

COERCION AS A METHOD OF EDUCATING FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF MODERN EDUCATION AND ISLAM

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Abstract: The use of coercion in moral education and its conflict with moral independence is an important issue in modern education that originated from the Enlightenment period. When compared with Western education, Islamic teachings, especially in the field of moral education, seems at first glance that the use of the coercion method is not rebutted. This may lead some people to conclude that Islam has accepted the use of coercion, or agrees with it, at least, in some cases. This article compares the issue of using coercion as a moral educational method in both modern education and Islam. It argues that Islamic education promotes both the concept of ‘persuasion’ and ‘caring’ and establishes its rules in a way that are far from coercion. However, the extent to which Muslims support the general principle of prohibition of coercion would depend on the interpretations that different Islamic traditions have provided for some Islamic statements, including the recommendation for the use of coercion in worship.

Keywords: Coercion, Education Method, Modern Education, Islam.

1. Introduction

Among the fundamental values of modern education is moral independence. Modern education refers to the system of education that is based on the values and elements of modernity (Coulby & Jones, 1996). In this system of education, individualism, which is the feature of the Enlightenment, influences the goals of education. In this system of modern education, moral independence is a basic value.

Moral independence has been interpreted as self-regulation, as well as moral autonomy or self-reliance and self-governance (Jackson, 2007). It is the freedom to make decisions in accordance with principles of wisdom (Kant, 2016). Researchers regard this concept as an important educational goal. For example, Piaget (Oesterdiekhoff, 2013) and Kohlberg (1984) consider moral independence as the final goal of moral education. It is the stage at which a person can make choices regardless of the external factors and based on his or her reasoning (Taylor, 2005). For this reason, moral independence has been accepted as a symbol of modern education in most new educational theories (Jalil, Sbeih, Boujettif & Barakat, 2009).

Moral independence is considered not only from the educational point of view but also from the psychological perspective regarded in the list of significant human needs as categorized by Abraham Maslow. He believes that after fulfilling basic needs, human beings face the need for independence (Ozoliņš, 2015). At the top of the pyramid is the deeper and more spiritual needs. In Maslow’s theory, independence flourishes in self-actualization needs which is the highest level of human needs (Greene & Burke, 2007).

Attention to the significant position of moral independence in moral education leads to the goals and methods of ethical education being considered in accordance with this principle. It is clear that the adoption of moral independence as a goal requires the elimination of incompatible methods. One of these methods is coercion which is to force a child and adolescent to conduct moral behaviors.

Coercion in moral education means that the mentor forces the recipient to carry out good behaviors and moral deeds (Eberle, 2011; Hameed et al., 2017; Shehzadi et al., 2020). This action is carried out in the form of a verbal or behavioral command or prohibition. In the former, the instructor orders the recipients, and in the latter, he pushes them virtually and practically. Researchers call the first “coercive threat” and the other “physical coercion” (Klitzman, 2013).

At first glance, when comparing ‘modern’ education with Islam, it would appear that Islam does not reject coercion method in Islamic moral education. The existence of evidence in Islamic sources has led some thinkers to conclude that Islam recommended using coercion to attain education outcomes (see, e.g. Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, 1984 Vol. 1, 119).

However, what exactly is Islam’s position about using this method? The present paper compares the coercion method in Western and Islamic education. The first part of this article reviews and critiques the educational method of coercion among Western scholars, while the second part will explain the Islamic perspective in this regard.

2. The Modern View of Coercion in Education

Despite the view that supports using coercion in education such as Hobson who argued that coercion is not accepted in teaching and learning, but it is useful in moral education (Hobson, 1973), there is a negative attitude among the scholars of the modern education about the use of compulsion in education and training. White (1984) elaborates:

“The argument starts from the presumption that any attempt to prevent children from doing what they want to do is *prima facie* morally unjustifiable: children’s liberty, like that of anybody else, ought not to be diminished, unless there are sound moral reasons for doing so.”
(148)

This highlights that the coercion is only permitted in particular situations. John Stuart Mill observes that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others (Mill, 2001). Preventing self-harm is another factor that researchers have identified as permissible coercion (White, 1984). Permission to use coercion in education in the two cases is based on considering what is good for the child and others. In their opinion, some sort of compulsory moral education, for instance, could be justified in this way (Ibid). The concept of the “child’s interest” or the “protection of the rights of others” is the infrastructure that has been accepted among Western scholars for the use of coercion.

