ENVIRONMENT, SELF, AND AGENCY IN EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IQBAL'S PHILOSOPHY AND BEHAVIORISM

Dr. Amina Murad
Institute of Business Management, Karachi

Dr. Muhammad Abid Ali
Associate Professor,
Coordinator Iqbal Chair,
Editor Bahria Research Journal on Iqbal Studies,
Bahria University Islamabad

Sabahat Anwar
Homeschooler, New York, USA

Abstract

This paper explores the theoretical divergence between Muhammad Iqbal's philosophy of education and the Behaviorist tradition, with a focus on three interrelated constructs: environment, self (khudi), and human agency. Iqbal posits the self (*khudi*) as a dynamic, creative force whose realization is fostered by an environment with existential challenge and ethical stimulation. Iqbal constructs a metaphysical view of the learner as a physical, moral and spiritual being, endowed with fitrah (divine predisposition),

internal faculties for learning and growth, and the capacity to engage in ethical struggle. Behaviorism, rooted in empiricism and evolutionary psychology, regards the learner as an organism shaped by external stimuli and reinforcement. By juxtaposing these paradigms, the study aims to reframe contemporary discussions in educational theory and practice, offering insights for curriculum design and pedagogy attuned to both empirical structure and metaphysical depth and their educational implications. This qualitative study employs philosophical-comparative analysis, situated within a qualitative, interpretive framework. It involves comparative textual examination of Behaviorist psychological theories and the educational philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal. Five themes emerged through textual analysis and thematic synthesis, a) Environment as pedagogical ecosystem, b) Human nature and educational purpose, c) Selfhood (Khudi) and identity formation, d) Self- directed behavior: Autonomy, resistance, and creativity, and e) Environment as moral eco-system and spiritual catalyst. The paper argues that Iqbal's model offers a pedagogical framework that unleashes human potential as a natural learner and restores human dignity, creativity, and moral sovereignty in an environment of freedom. These elements are conspicuously absent in Behaviorist approaches. The study also advocates for an integrated pedagogical model that nurtures conscious selfhood and empowered moral agency with Behaviorism's operational clarity.

Introduction

Educational philosophy and theory serve as the foundational frameworks that shape how we conceptualize learning, and human nature. They provide the normative and epistemological underpinnings of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, clarifying not just what should be taught, but why and how.[1] As Ozmon & Craver[2] argue, philosophy of education "helps educators develop coherent beliefs and practices by encouraging reflective analysis of values and assumptions."[3] Moreover, according to Carr,[4] educational theory must be understood not merely as a technical exercise, but as a moral and cultural endeavor that defines the learner's development in social and existential contexts.

The question of what it means to educate a human being is inseparable from deeper inquiries into selfhood and human agency that includes intentionality, autonomy, moral responsibility, reflexivity, transformative power and the forces that shape human development.[5]

Modern educational theories often rest upon divergent assumptions about human nature which range from mechanistic models rooted in empirical psychology to metaphysical visions grounded in ethical and spiritual flourishing.[6] In cultural and developmental context[7] human nature is shaped by both biological predispositions and cultural environments and psychology reconstructs gender and racial identities over time.

Among the most influential frameworks of the twentieth century, Behaviorism presented a radical departure from introspective traditions, focusing exclusively on observable behavior as a function of environmental conditioning. Devoid of any metaphysical assumptions such as soul, mind or intentionality, B.F. Skinner, the leading figure in radical behaviorism, argued that human behavior is the result of operant conditioning and environmental control, not innate traits or internal causes. He emphasizes the interaction between stimulus and response as they can be measured and thus used as a scientific tool to assess behavioral changes in children.[8] While this model yielded pragmatic tools for classroom management and behavior modification, it has also drawn sustained critique for its neglect of volition, moral agency, and inner life.[9]

