

THE STUDENT AS A TRUST IN OUR CUSTODY

By

Ja'afar Makau Kaura

Department of Islamic Studies

Usmanu Danfodiyo University

Sokoto

1.0 Introduction

I like to start this presentation by showing my immense gratitude to the Muslim Ummah Forum of Federal Polytechnic Kaura-Namoda for inviting me to speak on this very important topic which has bearing on our collective responsibility as Muslim members of staff working in tertiary institutions. I must congratulate the Forum for being bold enough to invite a discussion on a topic that is central to problems bedevilling our institutions of higher learning and which, many of us, as Muslims, consider as unserious despite the emphasis Islam places on trust (*Amanah*). I must also thank you for making my task in this presentation very easy by suggesting areas this little talk should cover, for which I have no alternative if I were to be left to do it on my own.

The presentation will, therefore, look at the conceptual definition of the key concepts in relation to the focus of the presentation, moral and educational training of the student and the role of the stakeholders. We now examine the conceptual framework of the topic for discussion.

2.0 Conceptual Framework

It is important, from the onset, to know the dominant concepts and how they relate to what the presentation is expected to discuss. This is necessary because concepts acquire different meaning when used in a different situation. The central concepts in the topic are; Student, Trust and Custody. Each of these concepts is important in the topic. Each of them will, therefore, be defined.

2.1 Student:

According to Encarta English Dictionary, student means ‘...somebody who studies at a school, college, or university’. A knowledgeable person in an area of study or somebody who is interested in a field of study can also be called ‘a student’. However, English Thesaurus dictionary gives a more robust meaning of ‘a student’ by defining it as ‘scholar, pupil, schoolboy, schoolgirl, schoolchild, undergraduate, apprentice and learner’.

In Arabic, the concept ‘student’ connotes, among others, طالب علم (seeker of knowledge) and تلميذ (pupil, student, apprentice, practitioner, trainee, disciple). In Islam a student is a person, male or female, who is engaged in search of knowledge not necessarily in a formal modern set up. A student can as well be pursuing pure Islamic religious sciences or mundane ones referred to as natural and physical sciences in modern time. Pursuit of the latter is Fard Kifaya (collective responsibility) while pursuit of the former is Fard Ain (individual obligation). While Fard Ain is compulsory, Fard Kifaya is encouraged, but both of them are important in Islam and students pursuing each of them are under the blessing of Allah while they are on it. There is no age barrier in studentship in Islam since a student pursues education from the cradle to the grave.

2.2 Trust:

‘Trust’ is defined by Encarta dictionary as position of obligation occupied by someone. Trust is a position in which somebody is expected to act honourably and responsibly. The concept means أمانة (*Amanah*) in Arabic language. In Islamic tradition *Amanah* means trustworthiness. It entails being honest, fair in dealing as well as honouring trusts and keeping promises and commitments. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) acquired the name *al-Amin* long before his prophet hood. In the present context, ‘Trust’ connotes diligent and sincere discharge of assigned duties and responsibilities by a staff with a view to assisting students accomplish their mission of being worthy in character and in learning at the end of their sojourn in the Polytechnic.

2.3 Custody:

The term is defined by Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary as legal right and/or duty to look after somebody or something. It is a means through which care of a child is given on divorce, and a safe keeping place for valuables like in the case of a bank. Another meaning

that is somewhat distant from the topic of this presentation is to keep somebody behind the bars; police custody. With the exception of the latter meaning, the Arabic concept denotes the former various meanings of custody. But in the present discussion, custody relates to official staff-student relationship as specified by staff schedule of duties clearly spelt out in the letter of appointment/posting of a member of staff.

It is therefore, clear from the foregone that this presentation is going to look at the roles expected of parents, teaching and non-teaching staff, and to some extent, the society and government in shaping the intellectual and moral milieu of the Student while he/she pursues his/her course of study in this polytechnic. However, going by the persuasion of the organisers of this occasion, these roles and relationship would be examined from Islamic perspective. We now consider the stakeholders whose roles are expected to provide the serene environment for the student.

