

The Conceptual Analysis of “Tarbiat” in Persian and “Education” in English¹

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Abstract

This article aims to consider and compare some concepts in Persian having the closest meanings to the concept of “education” in English. The main concept is “*tarbiat*”. The method of research is conceptual analysis for denoting some similarities and differences between the terms “*tarbiat*” and “education” in terms of etymological meaning, ordinary language, conceptual change, and contemporary usages. The results shows that both "education" and "Tarbiat" imply spiritual and physical development in etymological meaning; "Tarbiat" like "education" is a fluid word and has had some changes in its meaning from the past to the present time. In terms of the ordinary language, there are some similarities between the two words. Also, in the current usage, both the word “education” and the term “*ta’lim va tarbiat*” refer basically to teaching, learning and schooling.

Keywords: Analysis, Concept, Education, *Tarbiat*

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۳۹۷/۰۶/۱۰

^۱. تاریخ دریافت: ۱۳۹۷/۰۲/۲۹

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1. Introduction

Searle (1996) says: Analytic philosophy is roughly 100 years old, and it is now the dominant force within Western philosophy (in Glock, 2008, p.1). Conceptual analysis has an important part in Analytic philosophy and is the first step in philosophical activities and is a necessary condition to answer some other questions in this field. This is the case in the realm of philosophy of education too: “Questions of analysis are often linked with questions of justification. Socrates raised questions about the meaning of “justice” because he was interested in the reasons that there might be for living a just life.” (Hirst & Peters, 1970, p. 9). “Education” in English, and “*Tarbiat*” in Persian are key concepts on which many philosophical and educational arguments and attempts are based.

In English language and in educational philosophers’ works, the concept of “education” has been examined in some aspects, for instance, the etymological meaning of the verb “to educate”, the terminology of the word “education”, and the definition of “education”. The main term in Persian having the closest meaning to pedagogical purposes is “tarbiat”. In addition to “tarbiat”, there are some concepts that have the same usage in Persian language and the educational literature including the old texts as well as the current ones. This article considers the two concepts of “tarbiat” and “education” for analysis at four sections: 1) the etymological meanings and definitions; 2) the colloquial usage; 3) the conceptual changes in the ancient usage; and 4) the current usage.

2. The Etymological Meanings and Definitions

In English encyclopedias, it has been shown that there are two Latin stems for the verb “to educate”: “educere” and “educare”. The former means “to lead out” or “to train” and the latter “to train” or “to nourish” (Winch, 1999, p. 70). The same point is also accepted in philosophy of education: “The Latin word “educere” was usually, though not always, used of physical development, and “educare” was used of the rearing of plants and animals as well as children (Hirst, 1970, p. 23).

The word “tarbiat” is initially an Arabic word. This word has two stems: One is “ra-ba-ba” which means “to lead out”, particularly, leading out to good human tempers, like honesty, kindness, and so on. The other is “ra-ba-a” which means “to nourish” or “bring up”, especially, nourishing or bringing up a child, basically in physical development (Ibn Manzour, 1992, pp. 96 & 128). In the same vein, Imam Mohammad Ghazali" (1058-1111) says: “The body will be completed with growing, *tarbiat* and nourishing, and the soul will be completed with *tarbiat* and self-purity (Ghazali, 1972, p. 66). Ghazali also used the word *tarbiat* for the rearing of planets, such as apple and date (ibid, p. 69).

These notifications show that the etymological meanings of “education” and “tarbiat” have similarities. The two words are used for rearing of planet and children, physical development, as well as “to lead out” or “to train”.

In addition to etymological meanings, there are some definitions that show some similarities between the two verbs. For example: Wolfgang Brezinka in his work, “Basic Concepts of Educational Science”, maintains that: “The Latin verb “educere” forms the stem of the English word “education”, while the German word “Erziehung” has as its stem the verb “ziehen”(to pull, draw). The two have a similar sense: “to influence something through the application of force in such a way that it is brought from one position or state into another which seems to the influencer to be in some way nearer, better, more correct or more desirable” (Brezinka, 1994, p. 43). On the other hand, *Tarbiat* has the same definition as “education”. Al-Raghib al-Isfahani (1108-1109) refers to “tarbiat” as a process or course of events: “*Tarbiat* is transformation of a thing from one state to another state until it completes. (Raghib, 1991, p.184). Thus, both Brezinka and Raghib interpret “education” as a “process”, and both of them emphasize on “desirable results”.

It is clear that the Raghib's definition is very broad compared to that of Brezinka. On the other hand, ‘Ghazali’ gives a special definition of “tarbiat” which is almost similar to Brezinka's: “The educator must take bad tempers away from human being and replace them with good ones. This is the meaning of “tarbiat”, like a gardener who implants seeds, then takes away from them the weeds, clods, and stones and gives them water and proper soil.” (Ghazali, 1984, p. 87).

It is interesting to note that there are also similarities between Ghazali's definition and some educational philosophers' conceptions of education. In Rousseau's view, for instance, the educator, in taking care of children in their physical and spiritual developments, is similar to a gardener with respect to her/his plants. In the same vein, Scheffler denotes: “There is an obvious analogy between the growing child and the growing plant, between the gardener and teacher...they are both concerned to help the organism flourish, to care for the welfare by providing optimum conditions for the operation of laws of nature.” (Scheffler, 1960, p. 49).

