

Original Research



An investigation of the adult education method in Imam Sadiq's (AS) School: a content analysis of hadith of Unwan al-Basri

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Abstract

Background: Education plays an essential role in all aspects of life. It is particularly important in religious affairs. History shows that religious leaders utilized different methods to teach. In Islam, the Holy Prophet and the infallible Imams, especially Imam Baqir (AS) and Imam Sadiq (AS), considered spiritual guidance as part of education and always accentuated and attempted to teach practically through their behavior and speech. Islamic teachings have to a large extent reported religious leaders teaching methods. One of the hadiths that focuses on adult education is Hadith of Unwan al-Basri. In this hadith, Unwan al-Basri, aged 94, reports Imam Sadiq's (AS) teaching method. The current study aimed to investigate the adult education method in Imam Sadiq (A.S) School.

Methods: The Hadith of Unwan al-Basri was investigated through thematic analysis. The basic concepts were first obtained using the data coding process. The basic concepts were then reduced and categorized into sub-themes and themes.

Results: The findings showed that the analysis resulted in seventy basic concepts which were reduced into nineteen sub-themes categorized into four themes: characteristics of the teacher, characteristics of the learner, characteristics of the educational environment, and the educational content.

Conclusion: One of the most important elements in Imam Sadiq's (AS) teaching method was his emphasis on teaching both practically and theoretically.

Introduction

Education means to teach someone and learning refers to acquiring knowledge. Islam is a pioneer in educating and training. Teaching and acquiring are considered the center of the individual and social programs of this Divine school. The first verses revealed to the Prophet expressed the value of pen and teaching knowledge. These verses indicate the cultural policy of the Islamic world from the beginning. Qur'anic verses introduce teaching knowledge and training the human soul as the most important goals of sending prophets. Qur'an's repeated orders to think, reason, educate, and learn and the teachings of the prophets that invited people to accept Islam, as well as necessities of the Muslims' social life caused an evolution in teaching and learning to the extent that a large part of Islamic teachings has been dedicated to the teaching contents of eminent religious leaders.

On the other hand, studying Islamic teachings to discover and elicit teaching methods can be one of the

important research topics. The infallible Imams spent their lives teaching and training people. The glorious history of Shi'ism confirms this claim. The graduates and the trainees of the Imams' Schools, particularly Imam Baqir (AS) and Imam Sadiq (AS), were scholars who scientifically and spiritually kept guiding people in both urban and rural areas.

One hadith which can be a good source in investigating the teaching methods of the infallible Imams is the Hadith of Unwan al-Basri. What is interesting about al-Basri is that at the age of 94, he was still acquiring knowledge. In this hadith, in response to al-Basri's question about the truth of servitude, Imam Sadiq (AS) discussed valuable points by which one can elicit Imam's method of educating the adults. Thus, the current study mainly aimed to investigate Imam Sadiq's (AS) methods in educating the adults. To this end, the researcher analyzed the hadith of Unwan al-Basri using the content analysis method.

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The importance of the Hadith of Unwan al-Basri

The hadith of Unwan al-Basri is considered critical in terms of both quantity and quality. It is very brief, yet very rich and deep. The hadith is a report about Unwan al-Basri's meetings with Imam Sadiq (AS). In their last meeting, Unwan al-Basri asked about the truth of servitude. Imam responded to him comprehensively. It is known that late Ayatollah Mirza Sayyid Ali Tabatabai, also known as Allamah Qazi, had advised his scholars to read this hadith at least once a week. In this regard, Allamah Tehrani writes:

Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Qazi instructed his scholars and followers of the spiritual/mystical journey towards God to write the hadith of Unwan al-Basri and act accordingly to fight *Nafs al-'Ammārah* (the commanding soul) and the passions of the Soul. That is, he recommended them to act according to this hadith. He also stated: "You should keep it in your pockets and read it once or twice a week. This hadith is critical, and it contains comprehensive points about the quality of interaction and privacy, the quality and quantity of food, quality of acquiring knowledge, the quality and the quantity of tolerance and patience against the words of those who *gossip, and, ultimately*, the status of servitude, submission, satisfaction, and reaching the high level of mysticism and the peak of monotheism." Thus, he did not accept the scholars who did not adhere to the hadith.¹

The source of the hadith of Unwan al-Basri

Late Allamah Majlisi stated: "I have seen this hadith in my handwriting of Sheikh Baha'i: Sheikh Shams al-Din bin Makki has related: From the handwritten notes of late Sheikh Ahmad Farahani, I narrated from Unwan al-Basri aged 94".² Other scholars also have quoted this hadith (e.g., Hurr Ameli,³ Haji Nuri,⁴ Tabarsi,⁵ Shahid Thani,⁶ and Bahrani Isfahani⁷).