The basic tenet of the modern view on coercion is that compulsion cannot be eliminated, and that there are certain cases in which children and adolescents must be compelled. However, this tenet is questionable, because the concepts of the “child’s interest” or the “interests of others”, or the “harm to the child and others”, are ambiguous and capable of adapting to different examples. In contrast, if the negation of coercion has no choice but to permit an exception, that particular permission must not be applicable to other cases and should be precise and uninterpretable. It is also false that coercion cannot be excluded from education. Instead, there are methods that provide compulsory functions without causing damage (Alavi, 2013).

A proper confrontation with the issue of coercion in the field of moral education is that it should be completely rejected - a point that is glossed over in modern education. Confrontation, which generally distances coercion from moral education, proposes a framework that addresses the “child’s interest” or the “protection of the rights of others” in other areas, such as law, and not in the field of moral education.

An alternative to the modern educational perspective about coercion is what Christopher Bobonich terms the platonic method of persuasion (Bobonich, 1991). Plato poses persuasion in the realm of law, but it can be an alternative method in moral education (Lee 2014). The platonic persuasion method refers to persuading using fair contrary to deception, compulsion and force (Bobonich, 1991). Bobonich argues that, contrary to Karl Popper (Popper, 2018), the method of persuasion in Plato cannot contain false methods like lies (Bobonich, 1991). Morrow (1953) explained the Platonic idea as follows:

“The tragedy of Plato, we can see, is not the conflict between noble words and ignoble treacherous intentions. It is the conflict between his desire for the moral health of his fellowmen and the love of reason, critical reason, in human affairs. Plato never renounced either objects of his devotion; but they are not easy to reconcile, and the form of the synthesis them in his later days really means the victory of morality and the suppression of reason.” (244)

Bobonich insists that Plato’s persuasion method is rational and comprises three characteristics. First, thinking about beliefs that are bases for legal or ethical terms and norms and their significance. Second, teaching what they have to should do. Third, containing reasonable and logical reasoning that justifies ethical and legal norms (Bobonich, 1991).

It is helpful to further understand Plato’s persuasion by differentiating strong persuasion and weak persuasion. This is a point that makes it possible to avoid a mistake in the concept of coercion with strong persuasion. Lee (2014) discussed the argument against the use of coercion. According to him, the argument is based on a specific interpretation of independence. If we consider independence as being autonomous, it will refute coercion. He quotes from Scanlon that independence can be regarded in the agent to “makes up his own mind”. In this case, coercion will not necessarily be subject to independence (850). He says:

“Insofar as legal coercion involves coercive threats, rather than physical coercion, it is still up to the agent in question to ‘make up his own mind’ whether he should acquiesce to it, or defy it and risk suffering the threatened sanction.” (Ibid)

In this examination, the two issues are raised mistakenly. When the agent does not have to do, and only finds himself hesitant in the middle of two options, namely his decision and the request of the coercer, this is strong persuasion that only changes in the central consideration of the agent, but should not be considered coercion. Scanlon (as quoted in Lee 2014) says: “A coercer merely changes the considerations which militate for or against a certain course of action; weighing these conflicting considerations is still up to you.” (850)

What Scanlon assumed as compulsion renders a person between the request of the coercer and the other option, and he chooses one based on his decision. Coercion is when a person is forced to perform a particular act.

From the above discussion, we may conclude that coercion is not compatible with individual independence. In moral independence, one acts according to the free command of his reason without being influenced by external factors. The external factors are anything outside the pure judgement of reason. For this reason, many scholars believe coercion does not treat others as human beings, while moral independence and autonomy are to respect the person as a human being (Lee 2014).