3.0 The Stakeholders

The responsibility of training of children, morally and educationally, is shared by parents, teachers and school administrators. At home, parents take care of initial training of the child and subsequent interventions in his behavioural development. The society takes its turn when the child leaves home and joins it as a member. It is at the school that the training culminates into shaping the identity of the child. In all these stages of training and development, Islam has categorically outlined responsibilities and duties of the stakeholders some of which are outlined below.

3.1 Parents

Parents, as earlier indicated, are saddled with responsibility of training their children by Islam. Children, males and females, are blessing from Allah. They are a trust to the parents which will be enquired into by Allah on the Day of Judgement. They have equal rights over the parents. Part of these rights is provision of religious and moral training. The Prophet of Islam (SAW) has made it categorical that every child is born as a Muslim. It is the parents that either maintain that natural disposition for the child or change it by making him/her as a Jew or a Christian or a Magian. Therefore, to maintain the natural disposition for a child, parents must train him according to the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The

process of doing that has been clearly stated in many traditions of the Prophet (SAW). In the first place, a God-fearing mother must be given to the child by way of marrying a decent and religiously inclined woman. The wisdom behind that is for the child to have the best school in his mother while he/she is growing up. Such a mother trains the child to be a God-conscious and responsible member of the family and the society at large. In the second place, a good name (appellation) should be given to the child. People may wonder what is there in a name. But there is everything in a good name especially a name associated with the tradition of Islam. The name the child will grow to be proud of, which will also condition his worldview as a Muslim. Giving good name to a child is among the rights parents owe to the child according to the following tradition:

Among the rights of the child over the parent are three: to give
Him a good name, to teach him to write and to marry him when
He comes of age

The child should be trained to love the Prophet and his household. He/she should be trained to recite al-Qur'an at home before joining either Qur'an or Islamiyyah School. He/she should be trained to observe prayer at the age of seven, according to Prophetic tradition, and should be given a light beating at ten if he/she shows recalcitrance in observing it. In his formative period, the child looks up to what the parents do in the home. In other word the child is a good imitator. He/she copies what goes around him/her. That is why it is important for the parents to cultivate an Islamic and serene environment in the home. They should, as much as possible, avoid any tendency that is capable of diluting the mind of the child in this formative period. This kind of training will be of immense value to the child at the time he/she leaves home and join the society. Similarly, this kind of training portrays the kind of parents a child has and the kind of home he/she comes from. Albeit, it is this training that determines the future of the child in his association with the outside world.

Islam is not against Western education. It promotes all forms of education and tries to make them to conform to the aims and objectives of education in Islam. In fact, Islam considers 'wisdom' as the lost property of the believer which he/she takes wherever he sees it. This can be clearly seen in the roles played by Islam in reviving the dying philosophical/scientific traditions of the Hellenic era and passing same to Europe. What I am trying to show here is that the Muslim child can pursue both Islamic and Western education at the same time right

from his school going age. It is the duty of the parents to see to his successful accomplishment of the two.

3.2 Primary and Secondary Education

It is important that parents take education of the child seriously. They should not only send him to school, but they should choose a good one for him, Islamiyyah/Qur'an School, primary and secondary school. This is more important today when our public schools are in a sorry state. They should also complement the efforts of the school by providing necessary assistance to the child in addition to reading and writing materials. They should not leave the child to the mercy of his teachers. Rather they should assist him with his home-work and revision of lessons taught to him/her at the school where they can be able to do that or find someone to do it on their behalf. They should be on the alert to stamp out any unacceptable changes brought about by influence at school.

I have gone to this length to show part of what Muslim parents must do to bring up their child in a most acceptable Islamic tradition and give him sound education, both Islamic and Western, because the challenges the child will face are enormous at the tertiary level of education. It is the training, moral and educational, the child receives at these levels that make or mar his stay and success at tertiary institution. At the tertiary level, the environment, teachers, administrators, peer groups etc, will come to play in shaping the moral and educational personality of the child (now the student). Here comes the main thrust of the presentation; namely 'The Student as a Trust in our Custody'.