Allama Iqbal (1877-1938), a great philosopher and social scientist of the 20th century has inspired the East as well as the West with his lofty thoughts. Iqbal developed a comprehensive Islamic psychology emphasizing spiritual development and divine connection which he has articulated in his dynamic vision of education. His educational ideas introduce the learner as a self (Khudi) in the process of becoming who unfolds his destiny through struggle and creative engagement with the environment.[10] Education for Iqbal is not simply a matter of imparting information or molding behavior, but a transformative journey to reach higher level of khudi, cultivating human faculties, and deepening consciousness.[11] Education is one being conscious of the divine attributes that define the true essence of the human being. For an individual, the ideal self is not isolated, but is spiritually aligned and ethically united with the universe, having grasped the transcendent values of truth, goodness, beauty, and the ultimate unity of existence.[12]

Iqbal's critique of colonial and secular educational models underscores the need for a paradigm that nurtures human dignity, ethical agency, emotional literacy, and metaphysical depth. This paper undertakes a comparative study of these paradigms; Behaviorism and Iqbal's educational philosophy with particular attention to their underlying views of the environment, the learner's self, and agency. By highlighting their ontological and epistemological foundations, the study aims to reframe contemporary discussions in educational theory and practice, offering insights for curriculum design and pedagogy attuned to both empirical structure and metaphysical depth.[13]

Literature Review

The learning environment refers to the interconnected physical, social, and psychological settings in which education unfolds. It is a multidimensional construct that profoundly affects student engagement and learning outcomes.[14] A good educational environment can create a conducive learning atmosphere for learners so that they can achieve their maximum learning potential. Learning is deeply intertwined with the environment and naturally extends beyond the confines of the classroom.[15] For educators, researchers, and policymakers, a deep understanding of this environment is

essential to improving educational quality and supporting students in reaching their full potential.[16]

Constructivist theorists such as Piaget[17] and Vygotsky[18] underscore the importance of learning environments that actively engage students in the process of meaning-making. Accordingly, knowledge is not passively received but dynamically constructed through interaction with the surrounding world. The teacher, in this framework, becomes a facilitator creating opportunities for exploration, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving that allow learners to shape their own understanding. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory[19] provides a comprehensive lens for examining how layered environmental contexts influence student learning. His model identifies four interrelated systems: the microsystem, which includes immediate settings like family and school; the mesosystem, which reflects the interplay between these settings; the exosystem, encompassing broader influences such as community structures and media; and the macrosystem, which embodies overarching cultural values and societal norms. These systems do not operate in isolation, but they interact continuously, shaping a student's educational experience in complex and deeply personal ways. Together, these theories affirm that learning is not confined to the classroom, but rooted in a dynamic web of relationships, spaces, and cultural meanings that nurture the learner's growth from multiple directions.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism as a foundational theory in psychology focuses on observable behavior and how it is shaped by the environment. Emerged in the early 20th century as a dominant psychological paradigm, it was a reaction against introspective and mentalist approaches in psychology, positioning itself as a rigorously empirical science focused on observable behavior, rejecting internal mental states as scientifically unverifiable. Its methodological emphasis on controlled experimentation, operational definitions, and replicable results aligned closely with the principles of scientific inquiry.[20] Pioneered by John Watson (1878–1958) and later refined by B.F. Skinner (1904–1990), Behaviorism posits that learning is a function of stimulus-response conditioning, with the environment serving as

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the primary determinant of behavior emphasizing observable actions over internal mental states.[21] In educational contexts, Behaviorist models have informed instructional design, classroom management, and reinforcement-based learning systems.

Rejecting introspection as unscientific, behaviorists focus on stimulus–response (S-R) relationships, asserting that behavior can be understood and predicted through environmental cues. Classical conditioning, as demonstrated by Pavlov,[22] illustrates how organisms learn by associating neutral stimuli with significant events, while operant conditioning, developed by Skinner,[23] highlights the role of reinforcement and punishment in shaping voluntary behavior. Central to behaviorism is the belief in environmental determinism and reductionism, wherein complex behaviors are broken down into measurable units, often excluding cognitive or emotional dimensions.