Materials and Methods

The current descriptive study aimed to investigate the adult education method in Imam Sadiq's (AS) School, based on the hadith of Unwan al-Basri. To investigate the content of the hadith of Unwan al-Basri, its Persian translation was first divided into three parts: introduction, Unwan's question about the truth of servitude, and Imam's ethical advice. We then used thematic analysis to collect and analyze the data in six steps as follows: 1) To become familiar and provide an orientation to the entire data set,

repeated and active reading through the hadith of Unwan al-Basri was performed. 2) To generate initial codes, which is the most basic meaningful segment or element of the data, a coding data process was performed. We attempted to outline the codes not overlapping with other codes obtained from the entire data set. 3) Through the process of theme identification, an active and interpretive function was performed. In other words, we constructed the main themes (and the sub-themes) through analyzing, combining, and comparing the codes related to one another. To create and organize themes, including main and sub-themes, any association among the codes and the themes were taken into account. 4) In this step of the thematic analysis, we repeatedly considered the coded data within each theme to ensure proper fit in terms of adequacy and coherency in supporting data and the corresponding theme and distinct enough to merit separation. Furthermore, any re-sorted and modification of the coded data and themes were performed, so that we were confident that the theme and sub-theme organization adequately covered all of the coded data for final analysis. 5) To create a definition and brief description of each theme, they were reviewed once more to make sure that were brief and properly descriptive enough theme to provide unique insights. Coding, creating sub-themes and themes, and any modification of the data process were performed using MAXQDA 10 software. 6) Finally, a description of the findings of the current study including the codes, sub-themes, and themes was performed by providing some tables, followed by the discussion section to broaden the analysis and any implication of the findings.⁸ All the stages of the study were conducted by the researchers and an expert. To get the best results, the basic concepts and the documents were tabulated, an example of which is presented in Table 1.

Regarding the accuracy of the research method, it should be mentioned that this study was conducted in a relatively long time since the coding stages were reviewed several times. In addition, to ensure the reliability of the analysis, they were conducted by two researchers and one expert.

Results

Data collection and analysis through the thematic analysis of the hadith of Unwan al-Basri resulted in seventy basic concepts all of which related to the adult education method in Imam Sadiq's (AS) school. At this stage, no repetitive

Table 1. An example of the basic concepts and the documents

Basic concept	Document
Knowledge is unlearnable	O Abu Abdallah, knowledge is not acquired through learning
Knowledge is the light	It is a light that illuminates in the heart of one who wants God to guide him.
God gives knowledge to whomever he wants	In the heart of one who wants God to guide him.
Acquiring knowledge depends on servitude	Therefore, if you want knowledge, first seek out true servitude (to God) within yourself.
Acquiring knowledge depends on acting	knowledge by utilizing it

concept was found among them, therefore, they were recorded as the basic concepts. By repetitive analysis of the basic concepts, the similar concepts were categorized into one group which resulted in nineteen sub-themes each of which presented a suitable semantic coverage for the basic concepts. A set of careful analyses of the sub-themes to categorize and integrate the common features resulted in four themes. The final result of the analysis was the reduction of the basic concepts into nineteen sub-themes and four themes all of which were listed under the general title of "Imam Sadiq's (AS) method of educating the adults". The obtained main themes included: characteristics of the teacher, characteristics of the learner, characteristics of the educational environment, and the educational content (see Tables 2 and 3).

The themes obtained from the Hadith of Unwan al-Basri characteristics of Imam Sadiq (AS) (Teacher)

One of the main parts of this hadith is the characteristics of Imam Sadiq (AS). The hadith of Unwan al-Basri contains at least six characteristics of Imam, including principles of training, courtesy, educational principles, time management, spirituality, and Imam's problems.

Imam's principles of training

Imam's principles of training were categorized under six basic concepts, which are as follows:

Rejection of Unwan by Imam: Unwan al-Basri met Imam Sadiq (As) several times. At first, Imam rejected visiting him.

The comprehensiveness of his ethical advice: in giving advice, Imam did not address a specific person, rather he declared that he addresses all the truth seekers.

Imam's pray for Unwan al-Basri: Another principle

of training was Imam's pray for Unwan al-Basri. Imam prayed for his success.

Imam's pray for all those striving on the path to God: Imam Sadiq (As) prayed not only for Unwan al-Basri but also for all the seekers of the guidance: "peace be on him who follows the guidance".

Courtesy

Another characteristic of Imam Sadiq (AS) was his Courtesies some which have been reflected in the hadith of Unwan al-Basri, which include:

Imam's returning greetings: Imam returned Unwan al-Basri's greetings as required by the Islamic courtesy.

Avoding keeping people waiting: Imam did not keep Unwan al-Basri waiting for long. As soon as Imam got informed that someone wanted to visit him, he shortened his prayer schedule and received him.

Inviting Unwan al-Basri to have a seat: Imam invited his newly-arrived guest to have a seat and not to keep standing.

Asking Unwan al-Basri's teknonym (kunya): To begin the conversation, Imam asked Unwan al-Basri his teknonym (kunya).