3.3 Teachers and Administrators

The higher institutions of learning comprise of the university, the polytechnic and the college of education among others. Our concern here is to examine, very closely, the expected roles members of staff should play in handling the affairs of the Student who passes through them, and the teachings of Islam on the kind of relationship they should have with the Student who is now a trust in their custody.

The relationship that should exist between staff and the student should be determined by the catch-word 'trust'. We have earlier seen the meaning of the concept which is translated in Arabic as *Amanah*. Trust involves honesty, fair dealing, honouring trust, keeping promises and commitment. These aspects of trust should be practically demonstrated by each and every member of staff for him to fulfil his obligations as an employee of the Polytechnic.

Allah, the Most High, commands us to render the trust to whom it is due in the following verse of the Qur'an:

God doth command you to render back your trusts
To those to whom they are due; and when ye judge
between man and man, that ye judge with justice
verily how excellent is the teaching which He giveth
you! For God is He who hearth and seeth all things
(Q. Ch. 4: verse 58)

Therefore, going by the teaching of this verse, every Muslim member of staff is required to fulfil the trust by being steadfast in his schedule of duties. A Muslim should not think that because he operates in a secular set up and is therefore subject to non-*Shari'ah* laws, he is not covered by the teachings of Islam. Islam, a complete way of life, demands from a Muslim total acceptance of the religion and observance of his entire life activities according to its dictates. Islam, for example, wants a Nigerian Muslim civil or public servant to reflect the teachings of Islam in what he does in his office. Thus, a Muslim member of staff in this polytechnic will have his activities at his duty post adjudged by Allah according to the teachings of Islam. This fact is a reflection of the command of Allah to the Muslims to enter the religion of Islam whole-heartedly (Q-Ch. 2 v. 208)

It is part of trust for every one of us to see himself as a leader in his own area of jurisdiction. No matter the leadership position one finds oneself in, one is a leader in the eyes of Islam and will therefore be accountable for what one does in exercising one's powers. This kind of leadership is understood from the following Hadith of the Prophet (SAW):

Beware, every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you is answerable with regard to his flock, The Caliph is a shepherd over the people and shall be questioned about his subjects (as to how he conducted their affairs). A man as guardian over the members of his family and shall be questioned about them (as to how he looked after their physical and moral well-being). A woman is guardian over the household of her husband and his children and shall be questioned about them (as to how she managed the household and brought up the children). A slave is a guardian over the property of his master and shall be questioned about it (as to how he safeguarded his trust). Beware, every one of you is a guardian and every one of you shall be questioned with regard to his trust.

The above Qur'anic verses and Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW) clearly demonstrate the kind of relationship that should exist between the Student and the Muslim member of staff. Some key areas of this relationship based on the trust will be illustrated below.

(i) Honesty

Honesty refers to one's ability to be truthful and possess moral uprightness. One shall be able to tell the truth no matter who is involved. This is a religious obligation commanded by Allah the Most High where He says:

...Whenever you speak, speak justly even if a near
Relative is concerned... (Q.Ch. 6 V. 152)

Therefore, we need to be honest in our dealings with our students as teachers and as administrators. We should consider them equal and give them opportunity to state their cases when it comes to arbitration. We should not be unjust to a student because we hate his face as a result of his religious, ethnic or ideological affiliation. Similarly, we should tell the truth and uphold it even if our own close relations are involved. Islam does not condone tribalism and bigotry and a Muslim who indulges in either has sinned against Allah. It is therefore imperative for us to uphold the truth all the times and tell it no matter whose ox is gored.