Although influential in educational and therapeutic contexts, Behaviorism has been critiqued for its neglect of internal processes and its limited account of human agency and meaning-making. Behaviorism has faced sustained critique for its reductionist approach to human nature, neglecting the complexity of cognition, emotion, and volition; dimensions essential to ethical and transformative education.[24] Recent literature continues to highlight Behaviorism's limitations in fostering agency and moral development. Many studies which span philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and psychology have offered rich critiques of behaviorism's limitations and challenged Behaviorism's denial of intentionality and consciousness, emphasizing the irreducibility of mental states.[25]

Behaviorist models, while effective in shaping surface-level behavior, fall short in cultivating reflective learners capable of ethical discernment. Yusra et al.[26] further argue that Behaviorism's emphasis on external control undermines the learner's autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Though Behavioristic theory still has an impact on teaching strategies, its neglect of internal states renders it insufficient for holistic education.[27]

Iqbal's Philosophy of Education: Selfhood and Ethical Agency

Iqbal's vision centers on the development of *Khudi or* the self as a moral, conscious, and creative force. Education, in Iqbal's view, is

not merely the transmission of knowledge but the awakening of the learner's inner potential and ethical consciousness.[28] Iqbal's integrates metaphysical, psychological, and pedagogical dimensions in his philosophy, and emphasizes intuition, revelation, and self-reflection as legitimate sources of knowledge, alongside reason and empirical inquiry.[29] His conception of environment is not deterministic but dialogical presenting it as an arena for moral struggle, aesthetic refinement, and spiritual growth as he mentions, "The self is not a thing but an act... a tension toward the ideal".[30]

Comparing Iqbal's educational ideals with those of Dewey, Tufail[31] notes that while both value experiential learning; Iqbal's framework is rooted in metaphysical purpose and ethical transcendence. Ali[32] highlights Iqbal's insistence on nurturing individuality within a collective moral vision, arguing that his educational philosophy offers a holistic alternative to mechanistic models. Iqbal's emphasis on agency is particularly relevant in contemporary discussions on mental health and empowerment. His pedagogy encourages learners to act from inner conviction, not external compulsion; a stance that aligns with modern theories of self-efficacy and emotional literacy.[33]

Comparative Insights and Gaps

While Behaviorism offers structured methods for behavior modification, it lacks the philosophical depth to address questions of meaning, purpose, and ethical agency. Iqbal's philosophy, conversely, foregrounds these dimensions but requires pedagogical translation for contemporary educational systems. Few comparative studies exist that juxtapose Iqbal's metaphysical vision with Behaviorist theory. Though many studies[34] provide foundational analyses, but further research is needed to explore how these paradigms inform curriculum design, facilitator roles, and learner development, especially in culturally diverse and spiritually attuned contexts.

This literature review thus establishes the conceptual eco-system for a comparative inquiry into environment, self, and agency to highlight the need for integrative models that honor both empirical structure and metaphysical depth.

Methodology

The research method adopted in this study is philosophical-comparative analysis, situated within a qualitative, interpretive framework. It involves comparative textual examination of Behaviorist psychological theories, particularly those of Watson and Skinner, and the   educational philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal. Primary data sources include foundational Behaviorist writings and Iqbal's poetic and philosophical works, supplemented by secondary sources. The method emphasizes hermeneutic interpretation, thematic abstraction, and pedagogical mapping to explore similarities and contrasting ideas of environment, self (Khudi) and learner agency. This approach is suited to studies exploring epistemological foundations, ethical dimensions, and metaphysical perspectives in education.

Data Analysis and Results

Five core themes emerged from the analysis:

1. Environment as Pedagogical Ecosystem

2. Human Nature and Educational Purpose

3. Self (Khudi) and Identity Formation

4. Environment as Moral Terrain and Spiritual Catalyst

5. Self- Directed Behavior: Autonomy, Resistance, and Creativity

Environment as Pedagogical Eco-system

Environment plays a transformative role as a moral arena and spiritual catalyst *for* Iqbal. He views the environment as a dynamic space for the learner's self where he can confront challenges to awake his curiosity and creative powers and form goals for meaningful action. In his masnavi, Asrar-i-Khudi,[35] Iqbal addresses the importance of environment as a pedagogical eco-system by using the metaphor of diamond and coal. At its chemical core, coal and diamond are the same element i.e. carbon. Yet the difference between the two lies not in essence, but in environmental pressure, time, and transformative tension. The coal represents carbon that settled in low-pressure, low-challenge environmental spaces that did not provoke it to reconfigure, resist, or transcend. It remains opaque,

though useful but unable to refract light or embody the purity of crystalline structure. By contrast, the diamond is born from intense heat, sustained pressure, and deep transformation. Here the carbon struggled, reshaped its molecular identity under conditions that tested its limits. The result is transparency, brilliance, and incomparable strength. For Iqbal, the human self (*khudi*) is composed of unlimited possibility, however, "The essence of the ego is will, and the environment is the occasion for its manifestation" (Iqbal, 1930). What is important is the quality of the environment and the capacity for struggle that determine its final form.