Table 2. The themes, the number of sub-themes and the basic concepts

Themes	Number of the sub-themes	Number of the basic concepts
Characteristics of the teacher	6	17
Characteristics of the learner	6	18
Characteristics of the educational environment	1	2
The educational content	6	34
Total	19	71

Table 3. Themes, sub-themes, and basic concepts

Theme	Sub-theme	Basic concept
characteristics of the teacher	Imam's principles of training	Rejection of Unwan by Imam
		The comprehensiveness of his ethical advice
		Imam's praying for Unwan al-Basri
		Imam's praying for all striving on the path to God
	Courtesy	Imam's returning greetings
		Not keeping people waiting
		Inviting Unwan al-Basri to have a seat
	Educational principles	Asking Unwan al-Basri's teknonym (kunya)
		Using people's teknonym (kunya) in conversation
	Time management	Problem-based education
Imam's order to keep in mind his advice		
Instructing not to take advice lightly		
Spirituality	Sensitivity to the moments	
	Full-time occupation	
Imam's troubles	Constant remembrance of God	
	Being busy praying	
		Being a man much sought after

		Feeling grief and soliloquy
		Unwan al-Basri's prayer in the mosque of the Holy Prophet
	Devotion to Imam	Not attending Malik b. Anas's study circles
		Intention to revisit Imam
		Rejoicing by Imam's prayer
		Preparing to receive Imam's advice
		Being trained by Malik ibn Anas
		Asking about the truth of the servitude and asking for advice
characteristics of the learner	Striving to gain knowledge	Knowledge as something granted by God
		Praying for gaining knowledge
	Courtesy	Asking for permission to enter
		Greeting to Imam
	Being Sunni	Being Malik ibn Anas's disciple
		Equal status of Imam Sadiq (AS) and Malik ibn Anas
	Being devotee	Participating in congregational prayers even in grief
		Pilgriming and <i>invocation</i> to solve problems
	Being elderly	Being elderly
characteristics of the educational environment	Imam's house as the place of education	Imam's house as a place to acquire knowledge
		Imam and Unwan al-Basri's conversation at Imam's house
		1. unlearnability of the knowledge
		2. To gain Knowledge as a light
	The truth of the knowledge	3. Gaining knowledge on God's will
		4. Knowledge dependence on servitude
		5. Knowledge dependence on action
		6. Understanding by asking God
		7. No right to ownership
	The truth of servitude	8. Observing what God has commanded and refraining from what He has forbidden
		9. Not to make plans for oneself
		10. Giving in the way of God easily
		11. No time no showoff and useless debates
		12. Triviality of this world
		13. Abandoning amassing possessions
	Benefits of servitude	14. Not demanding fame and status
		15. Abandoning the rivalry
		16. Not wasting one's time on futile things
		17. Abode of the Hereafter granted to those not exalting themselves in the earth nor make mischief
the educational content		18. Good outcome for those who are God-conscious
		19. Triviality of the world, Satan, and people
		20. Not to eat that which one has an appetite for
		21. Avoid eating unless one is hungry
	Ethical advice about eating	22. To begin in the Name of Allah
		23. To eat lawful (<i>Halal</i>) food
		24. Avoid overeating
		25. To divide one's stomach into three parts
		26. To avoid argument
	Ethical advice about clemency	27. To pray for the insulters
		28. To return harsh treatment with benevolence
		29. To Ask the scholars
		30. To ask for understanding
	Ethical advice about gaining knowledge	31. No to Ask to test
		32. To avoid acting upon one's opinion
		33. To exercise precaution
		34. To avoid giving religious decrees and legal opinions

Using people's teknonym (kunya) in conversation: Imam not only used Unwan al-Basri's teknonym (*kunya*) while conversing with him but also asked Unwan to call him by his teknonym (*kunya*), i.e., *Abu Abdallah*, instead of calling him "the noble one".

Educational principles

Problem-oriented education: According to the hadith, Imam's teaching started with Unwan's questions. In fact, Imam selected his teaching content based on Unwan's questions.

Imam's order to keep in mind his advice: Imam strictly instructed Unwan al-Basri to memorize the ethical advice gave him. Imam instructed him to keep it in his mind. Obviously, knowing and memorizing are considered a prelude to acting.

Instructing not to take advice lightly: Obviously, knowing is not enough, knowing is a prelude to acting. Hence, Imam emphasized not only his advice should be memorized but also put into practice.

Time management

In the hadith of Unwan al-Basri, Imam's time management has been mentioned in the following two basic concepts:

Sensitivity to the moments: Imam had a specific plan for his life. He received only those who had already arranged an appointment with him. All the moments and hours of his life were planned. He stated: "I am a man who does not waste his breath".

Full-time occupation: He was occupied by various supplications throughout the day and the night.

Spirituality

Another sub-theme that is related to Imam's characteristics is his spirituality and worship-loving nature which is evident in some parts of the hadith.

Constant remembrance of God: Imam Stated that he was the man who had various supplications during the day and the night.

Being busy praying: When Unwan al-Basri arrived at Imam's house, his servant said Imam was busy praying in his prayer room, which shows that, first, Imam had a special place for praying, and, second, he was praying at that moment.

Imam's troubles

Imam stated that he was a man much sought after, i.e., he was persecuted by the government.

Characteristics of Unwan al-Basri (the learner)

The second theme which was obtained by the analysis of the content of the hadith is related to the characteristics of Unwan al-Basri. This hadith seems to be the only source revealing his characteristics since his name has not been mentioned in other narrative sources. This hadith reveals his six characteristics: devotion to Imam, devotion to

knowledge, courtesy, being Sunni, being a devotee, being old.