3. The Colloquial Usage

In Persian, especially in colloquial usage, “tarbiat” denotes some of the effects a person receives in her/his life: effects from environment, parents, and teachers. When a person shows a good or a desirable personality, people say: “(S)he has had a good *tarbiat*”, that means “(S)he is well educated”, and conversely, when (s)he shows a bad or undesirable personality, they say: “(S)he has had a bad *tarbiat*”. In these usages, people often emphasize on spiritual

aspect of "tarbiat" or take the personality, instead of the literacy, of the person into account.

In Iranian culture there are some wise persons who, although they did not have any formal education, they are well known as the role-models of *tarbiat*, because of their insights and their interesting and worthwhile sayings. These sayings are collected as quotations and people in every era have read and enjoyed them. For instance, one of these wise men is Sheikh Abolhasan Kharaghany (958-1032) who is a famous mystic. Although he was illiterate, he had many influences on the later mystics.

A Persian proverb says: "to be a scientist is easy, but to be a human is difficult." "Human" in this proverb refer to people who have all good human tempers that distinguishes them from others. Therefore in the concept of "tarbiat" the value aspect is very important and it is not strange that, in Persian, we can speak of "tarbiat" as moral education especially in ordinary language.

"Education" is similar to "tarbiat" in this regard. Peters has a statement which is quite similar to the above-mentioned Persian proverb: "We say that people go to a university to become educated and not just to become scientist" (Peters, 1969, p.24). According to him, "educated man" should have a desirable character: "An educated man [*sic*] is one whose form of life as exhibited in his conduct – the activities to which he is committed, his judgments and feeling – is thought to be desirable." (Ibid, p.25). The other two criteria that Peters mentions for the "educated man", namely knowledge and understanding, are less important than the desirability.

In the same way, Scheffler holds that education is not limited to cognitive components: "Education outstrips cognitive notions altogether in its range, embracing, as we have seen, also the information of propensities and traits, and the development of understanding and appreciation." (Scheffler, 1965, p.21). Today, in Persian, "education" has two components: "ta'lim and tarbiat". "Ta'lim" means instruction while *tarbiat* refers to character and values.

In summary, the notions of propensities, traits, and appreciation, are more important in relation to "tarbiat" than knowledge and skills. The same is true in the case of "education" in English.

4. Conceptual Changes in the old usages

Hirst and Peters hold that the concept of education is very fluid. At one end of the continuum, there is the older and undifferentiated concept of education which refers just to any process of bringing up or rearing in which the connection either with what is desirable or with knowledge is purely contingent. In the old usages, there may be uses which link education to desirable states without any emphasis on knowledge, as there may be uses which pick out the development of knowledge without implying its desirability. However, at the other end, the more recent usage links education with the development of

knowledge and understanding in depth and breadth and desirability. (Hirst, & Peters, 1970, p.25).

Referring to this fluidity of meaning in the case of "education", Brezinka states: "With the expanding volume of pedagogical literature produced in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the terminological confusion has increased rather than decreased. This applies not only to the English or German-speaking worlds, but also internationally to both East and West." (Brezinka, 1994, p. 28).

These statements are true about "tarbiat" too. "Tarbiat" is an old and fluid word. We can find it and some other words with the same meaning in the ancient Persian books that goes back to one thousand years ago. The word "tarbiat" entered in Persian language and literature about nine centuries ago by "Ghazali". Before him, we can see two words with the same meaning of "tarbiat". These two are "parvaresh" and "ta'dib". In the current usage, the former, "parvaresh", means "to rear" or "to train" especially to bring up children and to rear animals and plants. But in the old books, "parvaresh" means "tarbiat" or "education". For instance, the great and famous Iranian poet, Ferdosi Tousi (935-1020), in his great work "Shahname", has used the word "parvaresh". For instance, he says in "Syavash" story: "Rostam accepted the "parvaresh" of Syavash in his childhood, and Syavash after several years attained a good development, physically and mentally." (Ferdosi Tousi, 1965, p. 10).

"Ta'dib" has the same meaning as "tarbiat" too. While Parvaresh is a Persian word, "tarbiat" is an Arabic word which has entered in Persian. *Ta'dib* has been used in religious texts too. Some Islamic texts like "Nahjolbalagheh", the Imam Ali's book, give advices on the education of children. Imam Ali uses the word "ta'dib", for instance, where he says: "A father must select a good name for his child and accept her/his instruction and *ta'dib*" (Imam Ali, 1967, p.546).

The great and famous Iranian philosopher, Abu Ali al-Husayn Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980-1037), has a book on family-based education titled "Tadbir'al'Manzel". *Tadbir* Means "to manage" and *Manzel* means "home". Ibn Sina uses the word "ta'dib" in this book: "When the child gets two years old, her/his educator should begin her/his ta'dib." (Ibn Sina, 1929, p. 35).