3. The Islamic View of Coercion in Education

What is the similarity and distinction between the Islamic perspective on the method of coercion in moral education and the modern Western perspective? The negative view on this method is not foreign to Islam. In fact, this view has been highlighted in Islamic teachings. It is worth noting that the Qur'an has repeatedly emphasized the need to respect freedom of will (2:256; 10:99). Al-Zuhaylī (2001) points out:

“The Qur'an makes every person responsible for what he loves and chooses, believes and works, there is no compulsion in religion, and religion is based on freedom and choice, and this is the basis of directing responsibility for each person in his acts, and everyone will see the consequences of his action and his belief and saying.” (Vol. 3, 2948)

Commenting on the prohibition of coercion, Muntazirī (1988) asserts that there is an Islamic principle on which no human being has authority over others and has no right to oblige or forbids them, unless one whom granted this permit exceptionally and there is no doubt that this permit needs to a clear and categorical reason from the Quran or the Prophet's traditions. This principle is known as the principle of 'lack of authority' or '*ʿaṣl ʿadami wilāyah*'. The result is that coercion and commanding others requires a special reason, and if there is not such a specific reason, we reject coercion on the basis of this general principle (Vol. 1, 28) (Abikar & Mirioglu, 2019; Adeyemi & Adeyemi, 2019; Erlangga, 2019; Faheem & Arnaud, 2020; Gündoğdu, 2019; İhtiyaroğlu, 2019).

The ban on coercion is promoted to parents and teachers in Islamic moral education through traditions that have been quoted from the Prophet (PBUH) regarding the prohibition of scaring and threatening (*al-takhwīf wa ʿl-irʿāb*) where any action that leads to scaring and forcing others is generally banned. Historically, the Islamic form of persuasion and recommendation that was introduced as a substitute for the method of coercion is the well-known tradition of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong (*al-amr bi ʿl-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar*). This tradition was introduced by the Qur'an in the first century and enjoins a Muslim to recommend another to do what is right (*al-maʿrūf*). *Al-Maʿrūf* includes all good (Al-Jurjānī, 1992, p. 54). This Islamic principle suggests behavioral persuasion before it comes to verbal persuasion. At this stage, the Muslim shows his dissatisfaction of bad deeds done by others until the offender rectifies his behavior. This method was common among Muslims such that whenever a Muslim saw another committing an immoral act, they tried to prevent the perpetrators by showing their discomfort and, later, when they decided to persuade others they used the same method (Al-Dimashqī al-Dumyātī, 1997 Vol. 4, 208-209; Basheer et al., 2019).

In this Islamic principle, the next step is to persuade using words. Verbalizing a command does not force a person to compel and obey him. In this case, if the

second person acts, he has done so based on his/her personal decision and desire. Contrary to a group of Muslim jurists who have accepted the wide range of verbal stage, which includes the expression of harsh words and threats (Ibn Qudāmāh al-Maqdisī, 1984 Vol. 1, 647), rude words or threats are not included in this Qur’anic principle. This group of Muslim jurists have not provided a reason to prove their claim. However, in such cases, we have to refer to the general rules and principles of Islamic law, considering the prohibition of scaring and threatening (*al-takhwīf wa’l-ir’āb*). As quoted by Al-Haythamī (1988), the Prophet (PBUH) said: “Everyone who fears another God will scare him on the day of resurrection” (Vol. 6, 254). Also, he narrated that the Prophet said: “Never make anyone worried, because making worried is great oppression” (Ibid). And: “Whoever frightens a believer, God will not save him from the terrors and dreads of the day of judgement” (Ibid). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1210) the great Muslim scholar comments on these narratives:

“The verbal level of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong in Islam, has to be with the kindness and preaching. At this time, the use of threat and violence should be avoided because threats make the people motivated to continue their acts.” (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 1986, p. 54)

Like persuasion, ‘caring’ is also valued in Islam where the guardian cares for the family and is not indifferent to their moral education. The Qur’an says: “O, you believers secure yourselves and your families from the Fire” (66:6). Accordingly, the father has to educate his family members and teach them ethical behavior with his good behaviors. The verse advocates showing an ethical attitude and familiarizing them with correct manners (Ibn al-‘Arabī, 2003.Vol. 4, 1852). In particular, caring is a prerequisite for Muslims to play their social and educational role as responsible (*al-mas’ūl*). The Prophet (PBUH) said that you are responsible for all of you and you need to worry about each other (Ibn al-‘Arabī, 2003. Vol. 1, 451).

