

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES TEACHERS IN KUWAIT IN CONFRONTING MORAL DILEMMAS: CHALLENGES, LIMITATIONS AND BOUNDARIES

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of Islamic studies teachers in Kuwaiti high schools. We attempt to identify the role they play in promoting students' behavioural development, the potential they hold and the frustrations they share. Behavioural problems that are new to Kuwaiti society are emerging which have led to reactions from a variety of parties in Kuwait. Their efforts aim to highlight these behaviours and work towards eliminating them. The core of this paper is to explore what the role of Islamic teachers should be when it comes to confronting such moral dilemmas. In particular, we aim to do this in the light of the central objective of Islamic studies: that of empowering behavioural and moral development. We show that in reality, their role has been marginalized and their effectiveness compromised due to their not being granted the proper authorities in their arena. Long, in-depth interviews were conducted to identify the concerns, roles, frustrations and challenges that Islamic teachers are dealing with regarding moral development. Finally, we discuss some of their thoughts on how to enable Islamic studies teachers to fulfill their true role in positively developing students' morality.

Introduction

Islamic studies always used to be viewed as a spiritual subject, whose main source materials are the Qur'an and Sunnah (sayings and examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h.). Kuwaiti education system requires the teaching of Islamic studies at all school levels for Muslim students, even in foreign private schools. This requirement stems from the nature of Kuwait as a Muslim society and the fact that Islam is by constitution the official religion of the state.

The prominence of Islamic studies in the school system has been fading over the years. Parents as well as educators are tending towards viewing other subjects, such as maths, science and languages to be more beneficial for students' futures (for example, college acceptance, career prospects, etc.), compared to religion and Islamic studies. This statement is offered based on personal experience as a previous Islamic studies teacher, and dealings with parents who shared their concerns about academic

achievement in maths, science and languages, compared to their expectations regarding the development of their children's morals and values. Such parental concern is expected but at the same time, it is worrying that moral development is not at the top of parents' priorities lists.

The essence of Islamic studies is to nurture Muslim religious identity so that Islam becomes a part of our daily life. Islam should inform all our dealings and actions, and permeate every detail of our lives. Islamic studies aims to create citizens who are guided with Islamic intentions to positively interact with society based on good morals and values. This is especially pertinent in the modern era of globalization.

In order to understand the philosophy of Islamic studies, it is necessary first to present a brief introduction to the nature of Islamic studies. The aim and structure of Islamic education may be summarized into two main themes: first, it begins with the individual and expands to encompass human society as a whole. Second, it begins with life and ends with the hereafter. The main objective of Muslim religious education, according to Hussain and Ashraf (1979), is the creation of the

good and righteous man, who worships Allah [God] in the true sense of the term, builds up the structure of his earthly life according to the Shari'ah [Islamic laws] and employs it to subserve his faith" (p. 42).

An additional aim of Islamic education is to teach pupils to exhibit Islamic behaviours, as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) (Al-Keelany 1985, and Al-Sheebany 1993.)

Siddiqui (1997) adds that Islamic education is similar to any educational structure, in that it embraces a specific philosophy, need or belief, from which it cannot be separated. Islamic education may accept the same philosophical ideas as other systems except that it cannot adopt any philosophical perspective that is not compatible with Islamic foundations (Hussain and Ashraf 1979). This philosophy of adherence to founding principles is ingrained in the belief of any culture that uses its educational aims and objectives to meet its people's cultural needs (Joseph 2000); it is particularly relevant, though, in religion-based cultures such as Muslim nations, which aim to reinforce through education both traditional cultural mores and religious beliefs (Bull 2000, Cook 2000, and Talabani 1996).

Recently, a new term has surfaced in the Kuwaiti society's media and schools: the "negative behaviours phenomena", which is an umbrella term describing a wide range of behaviours like drug abuse, smoking, adultery, delinquency, and most recently, homosexuality. These behaviours are obvious in Kuwaiti middle and high schools, to the extent that it is now considered to be a phenomenon which needs to be addressed and dealt with. The main interest of this paper is these negative behaviours, in particular homosexuality, and how active Islamic studies teachers are in dealing with them. Such behaviours have caught the attention of various parties in Kuwait, from its highest levels such as the parliament down to front-line stakeholders, such as educators, religious scholars, parents and teachers.