After Ferdosi and Ibn Sina, Ghazali wrote his great work on religious and moral education titled "Ihya Ulum al-Din" (The Revival of the Religious Sciences). In this work, Ghazali uses the word "tarbiat" in two senses one of which refers to physical upbringing: "The human body isn't perfect at birth, it develops with "tarbiat" and "nourishment" (Ghazali, 1972, p.66). In this quotation, "tarbiat" and "nourishment" refer to physical growth. The other sense of the word refers to spiritual development: "The soul has a capacity for growth; "tarbiat" and "moral reforms" perfect it" (ibid). In this usage, the word "tarbiat" and the expression "moral reform" have the same meaning.

After Ghazali, Sheikh Sa'di, (1184 – 1283/1291?), the great Iranian poet, uses the word "tarbiat" in educational meaning. Sheikh Sa'di holds that "tarbiat" is a process between teacher and student. Before Sheikh Sa'di "tarbiat" did mean moral education, but in his works "tarbiat" is being used in a new meaning. This meaning is very close to the meaning of 'education' in English. For example Sheikh Sa'di in the chapter seven of his famous work "Golestan" says: "A minister had a son, he sends his son to a wise man and requested from him: Please attempt in his "tarbiat", perhaps he achieves wisdom." (Sheikh Sa'di, 2004, p. 141). The entire chapter seven of "Golestan" is titled and devoted to "tarbiat". In this chapter, there are many concepts relating to "education", such as, "teacher", "student", "school", "teaching", "reward", "Punishment" and so on.

After Sheikh Sa'di, the conceptual change in the word "tarbiat" has been slight. Many of poets, authors, and educational scientists use the word "tarbiat" in the preceding meanings. It is necessary, however, to make some explanations about the concept of "education" and "tarbiat" in the contemporary usage.

5. The Contemporary Usages

In the contemporary usages, often but not always, the two words refer to schooling, learning and teaching. In new texts, we can find this claim, for instance, about education:

"Every claim about an educational issue is partly a claim about the concept of education. The claim that there are certain "best practice" in teaching... to advocate teaching a particular subject logically implies some connection between study of subject and educational gain, and to say that a certain type of classroom management is desirable because, for example, it is conducive to developing democratic habits and values in inductive of a certain educational ideal" (Phillips, 2014, p. 257).

Today, in Persian, the word "tarbiat" together with "ta'lim" (ta'lim va tarbiat) mean "education", particularly in schooling. The word "ta'lim", being an Arabic word, and its Persian synonym "amoozesh" are used to denote instruction of knowledge and skill. However, the expression "ta'lim va tarbiat" (translated into *amoozesh va parvaresh* in Persian) means "Education". A great number of educational scientists and educators have used this term for their purposes. In the past five decades, many books and articles of western educators and educational philosophers have been translated into Persian, and the translators have used "talim va tarbiat" for the word "education".

The phrase of "Talim va tarbiat" refer to all activities which have aims, principles, and certain procedures, namely all the components of the process between teacher and student. In this process, learning, leading, transmission of cultural contents, training, and influence on students are at issue. Today, the usage of the concept of "tarbiat" for physical development is rare.

As for the word “ta’dib”, it is used today to show reforms in behaviors and tempers, particularly, in children. The stem of “ta’dib” is “adab”. In Iranian culture, instruction of “adab” is the duty of parents. When a child or a teenager can make appropriate relationship with others and behaves according to social norms, this is the sign of her/ his “adab”.

Referring to the current usage of "education" in English, Brezinka holds that it refers mainly to psychic, rather than, physical development: "I would hesitate to define the concept of education as including the concept of physical disposition alongside that of psychic dispositions. Better is to keep the concept of education unburdened by the controversies surrounding the mind-body problem." (Brezinka, 1994. p.83). Brezinka means that "education" should be devoted to the psychic dispositions. This shows that the current usage of "education" in English is similar to the usage of "tarbiat" in Persian.

6. Conclusion

The two old words, "education" and "tarbiat", which are from two different cultures, not only have similarities in terms of etymology and terminology, but also are fluid words and have had similar conceptual changes. In more details, these similarities are as follows:

A. Similarities:

Both terms denote spiritual and behavioral developments in human beings, especially in contemporary texts and usages. In old texts, we can find the meaning of physical development for the two terms too.

Both terms are fluid in their meanings because they are used in different meanings of influence, process, and conduct.

In the two terms, the reform and perfection in the personality are at issue.

The changes in the meanings of the two terms are similar, for instance, in the past both of them were used for the growth of plants and animals, but today this usage is rare.

Despite these similarities, there are some differences between the two terms of "education" and "tarbiat". They are as follows:

B. Differences:

In the concept of "education", instruction, knowledge and understanding are more important. But in the concept of "tarbiat", spiritual and moral developments are more significant.

In the concept of “education”, interconnection between teacher and student is essential, but in the case of” tarbiat” this is not the issue; a wise person can be regarded as educated without the need to have a teacher.

Today, due to the changes in the concept of “tarbiat”, the term "ta’lim va tarbiat" means "education" and basically denotes schooling and refers to the activities done at schools or in universities.

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