With the conditions that have affected social life, and given the threats of modern life, and in particular technology for children and adolescents, the importance of caring in the Islamic educational framework by modelling good behavior has become more significant. The comprehensive application of Islamic teachings in this field assumes that everyone is responsible for others. The parent is not solely responsible, but the scope of moral education is expanded to society. Overall, the Muslims’ positive attitude toward persuasion and care instead of coercion characterized early Muslim education and supported student freedom and initiative (Nawas, 2006; Stewart, 2008). Charlene Tan has quoted the recommendation of four world conferences on Islamic education (1978-1982) to Muslim students as: “think precisely and logically but let their thoughts be governed by their spiritual realization of truth as found in the Qur’an and the Sunnah so that their intelligence is guided in proper channels and does not stray” (Tan, 2014).

Despite the emphasis that Islam attaches to the concept of persuasion and care instead of compulsion and coercion, it is important to note that Islam has not interpreted persuasion in the same sense as Western scholars. Encouraging, enticing, and other cognates do not involve unethical methods such as deception or

lying. Rather, the Islamic concept of persuasion or care accompanies the paradigm of rational and ethical persuasion.

Although Islam generally rebutted the use of the coercion method, not all Muslims have taken the same approach to this general principle. This is due to the fact that there are two tendencies of the advocates of 'limited coercion' and opponents of 'coercion in general'. While Muslims, based on Islamic teachings, should not use coercion in moral education, the extent to which they adhere to the principle depends on their tendencies.

The diversity and multiplicity of the Islamic traditions in societies led to the emergence of rival perspectives on the use of coercion in moral education. On the one hand, there is an Islamic tradition that allows its followers to use coercion to children after the age of seven. This tradition includes certain societies in Iran and other Islamic countries where their madrasas and parents not only accept forcing students and children, but also accept beating and violent behavior (Oveisi et al., 2010). On the other hand, there is another Islamic tradition that rejects the use of coercion in general. An example is the modernists Muslims of some secular countries such as the United States and Europe, who through the Islamic schools promote liberal values such as critical thinking and rationality, and put aside the use of methods that contradict these values. These schools educate their students in ways that, while preserving their religious identity, keep their moral independence and accordingly do not use incompatible methods such as coercion (Dronkers, 2016; Saada & Gross, 2017).

The conflict between the two views on the limited use of compulsion among Islamic traditions is the result of an old debate among Muslims about Islamic ethics. Before addressing Muslim perspectives on this debate, it should be recalled that in the Islamic sources there are instructions on which parents can force their children after the age of seven to perform worship such as prayer. As the Prophet (PBUH) has said: "When your children reach the age of seven, order them to perform the prayer" (Ibn Hanbal, 1991. Vol. 2, 180). Islamic traditions usually described as 'rationalists' include the al-Mu'tazilah and Shi'a generally followed the idea that good and evil are objectives, and that human reason can understand good, evil and moral values. From the 8th century onward, Muslim rationalists such as Abu-al-Huḍail al-'Allāf, Abu 'Ali Muhammad al-Jubbāi, Abu Hashim al-Jubbāi, and 'Abd al-Jabbar believed that ethics is divided into two areas; the area that regulates human relations with society and others in this world, and the area where human relationship with God is regulated. It was argued that in the second domain, religion was the source of moral understanding, and in the first field of reason. Therefore, the commands issued by religion in the second area (the relationship between man and God) cannot be extended to the first (Al-Hanfi, 1988, Vol. 3, 384-393). Charlene Tan has quoted the Ramadan words as follow: "While the Qur'an and the Sunnah are still upheld as sources for norms of behavior for Muslims, their scope is confined to spiritual and moral matters for the individual" (Tan, 2014, p. 333). Therefore, they do not consider religion as the only source of understanding moral values. Independent reason was at the core of the source for their understanding of moral values. They put these two sources together by assigning the worldly part of ethics to human reason, and the other part which deals with the supernatural concepts that are full of mystery, to religion and revelation. Contemporaneous defenders of separation between the two worldly and the