We initially identify Islamic teachers' perspectives concerning such phenomena, specifically homosexuality. We identify the expectations of Islamic studies teachers and the actual reality for their profession within the Kuwaiti society and what they do to fulfill their perceived role in dealing with such behaviours, given the restraints upon them.

Islamic study is not solely an academic pursuit. It highly emphasizes and enforces morality and values. It embraces the same foundations of moral education as in secular schools, but within an Islamic context. Muslim morals are generated from the Qur'ān and ingrained in their daily lives in a way that is inseparable (Al-Abdeen 2004). It is not simply a chunk of information that students acquire, are tested on, and then are graded accordingly. On the contrary, Islamic study is a life long process of implanting and embodying the morals, values and knowledge obtained. Teachers who are interested in holding such responsibilities should embrace various characteristics, mainly the personal qualities (Mohammad 2002).

Practising the teachings that they impart provides teachers with credibility and respect from the students, who then are more likely to follow the example of their teachers, rather than just view the lessons as merely theoretical constructs. For example, in the past, followers of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) would not accept any new knowledge, information or theories, unless these had been implemented and practised by their providers personally (Mohammad 2002). Modelling morals are considered the core of developing morality in students (Bajovic et al. 2009).

Sanger (2008) asserts that “most of the educators do hope that all teachers are morally good, and effective in contributing to the moral development of their students, and want them to be well prepared for those challenges” (p. 180). It is frustrating when confronted with Islamic studies teachers who are acting in a negative manner. Such actions and behaviours might be conflated with true Islamic practice by the students and not recognized as private actions of the teacher:

It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for ‘Allah’s’ forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast taken a decision put thy trust in Allah. Allah loves those who put their trust in Him. (Qur’ān, *Al-‘Imrān*: 159)

In the same way that the body gets ill and sick, the soul is susceptible to illness—the symptom being that one’s values have deteriorated. The Islamic philosopher Ibn Sina indicates that human beings have the ability to practise the highest of morals and behave in the noblest of ways, yet also have the propensity to go the other way and acquire negative values and odious traits. He states that humans have the ability to practise good behaviours and embrace good values, in pursuit of their ultimate happiness. He adds that internalizing these morals requires continuous practice, a statement which was confirmed by the Prophet Muhammad (Shamsaldeen 1988). Ibn Sina adds that the sick soul can be cured through the implementation of good behaviour in one’s life, as well as accustoming the self to moral values, and avoiding the unaccepted values such as anger and following base desires. He adds that values and manners cannot be part of a human’s growth unless there is a natural aptitude for it, just like the businessman who exhibits charm and tact in his business dealings: if he learned his profession from good business teachers he will definitely implement what he learned in his own business and work, and vice versa for the businessman who learned from a bad businessman (Shamsaldeen 1988). Islamic education aims to create the good Muslim, who will behave well toward his/her Creator, society and his/her own self (Al-Khawaldah 2005, and Farhan 1980).

Some view values and morals to be fluid concepts that change along with society, but in the Islamic world-view, they are stable and consistent because they have been revealed in the Qur'ān in accordance with humans' spiritual needs (Al-Khawaldha 2005, Nucci and Linda 1982).

The role of Islamic studies teachers has been questioned and criticized: it has been accused that their role is missing emphasis on values and morals. Most teachers concentrate on religious knowledge with a focus on tests and grading, and ignore or marginalize the emotional and spiritual aspects (Al-Khawaldha 2005).

Globalization has its advantages and disadvantages. One of the disadvantages is that new behavioural problems are being imported through the mass media, whereas because institutions are typically slower to react, discussion about these behaviours is currently absent from the classroom. Teachers hold a significant role in teaching students to negotiate these hazards and addressing these issues in real life situations. However, it should be noted that this responsibility lies initially with parents, then the school, and finally society.

"Negative behavioural" phenomena appear daily in newspapers and other media. The Kuwaiti parliament established a committee to deal with negative behaviours. This movement was ridiculed and criticized by some Kuwaiti liberals and viewed as a move against freedom. The Islamic opinion concerning lesbians and gays states clearly that such behaviours are prohibited (*ḥarām*) in Islam, and viewed as inherently counter to the normality of human's creation and relations.