Devotion to Imam

Feeling grief and soliloquy: Although a Sunni, Unwan al-Basri realized the fundamental difference between Imam Sadiq (As) and Malik ibn Anas in their very first meeting. Unwan al-Basri felt heartfelt devotion to Imam. When he was rejected by Imam, he resorted to soliloquy and said to himself: "If Imam had perceived any good in me he would not have prevented me from studying under him and learning from him". He thought Imam was right in rejecting him and did not get irritated. Instead of charging Imam with cruelty, Unwan al-Basri attributed his rejection to his incompetence. His grief and soliloquy indicated his devotion to Imam Sadiq (AS). He had been studying under Malik ibn Anas' supervision for several years. However, after visiting Imam a few times, he got so devoted to Imam that he could not bear his rejection no longer.

Unwan al-Basri's pray in the mosque of the Holy Prophet:

When rejected by Imam, Unwan al-Basri felt sad and resorted to soliloquy. Finally, he went to the mosque of the Holy Prophet and prayed two units of prayer at the Rawdah (the area near the Prophet's (s) grave which is considered to be a piece of paradise) and said supplicating God: "O God! I beseech You please make Ja'far's ('a) heart incline towards me, and grant me from his knowledge".

Not attending Malik b. Anas's study circles: Being rejected by Imam, Unwan got too sad and upset to be calmed down. He returned home and did not even attend Malik b. Anas's study circles. This shows that his heart was filled only with love for Ja'far ('a). Visiting Imam, he realized the difference.

Intention to revisit Imam: The fact that one does not get disappointed and does not abandon his desire indicates his strong motivation. Unwan al-Basri could have abandoned his desire to meet Imam as soon as Imam rejected him. However, there is no disappointment in the domain of love and devotion.

Rejoicing by Imam's prayer: When Unwan al-Basri finally managed to revisit Imam, and Imam prayed for him, he got rejoiced and thought to himself: "if I were to take away nothing of benefit from this visit except this prayer (that he had wished for me), it would be more than enough".

Preparing to receive Imam's advice: when Imam asked Unwan al-Basri to empty his heart to receive his advice, Unwan al-Basri immediately did so.

Striving to gain knowledge:

Being trained by Malik ibn Anas: Unwan al-Basri stated that he had been studying under Malik ibn Anas' supervision for several years.

Asking about the truth of servitude and asking for advice: Unwan al-Basri asked Imam two important issues.

First. He asked about the truth of servitude and also asked Imam to give him some advice.

Knowledge as something granted by God: Unwan al-Basri asked God to grant him benefit from Imam's knowledge. This indicated Unwan al-Basri's belief in monotheism, on the one hand, and his idea about the status of knowledge, on the other hand.

Praying for gaining knowledge: Unwan al-Basri asked God to give him benefit from Imam's knowledge.

Courtesy:

Asking for permission to enter: Unwan al-Basri was very polite and didn't enter Imam's house without permission.

Greeting Imam: Unwan al-Basri greeted Imam as soon as he entered Imam's house which is in accordance with Islamic etiquette.

Being Sunni

Being Malik ibn Anas's disciple: From Unwan al-Basri's words at the beginning of the hadith, it was understood that he was Sunni. Unwan al-Basri had studied in Malik ibn Anas's school for several years. Malik ibn Anas is one of the four major Sunni Imams. His followers are called Maliki.⁹

Equal status of Imam Sadiq (AS) and Malik ibn Anas: Unwan al-Basri considered Imam Sadiq (AS) in the same rank as Malik ibn Anas, at least at their first meeting. He stated that he was interested in learning from Imam Sadiq (AS) just as "I had been learning from Malik". Putting Imam Sadiq (AS) and Malik ibn Anas in the same rank indicated that Unwan denied Imam's spiritual rank and demoted him to the status of someone like Malik ibn Anas.

being a devotee

According to the content of the hadith, it can be concluded that Unwan al-Basri was a devout person.

Participating in congregational prayers even in grief: When Imam reject receiving Unwan al-Basri and asked him not to disturb him, he returned home while was sad and upset, and did not leave his house except to attend congregational prayers. He knew that it was not permissible to abandon the prayer without any justifiable excuse. *His sadness was not a justifiable excuse to avoid participating in the Muslims' congregation.* This indicated his devotion to religious issues.

Pilgriming and invocation to solve problems: To solve his problem, Unwan al-Basri went to the mosque of the Holy Prophet (s) and prayed at the *Rawdhah* (the area near the Prophet's grave) and asked God to solve his problem. Invocation and pilgrimage to the grave of the prophet are other indications of his spiritual devotion.

Being elderly

It can be inferred from the hadith that Unwan al-Basri was interested in acquiring knowledge. Although he was ninety-four, he did not think that he did not need to gain

knowledge. Given that Imam Sadiq (AS) was about 60 at that time, Unwan al-Basri was about 30 years older than he. However, this did not affect his interest in gaining knowledge.