otherworldly parts of ethics, the centrality of reason in the first field, and the impossibility of expanding the commands of the second part to the worldly section, include Muslims such as Mohammed Arkūn, Hasan Hanafī and Abdolkarim Soroush (to read their views see, Dabbagh, 2006). One such Islamic view introduces a part of the ethics that deals with human relationships with society and others, independent of the other part of ethics which deals with the human-God relationships, and hence does not expand the rules and instructions of the second part to the first section (Fakhkhar Toosi, 2019). Regarding the view, forcing prayer is related to the second part of ethics and is not related to the worldly part of ethics, it cannot be concluded that Islam has accepted the use of compulsion in worldly issues. The domain of religious worship is independent of worldly moral education. In contrast to this Islamic tradition, there is another tradition that does not accept such separation between ethics and does not recognize reason as an independent source for understanding ethical values. Accordingly, the goal of ethics is to achieve prosperity in the hereafter. Consequently, this Islamic tradition considers all ethical orders for this purpose. This tradition includes the works of scholars like Al-Shawkānī (1984) and Ibn Taymīyyah (1999) who deal with ethical issues using this approach. Therefore, the statements in the Islamic sources that instruct forcing children to perform their prayers, which are related to the relationship between man and God, are regarded by this tradition as general commands and are hence extended to all moral areas. Accordingly, forcing children to perform prayer is considered a general rule that extends to all areas of moral education. This generalization appears in the works of some Muslim scholars of the 11th and 12th centuries, who considered the orders mentioned above to be mainstream. They not only allow parents to force their children but also beating them (Al-Nawawī, 1991, Vol. 5, 384; Al-Qurtubī, 1985, Vol. 5, 172; Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, 1984, Vol. 6, 119).

Another debate related to Islamic commands that involves the limited use of coercion is the concept of the ‘peculiarities of the Prophet’ *ikhtiṣāṣāt* or the particular subjects of the Prophet allocated to him and should not be considered general Islamic law. This concept first put forward by the Qur’ān commentators to interpret some commands that in case they were to become general laws, they would contradict the principles of Islam (Isma’il Ibn Kathīr, 1998, Vol. 1, 382). The ‘peculiarities of the Prophet’ *ikhtiṣāṣāt* involve rules for the Prophet and do not include the rest of the people, and therefore are not considered Islamic law, such as being obligatory for the Prophet to wake up and pray in the middle of the night (Al-Suyūṭī, 1984, Vol. 4, 196). According to this concept, when the Qur’an tells the Prophet, enjoin your family (20: 132) to pray, this is one of the specific duties of the Prophet (Al-Alūsī, 1995; Al-Qurtubī, 1985, Vol. 11, 263) as this verse is mentioned in the verses which have been dedicated to the tasks specific to him (PBUH) (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984, Vol. 16, 207). The word *ahl* in this verse includes the family (Al-Baydāwī, 1997, Vol. 4, 43; Al-Tūsī, 1988, Vol. 7, 224). Therefore, the verse does not refer to a general ruling which implies advice for all Muslims.

4. Conclusion

This article compared the use of coercion in moral education in modern education and Islam. Considering the question posed at the beginning of the article, it was argued that Islam does not accept the use of coercion in moral education and rejects it unconditionally. Conversely, Islam recommends using the method of

'persuasion' as well as 'caring' with terms that are quite far from compulsion. Avoiding deception, lies and immoral methods are criteria for 'persuasion' while teaching through modelling good behavior and moral acts are considered 'caring'. However, the scope of the prohibition imposed by Muslims on the use of coercion depends on the specific interpretation of different Islamic traditions about verses and narratives in which the use of coercion on worship has been raised. The difference between the viewpoints of Muslims about the separation of the otherworldly part of the ethics that deals with the relationship between man and God from the worldly part of ethics that deals with human relationships with society and others, and the inapplicable nature of the otherworldly ethical statements in worldly ethics lead to the emergence of two different interpretations about the scope of the use of coercion. One of them prohibits the use of coercion absolutely, and the other one allows limited use of this method. There is disagreement among Muslims on the statements that recommend the Prophet (PBUH) to use coercion for his family's worship and that, according to an Islamic tradition, these propositions are not considered to be general Islamic laws. Such a debate has led to different interpretations of the scope of this prohibition.

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