Many studies and investigations have been carried out in order to highlight such phenomena in an attempt to solve and eliminate such actions. Because of the increase of such behaviours in schools and in public places, the government has directed its attention to these actions, prompted by calls from Islamists, educators, and parents. Most studies attribute these actions to members of the youth, many of whom are disconnected with their realities and identities. Such unacceptable behaviours are not limited to the phenomenon of homosexuality but rather include other kinds of negative behaviours such as religious extremism. Studies and researches indicate that the influence of the media and openness encouraged by globalization are mainly responsible for such behaviours. In this era of globalization, it is the youngest who are most at risk, lacking as they do fully formed values and morals. They are losing their cultural identity and with it, the role of religion is also fading. Such trends have led Kuwaiti society to attempt to empower the religious educators in order to pull the youngest members of society from identity loss.

One such attempt was a project to emphasize morals and values, implemented in Kuwaiti schools as follows: this project aimed to highlight Islamic values and morals by allocating a few minutes in each class for teachers to emphasize values and manners, and point out negative behaviours and their possible consequences.

Also, such attempts lead to the question of the actual role of Islamic education within Kuwaiti schools. How active are the schools in implementing Islamic education objectives? How to develop students' morality so that they internalize Islamic morals to such an extent that they become inseparable parts of their personalities?

In order to answer these questions, I have conducted long, in-depth interviews with Islamic studies teachers from several high schools and met with 20 teachers, in an attempt to bring their voices, anticipations, challenges and frustrations to the

public. First, a look at homosexuality from the Islamic perspective will be provided in order to have an understanding of the angle the paper will be focusing on.

Homosexuality and Islam

Islam views the natural creation of humans as based on Allah's (God's) creation of every creature from a couple—a male and female—as is stated in the Holy Qur'an "we created a pair [male and female] of everything, that you may take heed" (*Al-Dhāriyāt*: 51:49)

The Islamic view of reproduction in humanity is that it is an act that should result in the consistency of life and humanity on earth. Islam not only discusses sex but it is also open about the natural sexual instinct and motives, and directs such instincts to their correct and natural path, and within the Islamic framework. Sex in Islam is a matter of chastity and virtue that transcends the purely sensual aspect.

In Islam sexual urges within humans are recognized as part of their creation and as such, need to be fulfilled in a legal allowed manner. If such natural proclivities are unconstrained and such relationships are practised outside the circle of marriage, it is considered an adulterous action, for which significant punishment has been prescribed, as it is in the case of homosexuality. The main purpose and idea of marriage is to regulate the relationship between female and male according to the path that God has ordained. Marriage is meant to refine and discipline this sacred relationship within the Islamic framework:

And among His Signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect. (Qur'an, *Al-Rūm*: 21)

It is well known that marriage is a social commitment in all cultures and religions. It is a means to fulfill sexual and social needs of humans, and for creating families. Islam also encourages marriage in order to prevent humans committing the *ḥarām* (Islamically prohibited) act of adultery (Abdullah 1992).

Currently, the youth are lacking the experience of negotiating the globalized era. Exacerbating this are the absence of parental guidance and the weak influence of religion. As a result, they are easily trapped in what might even be against their religious foundation, such as practising unaccepted behaviours which have been mentioned earlier in this paper. They embrace behaviours (homosexuality) which contradict their natural creation from the Islamic perspective. Such actions are prohibited and forbidden in Islam:

Of all the creatures in the world, will ye approach males? And leave those whom Allah has created for you to be your mates? Nay, ye are a people transgressing (all limits). (Qur'an, *Al-Shu'arā'*: 165-166)

We also (sent) Lūṭ: He said to his people: "Do ye commit lewdness such as no people in creation (ever) committed before you?" (Qur'an, *Al-A'rāf*: 80)

Islamic law prohibits such behaviour because it is against the nature of human beings, and through such behaviour family values are destroyed and diseases spread. Kuwaiti society and the Gulf region refer to gays as the third sex, and lesbians the fourth sex. Lesbians are known as *boyaat*, derived from the English word, *boy*, inasmuch as girls are imitating boys in their appearance and the way they are dressed, so much so that some might have to double check to recognize that they are in fact female. My focus in this article is on the *boyaat*, since such behaviour is more obvious specifically within the girls' middle and high schools. Such transformation in sexual identity is not allowed publicly and is socially rejected in Kuwait. There is no compromise when it comes to Islamic and traditional boundaries in Kuwait, and this was the main reason for creating the committee of negative behaviours. The main purpose of its establishment is not to punish these girls, but to guide them and offer them counselling to identify objectively their own sexual identities. The phenomenon of *boyaat* is not solely a Kuwaiti issue: it also exists in more conservative societies, such as Saudi Arabia. Dr. Al-Sibee indicates that embracing such behaviours is correlated highly with negative childhood experiences such as childhood abuse, or sexual harassment. He points out that 70% of lesbians believe that they are not females, and they don't know any other way to get their sexual satisfaction, and indeed they show no interest in males (Al-Sibee 2002).