Characteristics of the educational environment

Imam's house as the place of education

Imam's house as a place to acquire knowledge: According to the hadith, Imam Sadiq (AS) taught his scholars at his house. At the beginning of the hadith, Unwan al-Basri stated: "when Ja'far al-Sadiq (AS) came to Madinah, I went to visit him and was interested in learning from him just as I had been learning from Malik". As he stated later "I made my way to Ja'far's (AS) house", it was understood that Imam taught at his own house.

Imam and Unwan al-Basri's conversation at Imam's house: As Imam Sadiq (AS) and Unwan al-Basri's conversation occurred at Imam's house, it was evident that Imam taught at his house.

Educational content

The educational content is the essence of the hadith of Unwan al-Basri. When Unwan al-Basri was finally received by Imam, he asked Imam some questions which form the educational content of this hadith. The educational content theme includes the following sub-themes: the truth of the knowledge, the truth of servitude, benefits of servitude, ethical advice about eating, ethical advice about clemency, and gaining knowledge.

The truth of the knowledge

Unwan al-Basri said to Imam: "I asked God to grant me benefit from your knowledge". However, Imam points out that: "knowledge is not acquired through learning", and presented a different view of knowledge which can be seen in the following concepts.

Unlearnability of the knowledge: According to the hadith of Unwan al-Basri, knowledge is not acquired through learning and cannot be gained by studying.

Knowledge as a light: Knowledge is the Divine light.

To Gain knowledge by God's will: God gives knowledge to whomever he wants

Knowledge dependence on servitude: There is an obvious relationship between knowledge and servitude. In other words, if you want knowledge, first seek out true servitude (to Allah) within yourself.

Knowledge dependence on acting upon it: Imam said to Unwan al-Basri: "seek knowledge according to its use (i.e, what you can act upon)". Therefore, there are some prerequisites to acquiring knowledge, one of which is acting upon it.

Understanding by asking God: One also must ask God to make him understand, therefore, "He'll make you understand".

The truth of servitude

Another subtheme obtained from the basic concepts is the truth of servitude.

No right to ownership: The first phase of servitude is that the true servant does not consider anything as his possession. All wealth verily belongs to God, and servant disposes of it as God commands them to.

Observing what God has commanded and refraining from what He has forbidden: The servant acts based on God's commands and refrains from what he has forbidden.

Not to make plans for oneself: the servant does not make plans for themselves, i.e., leaves all the affairs and his future to God.

Benefits of servitude:

In another part of the hadith, benefits of the servitude were mentioned.

Giving in the way of God easily: When the servant does not consider any of the wealth at his disposal as his own, giving from it in the way of God becomes easy for him.

No time no showoff and useless debates: When the servant occupies himself with observing God's commands and refraining from what He has forbidden, he no longer has time for showing off and useless debates with people.

The triviality of this world: When the servant entrusts all his plans to the Master Planner, the tribulations of this world become insignificant in his eyes.

To abandon amassing possessions: Servant does not collect wealth. The true servant does not seek after worldly gains to amass possessions.

Not to demand fame and status: One of the benefits of servitude is that the true servant avoids fame and status.

Abandoning the rivalry: The true servant of God avoids rivalry with others.

Avoiding wasting one's time on futile things: The true servant of God avoids wasting his time on futile things.

Abode of the Hereafter is granted to those not exalting themselves in the earth nor make mischief: God says in the Holy Qur'an: "This is the abode of the Hereafter which We shall grant to those who do not desire to domineer in the earth nor to cause corruption".(28:83)

Good outcome for those who are God-conscious: According to Qur'an: "the outcome will be in favor of the Godway". (28:83)

The triviality of the world, Satan, and people: According to Imam Sadiq (AS), when God grants these three characteristics to a servant, the world (i.e., worldly matters), Satan and people (and their opinions) become insignificant in his eyes.

Ethical advice about eating

Unwan al-Basri asked Imam to give him some advice. Imam advised him on nine issues. Three of them were to do with self-discipline, three to do with clemency towards others, and three to do with knowledge.

Avoid eating that which one has no appetite for As for

the three pieces of advice on self-discipline, the first one was related to eating. Imam advised him not to eat that which "you have no appetite for" since it brings about idiocy and stupidity.

Avoid eating unless one is hungry: One should eat when he feels hungry.

To begin in the Name of Allah: One of the most important eating etiquettes is to begin to eat in the Name of God.

To eat lawful (Halal) food: One should only eat the lawful (Halal) food. Lawful relates to either to the type of the food-i.e., the meat of lawful (Halal) animals- or the way the food is obtained- i.e., through lawful (halal) income.

Avoid overeating: One should not overeat. It has been strictly forbidden. For example, Imam Sadiq (As) stated: "There is no vessel that man fills worse than his own stomach".

To divide one's stomach into three parts: Imam said to Unwan al-Basri: "if you must fill your stomach, then allow one-third of it for food, another third for drink, and keep the last third for air".

Ethical advice about clemency

To avoid argument: One important aspect of clemency is to avoid arguing with others, particularly the ignorant ones.

To pray for the insulters: That some can pray for those who insult him indicates his clemency.