In educational terms, coal-like environments are those steeped in passive instruction, rote conformity, or moral stagnation. They do not challenge the learner's potentials, identity, or ethical dilemma. Diamond-like environments however, provide opportunities for intellectual provocation as well as address ethical debates which demand resistance, inquiry, action, and reflection. Learners in such spaces are not conditioned nor programmed. In fact the environment provides opportunities for organic growth. Quoting Qur'anic verses (2:164, 6:97–99, 25:45–46, 88:17–20) Iqbal notes that the Creator's emphasis on empirical observation such as changing of night and day, formation of clouds and rain, changing of winds, ripening of fruits, mountains as pegs etc. situates Nature as a didactic field for reflection and interpretation as it teaches through symbols accessible to sense-perception (Iqbal, 1930).

In his poem, "Insan aur Bazm-i-Qudrat", (Human and the Assembly of Nature), (Bang-i-Dara 25) Iqbal stages a metaphysical dialogue between the human self and the natural world, using the imagery of morning light, rivers, gardens, and celestial phenomena to explore the status of man within the universe. He invites the learners urging them not merely to observe but to participate in its unfolding meanings. The radiant morning, flowing rivers, and blooming gardens are not passive backdrops but engage in active dialogue responding to the human self's questions, offering wisdom, and reflecting divine truths. So instead of being passive scenery, nature becomes a voice, a teacher, a mirror engaged in a spiritual conversation with the learner. Each element of the environment becomes a metaphorical text to be studied, interpreted, and internalized. Iqbal constructs the environment as both a spiritual

mirror and an eco-system for self-growth, where the learner is called to reflect on his inner obscurity in contrast to the external brilliance, reflecting a profound pedagogical principle. Selfhood (Khudi) is awakened through attentiveness to the Divine Signs embedded in nature. This synthesis of ecological observation and inner inquiry reflects Iqbal's broader educational philosophy, in which the environment is a catalyst for existential and moral awakening by making the self realize that he is not bound to destiny like the universe, plant and mineral worlds around him. The believer is bound by the Divine Commands.

Behaviorism on the other end of the continuum, conceptualizes the environment as a neutral stimulus matrix designed to shape behavior through reinforcement schedules.[36] Learning, in this view, occurs when an individual responds correctly to environmental cues, with little room for interpretation or moral introspection. The environment, therefore serves as a mechanism for behavior shaping applying reinforcement techniques. The emphasis is more on control, predictability, and compliance through standardized stimuli. In vulnerable children, this rigid eco-system may neglect emotional safety, sensory sensitivities, and a contextual nuance that may harm the learner's self through reductive conditioning.[37] In vulnerable children, this rigid terrain may neglect emotional safety, sensory sensitivities, and contextual nuance, risking harm through reductive conditioning.

Human Nature and Educational Purpose

Behaviorist psychology assumes a tabula rasa approach, framing human nature as an empty vessel shaped exclusively by environmental contingencies. According to Skinner[38] behaviors are learned through operant conditioning, and internal states like intention, emotion, or spiritual disposition are dismissed as unmeasurable and irrelevant. The learner, in this model, is essentially reactive and manipulable. Reflecting on the origins of the contemporary education system, John Taylor Gatto (2000), one of New York's most acclaimed schoolteachers, argues that mass schooling was not designed primarily for the intellectual or moral upliftment of children, but rather emerged from the socio-economic logic of the Industrial Age. According to Gatto, the powerful coal

nations of the 19th century engineered institutionalized education to serve industrial and political interests, particularly in the post-Civil War era when business elites, government officials, and academic institutions began advocating for the isolation of children in formal schooling environments. This shift was driven by a dual motivation: a belief in the efficiency of mechanized social order and a desire to produce a compliant workforce. The model of forced schooling, Gatto contends, was intended to transform children into human resources, aligning them with the needs of an expanding industrial economy while distancing them from democratic and libertarian traditions. Early philosophical and theological narratives about social order obscured these intentions, allowing indoctrination to be framed as progress. Thus, the educational revolution was as much a product of economic greed as it was of a sincere, albeit misguided faith in the power of structured conformity to shape society.