A Kuwaiti movement was started by Sheikha Fariha Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, where she encouraged the government to enact a law that would prevent and forbid such negative behaviours (*boyaat*) and underlined that such phenomena should not be ignored, especially with its noticeable appearances in schools as well as public places. She asserts that such actions are alien behaviours and foreign attitudes that must be eliminated from Kuwaiti society and be dealt with immediately (Khalifa 2009). She mentioned that allowing such foreign behaviours is affecting the main foundations of Kuwaiti traditions and its family values. She also says that rehabilitation centres should be established to deal with and offer counselling to such cases.

Some concerned people have doubts regarding this campaign of preventing negative behaviours in the society. They fear that such actions could hinder individuals' personal freedom. Dr. Waleed Al-Tabataba'i, a Kuwaiti parliament member, finds such accusations as strange, and points out that these types of campaigns are to understand these practices and to treat them as well as to control their spreading. He views that such moral deviation within the Islamic foundation must be stopped, through counselling and empowering the roles of mosques and schools, and positive media influences and the increase of moral campaigns in Kuwait (Al-Tabataba'i 2008). The main purpose of these campaigns is not judging and punishing the youth embracing such behaviours, but on the contrary, their main goal is to provide guidance and insight for them when it comes to discovering their sexual identities, and find strategies to deal with these behaviours. Those youth who hold such inaccurate beliefs and vague pictures related to their sexual identities and tendencies are mostly victims of a loss of parental guidance, the absence of religious influences and the negative impact of loose media. They have had no internal or external guidance throughout their lives. In addition, educators' avoidance of such problems leads to such negative behaviours taking root, and accordingly results in the unconscious imitation by the youth.

A Kuwaiti study entitled, 'Negative behaviors among the student community of middle school and high school boys and girls for the academic year 2006-2007: a

field study of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer educational region' shows that 70.3% of high school students are aware of these kinds of behaviours (*boyaat*), 52% of secondary school students being familiar with such actions; 86% of high school students disapproved of such behaviours, and 92% of students indicated that they have confronted students who are involved in such actions (Farhat 2007).

The noticeable existence of such behaviours made this author wonder about the role of religious and Islamic educators concerning such phenomena. Most of what has been revealed emphasises the significance of the role of religion, but there was no agreement on the implementation of this role or whose responsibility it is. Most of the studies mentioned the role of the social counsellor in schools, and did not pay much attention to the Islamic teachers who are dealing with such cases on a daily basis. I tried to uncover the role of Islamic studies teachers in middle and high schools and their actions, worries, frustrations and expectations concerning such phenomena.

Topics of inquiries

I have visited three high schools for girls, where this phenomenon of *boyaat* was more evident compared to other schools. I interviewed 20 Islamic studies teachers who taught at grades 10th, 11th and 12th. I did not meet with students or parents or social leaders since the research questions related to Islamic studies teachers only. Three of the interviews did not provide me with enough data so they were not included in this study. I used qualitative methods for analyzing my data. This consisted of taking notes during the interviews, and coding these inputs from the teachers in order to classify them according to the conceptual aspects that were based on the interview questions given below. This was followed by reading, refining, rechecking and revising the inputs and information, and observing relationships or patterns among the information provided by the teachers and identifying the outcomes and then relating them to the literature. My professional experience and personal background coupled with the support provided by peer review of the inputs and interpretations and the final analysis in view of the literature provided me with a significant instrument for this research.

The interview questions for the Islamic studies teachers were as follows:

1. What are your views on the role of Islamic studies teachers?
2. What was your initial motive to become an Islamic studies teacher?
3. What expectations do you have for your students?
4. How do Islamic studies teachers view their relationship with their students?
5. Do you think such relationship would differ compared to other subjects? Why?
6. What do you think about the most important aspect of teaching such a subject?
7. What is the main focus of Islamic studies subject?
8. What are your main methods of enforcing morality and good behaviours?
9. How do you deal with your students' misbehaviours?
10. What recommendations you have for emphasizing students' values and morals?
11. Do you find that there is an urge to focus on certain morals and values in this age instead of others? And why?