To return harsh treatment with benevolence: Another piece of ethical advice regarding clemency is to be benevolent toward one's enemies and the ignorant ones.

Ethical advice about gaining knowledge

To ask the scholars: Imam's third advice to Unwan al-Basri was related to acquiring knowledge. He first recommended him "to ask the scholars who you are ignorant of". It is said that better to ask the way than go astray. Thus, asking scholars is the most rational way of understanding.

To ask for understanding: Asking has its own rituals. One must ask to find the truth and understand that which he is ignorant of: "do not ask them obnoxiously"

No to Ask to test: It is not a good idea to ask questions to test someone whose action is clear. If it is obvious that someone is wise, there is no need to test him. If there is any doubt about wisdom, it seems rational to ask questions to test his wisdom.

To avoid acting upon one's opinion: Another important point regarding acquiring knowledge is that one should not act based on his own opinion about something. Of course, as long as one's personal opinion is not based on a reliable source, such as Qur'an and *Etrat (holy Prophet's infallible household)* and its authenticity has not been approved, there is no difference between one's or the other's opinion.

To exercise precaution: Precaution is a way of salvation. Exercise precaution in all things wherever possible. One may not have access to scholars to ask that which he is

ignorant of. What should he do? Imam Sadiq (As) advised Unwan al-Basri to exercise precaution in such a situation.

To avoid giving religious decrees and legal opinions: Imam Sadiq (As) advised Unwan al-Basri to avoid giving religious decrees and legal opinions about whatever he is not completely aware of. One of the serious problems of acquiring knowledge is false pride. It happens when one does not have the essential capacity for gaining knowledge. Such a person expresses his pride by giving baseless religious decrees and legal opinions.

Discussion

The comprehensiveness of education

One of the important points in education is the comprehensiveness of the content. The harm of incomplete knowledge is not less than ignorance, not to say more than that. It is essential to teach doctrinal, moral, jurisprudential issues. According to the Holy Prophet, knowledge is limited to “firm sign”, “just duty”, and “established practice”¹⁰ which have been interpreted as theology, ethics, and jurisprudence.¹¹

The hadith of Unwan al-Basri is brief, yet comprehensive. In this hadith, Imam Sadiq (As) talked not only about ethics, but also about theology, and jurisprudence. Similarly, he raised not only spiritual and devotional issues but also worldly subjects.

Islam is basically a universal religion that covers all the doctrinal, moral, jurisprudential issues, and strictly avoids any discrimination between various teachings. Qur’an criticizes the Jewish scholars for accepting some of the teachings of *Torah*, while rejecting others (4:150). Considering some teachings and ignoring some others will cause irreparable harm to the man.

The comprehensiveness of the hadith of Unwan al-Basri is also important due to its emphasis on moderation. Imam Sadiq (As) instructed al-Basri to behave moderately and avoid extremism. Imam also showed the moderation path. Qur’an calls Muslims as “a middle nation” and considers Islam as the “middle and moderated religion” (2:143).

In interpreting the Mediocrity of Islam, late Allameh Tabataba’i stated: “the word ‘middle’ means to take the central point of something and not to go to either side of it. Compared to the People of the Book and the polytheists, the Nation of Islam is the middle nation. A group of people, like the polytheists and dualists, takes merely the materialistic aspect. They want nothing but the worldly life and enjoy the materialistic aspect of life, aim to perfect the worldly pleasures. They do not think of the doomsday and the possibility of the resurrection. They do not even pay the slightest attention to the spiritual virtues. Yet, another group, like the Christians, focus only on the spiritual aspect and invite people to leave the worldly life and follow a *monastic* life. However, God has made the nation of Islam a middle nation- i.e., has sent Muslims a religion that guides them to moderation, a path in which there is no extreme, rather it equally strengthens both

worldly and spiritual life. In fact, Islam focuses on both worldly and spiritual virtues.¹² This feature is one of the important advantages of Islamic educational system. In other educational schools, the epistemology and ontology have been transformed due to the denial of the spiritual aspect of the world and the human. In most contemporary schools, the existence is viewed as equivalence to the matter, and any abstraction has been denied. Similarly, in epistemological dimension, the religious and spiritual affairs are denied and the sense-based experiences and logic are considered as the only valid knowledge.¹³ Naturally, such attitudes in ontology and epistemology will make a large part of the sciences and the knowledge needed by the man invalid, and accordingly, the universality of the educational content will be affected.

In fact, there is no diversity and multiplicity in the three means of revelation, intellect and sensory experience, and the perceptions and the approaches to prove them. The diversities are related to the humans’ understanding about these three categories (revelations, intellects, and experiences). The western intellect clumsily and sometimes biasedly rejected the true revelation which has no manifestation other than Muhammad’s (PBUH) pure Islam and thought that it will gain the essence of happiness in all the scientific and practical areas by conquering all the visible and invisible aspects of the nature by means of the intellect and experience. However, little did it know that by denying the religion and spirituality, it will not be able to solve many of the man’s real needs.

