questioning his intentions and this led to him leaving Baghdad on a spiritual quest, travelling to Damascus and many other places of Islamic significance. After spending two years travelling to Damascus, Jerusalem and Makkah, he began work on his most important book, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)*. This work contains a major concentration of Al-Ghazali's thoughts about education, and it deals with every aspect of the inner and outer life of Muslims (MacDonald, 1953, 1965). After two years,

¹³The Saljuq (also Seljuk) Turks emigrated from the Steppe country north of the Caspian Sea to Persia in the early fifth century. The Saljuq dynasty was established in Persia in 429 (mid-eleventh-century CE) and gradually extended to rule over Persia, Iraq and parts of Syria and Kirman until the late sixth century.

¹⁴Abu Hāmed Mohammad ibn Mohammad al-Ghazzālī (1058–1111) known as Al-Ghazali or Algazel to the Western medieval world, born and died in Tus, in the Khorasan province of Persia (modern-day Iran) was a Persian Muslim theologian, jurist, philosopher and mystic. He was one of that era's significant scholars and educators and indeed regarded as such throughout the history of Islam.

Al-Ghazali returned to Baghdad in 1097 and he resumed teaching while continuing to work on *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. In 1104, Al-Ghazali returned to his position at the Nizamiyyah Academy in Baghdad at the request of the *Seljuq* minister, Fakhr al-Mulk, and taught for another five years. Al-Ghazali was known to be a *Sufi*¹⁵ representing the spiritual and esoteric traditions of Islam. His *Sufi* approach to his teachings was very self-evident as a teacher at the Nizamiyyah madrasah and this also manifested in his books. By the twelfth century, madrasahs, such as Nizamiyyah, had become the main institutional type for teaching Islamic sciences; Al-Ghazali represents the prominence of the madrasah institution and he is also illustrative of the style of transmission where the sacred elements are integral to knowledge transmission.

1.2. Phases of Islamic Educational Reform

From as early as the fifth century until the nineteenth century, Islamic societies had developed educational institutions and this we will now continue to discuss. This period is also known for the different phases of educational reform in the context of the madrasah as an institution. Below we provide a description of what has been described as the five phases of educational institution development (Esposito, 2009). In phase one, Islamic schools were unaffected by the West. In phase two, reforming Muslim rulers established Western style military and professional schools. In phase three, major reforms of traditional institutions developed with the formalisation of how the transmission of religious knowledge took place and this led to many adopting a modern university model. Phase four is represented by the unification and expansion of the college system by new independent states. In phase five, a renewed interest in educational reforms from a traditionalist madrasah approach is noted. The madrasah of this research is the quintessence of a traditionalist approach which reflects institutions that remained firm in their practice through political change.

1.2.1. *Phase One: The Traditionalist Madrasah*

Before the Western influence, madrasahs imparted knowledge by a chain of transmission and the institution formed around this teaching and learning process and the life of the madrasah often extended into the home, mosque and other informal meeting places. The focus was on the process of memorisation, reading and writing of the Qur'an. Often there were no clear central administration of the madrasah and the main purpose was to help develop, shape and homogenise religious authority and knowledge through standard religious texts and collections. The main subjects taught were Qur'anic revelation, *hadith*, jurisprudence, theology, Arabic grammar and logic. Other ancillary subjects such as astronomy, medicine, arithmetic, philosophy and poetry were also taught in the

¹⁵Sufism is the mysticism of Islam. It is Islam's inner dimension, described as the *Science of the Heart* (Netton, 1992).