12. Do you find that Islamic teachers are qualified and trained enough to enforce students' morals and values?
13. Do you find your students have a gap when it comes to morals and values?
14. What is your role in confronting such gaps? Can you explain or give an example of incidents you dealt with?
15. Where do you find yourself when there is a hindrance to your dealing with or fixing some of students' morals and behaviours?
16. In your experience, do Islamic teachers devote more time and effort to the transmission of knowledge or to developing students' personalities and morals?
17. What are the main moral dilemmas and behavioural problems that you are dealing with or you and your colleagues are facing?
18. Are you aware of the *boyaat* behaviours? Do you have them among your own students? Explain.
19. What was your internal feelings concerning these behaviours? And what was your action toward it?
20. When facing such moral dilemmas do you try to solve them personally, or bring such issues to departmental meetings?
21. Do you feel that Islamic studies' role in general is missing?
22. Do you find your position as an Islamic teacher powerful enough when it comes to modifying students' behaviours and morals?
23. How can Islamic studies teacher involve positively to minimize such negative behaviours?
24. What is your explanations of the success of the values campaigns that was launched recently in the Kuwaiti society such as Rikz & Giras?
25. Who do you think is responsible for modifying students' negative behaviours?
26. Have such negative behaviours been discussed with your students explicitly or in a shy manner?
27. If you have dealt with *boyaat* in order to help them improve their moral behaviours and overcome such habits, what did you find as the main incentives, what is their own opinion when you bring up the Islamic point of view, whom do they blame, or do they have other attitudes?
28. How do you see the role of the school administration concerning such issues, or have the school expressed a nonchalant attitude?

Interviews with Islamic studies teachers revealed their views concerning their role, boundaries and challenges they are confronting, and how they cope with these. This led to the central inquiry posed by Schuitema, Dam, and Veugelers (2008): "how can schools prepare students to participate in the social cultural practices and to make their own choices?" (p. 69)

Islamic studies teachers' enforcement of morals and values

Considering challenges that the Islamic teacher deals with poses the question as to whether Islamic teachers are entitled or eligible to prepare students to make their own choices. Islamic teachers view themselves and their subject to be essential: they are committed to represent and embrace what they teach and help students to adapt and

adopt what has been taught. Developing students morally is a responsibility of every concerned teacher regardless of the subject they teach (Al-Malkee 2006; Narvez, and Lapsley 2008), but when it comes to Islamic study, it is an absolute must. In Islamic education “Qur’anic teaching serves the role of moral guidepost by which well-directed spiritual development (i.e. purification) can occur.” (Hussain 2007, p. 302).

One of the teachers indicates, “I can’t view myself teaching student merely knowledge. There must be an emphasis on implanting religious values and morals.” Islamic study is mainly concerned with behavioural actions that have a connection with belief and religion (Saleh, Al-Samadee, and Al-Khawaldah 1991). She adds, “our profession as Islamic teachers compels us to act as a religious herald in addition to just a teacher. Ignoring this aspect of the job as a Muslim teacher would empty the discipline of its very soul.” Parents should place more importance on teachers who have a virtuous disposition and influence students’ moral development than on teachers who can teach “secular” subjects well (Osguthorpe 2008).

Another respondent explains, “so many times we do view ourselves as counsellors, because of the nature of our subject. This would rarely happen with teachers of other subjects. It puts a great load on us, but at the same time, empowers our role. We as Islamic teachers are different in the nature of our profession and under the microscope constantly.”

Another teacher adds, “every action we perform and word that we utter is counted and carefully observed by students.” Islamic studies teachers are required to be religiously committed as, due to the unique position their subject holds, credibility in action and behaviour is key for students’ moral development. “Teachers act as moral exemplars and models, which in turn is believed to have a direct effect on the moral development of students.” (Osguthorpe 2008, p. 288). Allowing students to observe behaviours of teachers is an effective method known as modelling, and is even more powerful and effective if said values and manners have been preached constantly. Such a system of teaching is called a “neuron system” (Gallese, Keyser, and Rizzolatti 2004), as it relies on the fact that “by observing an act the same neurons are activated as if the observer were the one performing the act itself. Thus the importance of educators’ modelling good sets of values through discussions may become of essence in developing moral actions in students.” (Bajovic, Rizzo, and Engemann 2009, p. 18). Eventually this will create a caring classroom community that encourages positive social attitudes among students as well as enforcing academic achievement (Narvaez and Lapsley 2008).