Practicality of the education

Unwan al-Basri asked Imam two important issues. First, he asked about the truth of the servitude and also asked Imam to give him some advice. In both cases, Imam gave detailed, practical answers. First, he related the truth of servitude to three strands: 1. in all that God has placed at his disposal, the servant does not consider any of it his possession; 2. the servant does not make plans for himself; 3. the servant occupies himself solely with observing what God has commanded and refraining from that which He has forbidden. Then, Imam went on explaining the benefits of the three given strands in a detailed and practical way:

Therefore, when the servant does not consider any of the wealth at his disposal as his own, giving from it in the way of God becomes easy for him. And when the servant entrusts all his plans to the Master Planner, the tribulations of this world become insignificant in his eyes. And when the servant occupies himself with observing God’s commands and refraining from what He has forbidden, he no longer has time for showing off and useless debates with people.

Unwan al-Basri asked Imam to give him some advice, Imam gave him some practical advice and explained them in details: three pieces of advice on self-discipline, three on clemency towards others, and three on knowledge. In each case, Imam presented a tangible explanation.

Problem-oriented education

One of the most common teaching methods is to question and answer. To show the importance of questioning and answering, Imam Sadiq (As) states: "Verily, knowledge is a lock and its key is the question".¹⁴ In another hadith, Imam Sadiq (As) states: "one of the causes of the people's death is that they are not questioners".¹⁵

By analyzing Qur'an, one finds out that the phrase "They question you about" ("Ya's'lunaka 'an ...") has been repeated thirteen times in Qur'an, about half of which occurs in *al-Baqarah* chapter (i.e., 2: 189,215, 217, 219, 220, and 222). The companions asked the Holy Prophet different questions about various issues, and he answered them by the Divine command and Inspiration. Most of the narrative teachings are considered as the answers to the questions of the companions of the Infallibles such that few hadiths can be found that don't serve as answers to the questions.

Direct and indirect training

Indirect and practical training is the one in which the teacher trains the learners by his behavior and manner. This kind of training is much more effective than direct and formal teaching. It is accentuated in many teachings that a true scholar is the one whose behavior confirms his speech.¹⁶ The infallible Imams have instructed their followers to preach Shi'ism by their actions, not through speech.¹⁷ In one hadith, Imam Ali (As) states: "whoever considers himself as Imam must first attempt to educate himself before training other people. And he must first teach by his behavior, then by his speech".¹⁸

According to the hadith of Unwan al-Basri, it can be concluded that it is necessary to combine practical teaching with theoretical teaching. Although the main point of the hadith of Unwan al-Basri is the educational content and the questioning and answering that occurred between Unwan al-Basri and Imam Sadiq (As), it was full of practical lessons which Imam taught through his behavior towards Unwan al-Basri, such as self-discipline, being hopeful while in trouble, seizing the opportunity, humility, courtesy, respect, patience, honest, etc.

Main characteristics of adult education

One of the important points in the hadith of Unwan al-Basri is al-Basri's great devotion to learning. Adult education is different from child and teenager education. Adults are more responsible, while children are more playful. Therefore, in adult education, the teacher can make better use of time.

The place of courtesy in education and training

Courtesy is one of the essential elements of educating and training. In addition to the hadith of Unwan al-Basri which presents the courtesy of the teacher and learner, the story of Moses *Kalim Allāh* (He who spoke to God) and *Khiḍr* reflects this issue very beautifully. Although Moses

was one of the 'Ulu al-'Azm (Those of the Perseverance and Strong Will) Prophets and the one to whom *Torah* was revealed, he was very polite and courteous towards the one who wanted to teach him!

From the very beginning of the journey until the end, Moses spoke politely and with humility. For example, he did not express his request to accompany him in the form of a command, rather asked him: "May I follow you?" Second, he did not consider companionship as interaction or fellowship, rather interpreted it as obedience. Third, he did not make his obedience conditional on training. He did not say: "I will obey you provided that you teach me", instead he said: "I follow you so that you may teach me". Fourth, Moses formally called himself his disciple. Fifth, Moses attributed *Khiḍr*'s knowledge to an unknown source and not to *Khiḍr* himself, saying: "from what you have been taught", not "what you know". Sixth, Moses praised his knowledge as the word "growth", meaning your knowledge is the growth. Seventh, he considered whatever *Khiḍr* had taught him as part of his knowledge, not all of *Khiḍr*'s knowledge: "teach me part of what you have been taught". Eighth, he called *Khiḍr*'s instructions his orders, and whenever he opposed them, he called himself rebellious and disobedient. Thus, he increased his master's rank. Ninth, he did not make an explicit promise. He did not say "I will do this or that", rather he said: "God willing, you will soon find me doing this or that". Similarly, *Khiḍr* behaved respectfully and did not reject him explicitly. Instead, he implicitly told him "you can not bear to see what I do". Second, when Moses promised not to disobey him, *Khiḍr* did not make this conditional, rather allowed Moses to follow him. Third, *Khiḍr* did not forbid him to ask questions, but said: "if you decided to follow me, you should not ask any questions". In fact, it was a requirement for such a journey.¹⁹

The effect of Characteristics of the learner on the teaching

One of the important messages of the hadith is that characteristics of the learner, such as gender, religion, and age, has no effect on the teaching. According to the hadith, Unwan al-Basri was Sunni and followed Malik ibn Anas, but it did not prevent Imam from teaching him. In fact, Imam Sadiq (AS) willingly taught him. Although Imam Sadiq (AS) rejected him at the beginning, it was probably to motivate Unwan al-Basri and to make him more prepared.