Another aspect of honesty is moral uprightness. It suggests behaving in a moral or honourable manner. As members of staff, students look up to us for moral standard in the Polytechnic. Two things are worthy of our attention here. The first one is that these students are a trust in our hands. Their parents have high expectations that we are going to train them morally and intellectually, same goes with the society. The second one is that certificates and diplomas are awarded by our institutions based on character and learning attained by students at the end of their studentship. Now the question is what do we tell the parents and the society if these students came into the Polytechnic morally sound but passed out morally bankrupt? As Muslim members of staff, it is our duty to inculcate good morals in our students. We should discourage immorality and promote morality through whatever means possible. We should remember the saying of the Prophet (SAW) that if one invents or promotes a good tradition one gets the reward for the invention or promotion of the good tradition and the reward for people who practice it. Likewise if one invents or promotes a bad tradition one gets the sin of inventing or promoting it and the sin for people who practice it.

(ii) Honouring the Obligations

This is another aspect of trust in Islam. We are bounded to our students through appointments we have taken to work here. Without students nobody among us will be here. We should therefore be considerate to our students by trying to meet up with our obligations. We should remember that obligations are going to be enquired by Allah on the Day of Judgement as stated in the following Verse of the Qur'an:

Come no near to the orphan's property except to improve it, until he attains the age of full strength; and fulfil (every) engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning). (Q. Ch. 17 V. 34)

Similarly, Allah has extolled the virtues of Muslims who respect their trust and fulfil their covenants in Qur'an, chapter 70 v. 32. The engagements and covenants as mentioned in the two verses above include our letters of appointment. We have accepted to provide our services to our employer in return for the salaries we receive. Some of us are teachers while others are administrative staff. Yet others are technical and others are support staff. And the totality of our service is geared toward enhancing the mission of our students. It is therefore part of the trust to go to class and teach our students. We should teach them what is in the curricula, and should endeavour to cover the course content. We should also give assignments to our students and grade it well. We should attend laboratory and workshop practical sessions. By doing these we are enhancing the capability and competence of our students. Likewise, we make legitimate our take-home and fulfil our covenant with our Creator, Allah.

In this kind of educational set-up, every member of staff is important because everyone has a role to play for the success of our students. Administrative and technical members of staff are important as they play complementary roles for us to graduate capable and competent hands. Trusts demand from them to discharge their own obligations in providing administrative services especially in student affairs department and academic office. Students' welfare should be taken seriously to guard against unwarranted agitation from them.

We need to emphasize that in dealing with our students both academic and administrative members of staff should underline the importance of time which represents money and progress. Anything we are supposed to do for the sake of our students we should do it in good and right time as demanded by our schedule of duty. We should come to office on

time and meet and close on time. We should not sit idle when we have work to do. Technical and junior staff should also carry out their assigned duties diligently for the sake of our students. Failure to do these will portray us as fraudsters who take full salaries without giving equal output to our students. Allah promised to raise such fraudsters to account on the Day of Reckoning:

Woes to those that deal in fraud, who, when others measure for them, exact in full, but when they measure or weigh for others defraud them. Do they not think that they will be raised to life upon a fateful day, the day when all mankind will stand before the Lord of the World? (Q. Ch. 83 V. 1-6)

(iii) Firmness on Rules and Regulations

To implement rules and regulations for the good of the community is the responsibility of both academic and administrative staff. For example, the teacher has authority to operate a system of reward and punishment in his class within the scope of the institution's rules and regulations. The Student Affairs Office, in conjunction with security Office, oversees the operations of such rules and regulations. It is the desire of Islam that communities and societies should be governed by laws since it does not condone lawlessness. Therefore, Muslim members of staff should make sure that during their interaction with students, rules and regulations of the school are followed to the letter. Allowing a student to break law or assisting him to escape punishment after breaking the law is not in the character of Islam. A Muslim member of staff who does that, no matter who is the culprit, has gone against the teachings of Islam. The Prophet of Islam demonstrated that by emphasizing that whoever commits an offence he should be given the right punishment. He went to the extent of saying that even if His daughter Fatima should steal, he would cut off her hand.