Challenges and obligations

“My work requires that I be more attached to my religion and become closer to Allah’s book, the holy Qur’ān, and the Sunnah. I cannot isolate myself from my job: they are absolutely connected and inseparable,” a teacher states her view. Unfortunately, sometimes this image might be disturbed by Islamic teachers who don’t represent true Islam, who act differently to what they teach in the classroom. Such actions distort the general image of Islamic teaching and its core.

A teacher explains, “Islamic teachers must take into account the surveillance of Allah rather than just the supervision of administration and parents.” Another adds, “Islamic teachers are dealing with great depression and frustration as our subject is

not considered as important as other subjects. Islamic studies is viewed as an “easy option”, and this undermines our role when compared to other subjects that rarely touch students’ souls.”

It is understood that religious teaching is affected by several factors and that students should internalize morals and values through modelling by teachers. The Qur’ān has highlighted the importance of a role model, as exemplified to perfection by the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.).

Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah. (Qur’ān, *Al-Aḥzāb*: 21)

Prophet Muhammad is the role model for all Muslims: his personality, guidance and practice contain lessons for all generations. His personality is a perfect representation of what has been directed by the Qur’ān (Hawamda 2006).

The main job for religious education

... is to help children attain that spiritual cognition of that innate norm... It is this norm that should help scholars formulate basic concepts for all branches of knowledge. Only then will we realize that they can never be neutral, nor can they be completely segregated into separate hierarchical units.” (Ashraf 1993, p. 17)

When students are active in developing knowledge, attitudes and behaviours rather than receiving them passively, the effect is more lasting (Tredway 1995, p. 47; and Schuitema, Dam, and Veugelers 2008). Allowing students to construct moral attitudes helps them differentiate and evaluate their own practices and those of others in terms of whether they are acceptable or not according to their religious foundations, and this in turn helps them to internalize Islamic behaviours (Salem 2007).

In addition, Islamic education is always viewed as being the most important subject for bringing up a good Muslim. Shamma (2000) concurs that *tarbiyah* (nurturing)—including spiritual and religious nurturing—should remain the province of the family: “It is our obligation and duty as parents to teach our children so that they grow up as believing, practising Muslims.” (p. 1). Especially in the earliest years of development, the teacher’s role is considered minor compared to parental authorities and power where the latter is the first educational institution (Alkandari 2004). However, the importance of the parental role does not absolve teachers of their own responsibility in prompting students’ morals and religious development.

Islamic studies’ main core is “internal development of the individual as citizen within his own kingdom of spirit.” (Al-Attas 1993, p. 142, and Hussain 2007). Hussain (2007) says that a “good person should possess an integrated and ordered internal unity of physical, emotional and intellectual aspects, governed by the soul, and God governs the universe” (p. 298).

The role of Islamic teachers is not as powerful and influential as it should be, for various reasons. In earlier generations, religion was the core of any educational structure of Muslims, and Shari’ah (the Islamic law) governed Muslim lives (Alkandari 2004). The “modern education” is currently disconnected from and devoid

of spiritual and religious guidance, and this tenuous connection with the Qur'ān eventually wrecked its foundations. So many thoughts and ideologies interfere with such educational systems, despite several attempts being made to renovate Islamic thoughts and ideology. Still these attempts are humble and incapable of restoring and empowering the religious role and its effects within the new generation (Hawamda 2006, and Al-Malkee 2006).

This fact was confirmed by the teachers who were interviewed. They raised concerns that their role and their subject have been marginalized and weakened (Al-Malkee 2006) for various reasons such as the shift of parental morals and values, lack of time to enforce morals, absence of teachers' authority, fear of confrontation with parents and peer pressure.