In his practical life, Imam Sadiq (AS) has taught and argued with different people with various beliefs, religions, and ideologies. According to Islam, one's gender has no effect on his education. It is necessary for both men and women to learn. In the Sirah Ma'suman software, the names of thirty-nine women have been mentioned, who have narrated hadiths from Imam Sadiq (AS).²⁰ One of the principles of Islam is that different people- men, women, children, teenagers, the young, the elder- regardless of their religion, are allowed to be educated, instances of

which can be found in Imam Sadiq's life.²¹

Generality of ethical advice

Imam Sadiq's (AS) ethical advice to Unwan al-Basri is general. Imam stated: "Know that they are my advice especially to those who strive on the path to God". It seems that Imam had two expectations from Unwan al-Basri: first, since Unwan al-Basri was the main addressee of this hadith, therefore, he had to take Imam's advice seriously and act upon it. Second, Imam expected him not to be the first and last receiver of the advice, and to transfer it to others.

On the other hand, the generality of ethical advice relates to contingent ethics. In ethical issues, the advice the teacher gives may hold only for the specific situation of the learner and be contingent. Obviously, not every piece of advice holds in all situations. However, there are some general ones which are necessary.

Five areas of self-development

In some hadiths,²² including the hadith of Unwan al-Basri, some stages are presented for self-development. For example, one should gain ethical virtues through self-development and self-management: silence, hunger, staying up, solitude, constant remembrance of God. Inspired by the themes of the hadiths, a poem considers the following conditions to reach perfection: silence, hunger, staying up, solitude, constant remembrance of God/ make perfect every incomplete person in the world.

Conclusion

In this study, the hadith of Unwan al-Basri, Imam Sadiq's (AS) teaching method of the adult learners, was investigated. Obtaining the basic concepts and further analysis, four themes were obtained, including characteristics of the teacher, characteristics of the learner, characteristics of the educational environment, and the educational content.

Regarding the characteristics of the teacher, it was found that courtesy, time management, respecting authorities, providing useful, practical responses were the salient characteristics of Imam Sadiq (AS). According to the hadith, among the prominent characteristics of Unwan al-Basri as a learner included courtesy, being a devotee, Sunni and elderly, striving to gain knowledge, devoted to the spiritual characteristic of Imam Sadiq (AS). Moreover, it was found that Imam Sadiq (AS) used his own house as an educational environment.

Regarding the last theme, i.e., educational content, the following results were obtained: Unwan al-Basri asked Imam Sadiq (AS) about the truth of servitude. Unwan al-Basri was a devoted man. But Imam presented servitude as something more delicate and detailed than he adhered to. For Unwan al-Basri, servitude meant to observe the Shari'a, the manifestation of which was to participate in congregational prayers. He was right to some extent. But

the requirement of servitude is more than that. According to Imam, the truth of servitude has three strands, one of which refers to performing the obligatory duties and refraining from everything that has been forbidden by God. The other two strands- i.e., the servant does not consider anything as his possession, and he does not make plans for himself, rather leaves it to God- are completely internal. That two strands out of three are internal indicates the importance of the issues related to the soul and the heart. In another part of the hadith, Imam gave some ethical and mystical pieces of advice which are critical in achieving bliss and happiness.

Imam advised Unwan al-Basri on nine brief and simple issues, yet crucial. It may be thought that the spiritual journey towards God requires special remembrance of God and austerity and is very difficult. However, by giving some simple advice, Imam rejected this misconception. First, Imam gave some advice about the quality and quantity of eating. This mysticism is not possible without observing the lawful (halal) and unlawful (haram), constructive interaction with the enemies, and the ignorant ones. The clemency of the man is approved when someone insults him, but he never utters a word of insult, and returns it with good counsel and pray for him. The mysticism and spiritual journey approved by Imam Sadiq (AS) can only be achieved through jurisprudence, Shari'a, and acting upon the religious laws, and based on one's personal opinion. In fact. The Tariqa which Imam Sadiq (As) showed to Unwan al-Basri and all those striving on the path to God is not apart from Shari'a. Studying concepts such as lawful (halal) food, and acting cautiously invalidated the separation between Shari'a and Tariqa. As a result of this mysticism, the man never gets arrogant because of his knowledge and does not consider himself different from others.

Ethical approval

Since this study is in the field of humanities and content analysis of one written text (hadith), and there is no patient or human subject participating in the study, we felt that ethical consideration is not applicable.

Competing interests

According to the authors, this article has no conflict of interest and was not funded by any department or organization.

Author contributions

AS: The idea, study design, collecting and analyzing the acquired data, and final draft of the manuscript. MMER: Assistance in designing, conducting the study, analyzing the acquired data, and preparing the first draft.

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