If this is what Islam teaches, Muslim members of staff must not, therefore, condone lawlessness among students. They should stand up against it, and assist toward creating a peaceful environment where both staff and students are safe; an environment devoid of immorality, cultism, drug abuse and examination misconduct among others. They should go further to assist toward the formation of associations to counter these malaises such as anti examination misconduct committee to sanitise the campus. Because by so doing they uphold the trust put in their custody and also put into practice teachings of the Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) which commands that:

Whoever sees a detestable thing he should correct with his hand, if he cannot, he should correct with his tongue, if he cannot he

Should hate it, though it is the weakest aspect of faith

(iv) Looking after Resources

The Polytechnic has a lot of resources based on which it is run. Our concern here is financial and material resources, though human resource is equally important. These resources have relationship with welfare and academic activities of the students, and of course the staff. Protecting these resources against mismanagement and misappropriation should be seen as part of fulfilling the trust. Therefore, Muslim members of staff should, as part of their endeavour to uphold the trust of their students, strive to safeguard the material resource from any form of mismanagement. A Muslim member of staff should not engage in mismanaging any of the resource, and should as much as possible discourage others from doing that. It is equally important to frown at misappropriation of financial resource as it is heinous crime in Islam. For any kobo stolen from public funds one will make recompense for the entire people the kobo truly belongs to on the Day of Judgement. It should also be noted that majority of scholars opined that Allah does not forgive wrong committed against fellow human beings. Therefore one has to seek for forgiveness from every person. It is therefore, important for the Muslim members of staff to consider protection of material and financial resources as part of the requirements to uphold the trust of their students.

What has been analysed in the preceding pages is ideal one expects to find in our tertiary institutions. However, the reverse is the case in some institutions. This forms the discussion that comes next.

4.0 The Challenges

It is imperative to note that there is huge short supply of trust among people at family, society and school levels. What informed meticulous resort to trust by parents in respect of their children in the past is no longer holding the family together. In the past, children are the pride of the family and adequate time was devoted to their training because parents were less materialistic in orientation. This cannot be said to be the same now as almost everybody is literally engrossed in the pursuit of material wealth. Working mothers and working fathers do not have time for their children. The same thing goes with the market women, traders and politicians. Therefore, what is coming from home to our schools is

shameful as most of the children lack home training. Parents expect that teachers can work miracle to turn around the immoral attitude of the children.

Our schools at primary and secondary level are ghost of their former self. Public schools are bereft of their former serene atmosphere that nurtured good students because of combination of factors all to do with trust that teachers had taken seriously. But these factors have now given way to a culture of total neglect by government and society of education of our children. Teachers are unmotivated, infrastructure have nearly collapsed in public schools and classes are overpopulated with children that suffer neglect from parents, all equalling to wasted time for teachers and pupils. Private school ventures are lucratively springing up all over the place in our towns and villages for the children of the elites in the society. This is a clear indication that the family, the society and government no longer take trusteeship of our children serious. It is a combination of ill-prepared candidates from private school plus immorally raised children of the elite that now populate our tertiary institutions.

One should, therefore, be least surprise why many of our tertiary institutions are plagued with problems associated with students' malaise such as cultism, drug abuse, examinations misconduct and destructive tendencies among others. Nearly over half of student population in our tertiary institution has no business being there. This is attested by mass failure of students during semester examinations which are a reflection of spurious grades 'earned' through fraudulent ways during WAEC/NECO examinations.

It is unfortunate that trust no longer exists between parents and their children at home and teachers are no miracle workers. Our only hope is to retrace our steps and revisit our glorious past to recoup our lost glory. This can only be possible if, and only if, we can effectively deploy Islamic teachings to guide our way. These, I believe are challenges of neglect of trust that is looking us in the face.

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Being the Text of a Paper Presented at a Public Lecture

Organised by

Muslim Ummah Forum

Federal Polytechnic Kaura Namoda

At

Yahaya Shantali Lecture Theatre, Main Campus

On

27th Rabi'ul Awal 1431 AH/05-03-2010