What actions are planned and have taken place to deal with such concerns? Unfortunately only moderate attempts have been made so far. Throughout the interviews, teachers explained that students' embracing the *boyaat* is more likely to be imitation than something more serious. "It is mainly a peer pressure thing, and the need to fit in with the group. This is the clear explanation for adopting such behaviour," as one of the Islamic teachers indicated. The need to belong is very strong, and members of groups where peer pressure is prevalent participate in every action or behaviour practised by the group, whether it is right or not (Salem 2007). When students are pressured by their peers, they copy their friends to fit in and get the ticket for acceptance without rationalizing this action or its consequence. An Islamic teacher talks about one of her students who, when asked about being one of the *boyaat*, replied, "when I was not like them in the way they dress, think, and behave they would reject my friendship, now that I am one of them, I am—externally at least—one of their best friends."

Most of the girls adopting such behaviours share common characteristics such as showing disrespect to others and being controlling and rebellious in their attitudes toward others, and act in manners that are totally unaccepted and forbidden religiously and traditionally as well as legally in schools. One of the teachers explains, "some of those girls would go and stay in one bathroom together...", while another teacher told me that she witnessed a girl kissing a female friend on the lips.

The teacher explained that these behaviours are a result of loose parental control, and spoilt families: one of the girls indicates, "my father calls me all the time with a boy name not my real name." Others might come from socially broken families with separated or divorced parents, where children are lost between these two separate lives.

Other parents, when faced with their children's behaviours, sadly and helplessly indicate their inability to control their children's behaviours. One of the frustrated mothers states, "we tried convincing her to back off from such behaviour and direct her to her natural identity, and that she is a girl and we love her the way that Allah created her: as a girl, but unfortunately, she insists on the way she looks."

Another parent told one of the Islamic teachers, "deal the way you think it is suitable with her: she is already disrespectful to her father and me, she does not care about anything". On the other hand, some parents would ignore such bad behaviour or encourage it: a mother told us that her daughter "is free to do whatever she wants to do, act and dress, and I want her to become this person."

One of the teachers expresses her frustration thus: "Other parents are so passive when it comes to moral issues concerning their kids, we as teachers are unable to either meet them or have any kind of contact, and they would ignore our calls".

So many challenges are facing teachers concerning such behaviours, but how Islamic teachers are dealing with such challenges is the next point to address.

Confronting the challenges

"We Islamic teachers are obliged to change the negative reality students are living within through cooperative effort. The Islamic department in our school committed themselves to guiding those lost girls to the right path through religious guidance that touches their souls. We also have cooperated with counselling in order to guide our students back to Islamic manners and values as a step to correct students' behaviour." These views have been expressed by a teacher.

Islamic education aims for the ideal social morality, which "in an Islamic sense, aims to develop an Islamic character in each Muslim, manifested in a harmonious community of inwardly guided individuals who will interact in just and noble ways." (Hussain 2007, p. 303).

Islamic teachers should encourage "peer discussion groups" (Bajovic, Rizzo and Engemann 2009, p. 17), as such methods will develop critical thinking skills and build a constructive dialogue that will help in internalizing morals and reach the anticipated moral development based on the Islamic foundations.

What is needed is, "Creating a friendly dialogue with these girls and trying to build connections that show our concern and care for them," as one teacher said. In addition, teachers conducted many seminars and lectures by religious speakers who have a great influence on the youth in an attempt to deliver their behavioural messages through those religious scholars: "we cannot lose our enthusiasm to guide these youngest. We try to the best of our abilities to reach out those girls for their best, religiously and behaviourally."

Utilizing open discussion methods would encourage students to construct positive values and morals and to internalize them, more so than traditional learning methods (Tredway 1995, and Schuitema, Dam, and Veugelers 2008).

Discussion concerning moral dilemmas from the religious perspective would help both teachers and students to achieve moral growth "which enhances critical thinking and ethical reasoning that will deepen their understanding" (Schuitema, Dam, and Veugelers 2008). This kind of thinking is beneficial when it touches upon morals that are Islamically and religiously forbidden, such as *boyaat*. "Islamic morality is the manifestation of that which begins from internally operating reality and is then understood through Qurā'nic injunctions." (Hussain 2007, p. 303).

An Islamic teacher explained: "One of the key tasks as an Islamic teacher is to regain the trust of the parents. Having their support would be a great element in easing our mission. Sometimes parental disapproval and negative or passive interfering would greatly hinder and dismantle our attempts to reach these girls." Another method that helps promote self awareness concerning these negative behaviours is constructive thinking and reasoning, where students set rules and obligations that they would commit to, and since it is self-constructed, it would be immersed within them (Hussain 2007).