By contrast, Iqbal affirms a multi-dimensional view of human nature, rooted in divine origin (*fitrah*) and endowed with reason, intuition, and moral agency.[39] Fitrah as an unchanging natural predisposition for good existing at birth in all human beings,[40] Iqbal propounds that human nature is designed to foster personal and social growth in a conducive environment that guides them toward a successful culmination of life where every individual is able to hold himself accountable in front of his Creator for all his actions.[41]

Education is not behavior modification but cultivation and awakening of human self that is capable of transcending animal instincts through ethical action. Iqbal's ideas of education align with Holt[42] as both envision schools as places where children can naturally grow in various attributes like curiosity, courage, and independence. The learner is predisposed to psychological growth and responsibility, and educational systems must nurture this inner striving rather than suppress it.[43] Education for Iqbal is therefore a process that is concerned with the pursuit of knowledge, and development of the mind, be it skills, virtues, and other characteristics that enable an individual to realize the ultimate principles that have the greatest good for him and help in reaching the highest limits of his potentials.[44] While Behaviorism reduces human nature to behavioral outputs, Iqbal emphasizes latent moral potential and aspirational growth.

Selfhood (Khudi) and Identity Formation

Selfhood occupies a marginal, if not absent, place in Behaviorist theory. Watson (1913) explicitly rejected introspection, and Skinner's model avoids discussion of ego development, focusing instead on observable behaviors. This omission undermines the role of identity, purpose, and volitional growth in educational contexts. Identity formation is sidelined; behavior is primary, and selfhood is either invisible or irrelevant to learning objectives.

In sharp contrast, Iqbal's philosophy places *Khudi* as the evolving self defining the purpose of education. The strengthening of *Khudi* through struggle, creativity, and moral choice is essential to personal and communal transformation.[45] The learner is encouraged to become self-aware, assertive, and spiritually refined, transforming education into a process of ethical individuation. This vision of the self is both existential and metaphysical, requiring educators to facilitate experiences that challenge, refine, and awaken the learner's sense of inner destiny. Human self as a conceptual knower as mentioned in the Qur'an is capable of knowing names of all concepts (*2:30–33, 13:11*), shaping inner worlds when resisted by external forces emerges through intellectual and spiritual struggle and a co-creator with the Divine.[46] Khudi being the central force of human existence and subject to organic and psychological growth through struggle, reflection, and creative action, true education is the education of the function and cultivation of the self as bold, ethical, and spiritually alive entity (Ali, 2011). The main theme of Asrar-i-Khudi (Iqbal 1975) rests on two points; "that personality is the central fact of the universe. The Old Testament describes this ultimate fact as the great 'I am'" (Razzaqi 2003, 207) and "I am, is the central fact in the constitution of man" (Razzaqi 2003, 207). According to Iqbal (1990) in his poem Saqinama in Bal-i-Jibril, Khudi is the inner mystery of life itself displayed in individuals, yet free from them. Being the latent power in every individual waiting for his dynamic action and exuberant thought, Iqbal urges the educators to facilitate the students to enable their creative potential as the purpose of the revolution of the all heavenly bodies is also meant to allow individual's selfhood to tap his potentials by exploring the creations of God.

Self- Directed Behavior: Autonomy, Resistance, and Creativity

Behaviorism characterizes self-directed behavior as *responsive behavior*, determined by conditioning. The learner's choices are shaped by reinforcement, and free will is largely dismissed (Skinner, 1953). Even moral actions are seen as trained habits rather than conscious decisions. This perspective suits behavior management and standardized instruction but fails to prepare learners for ethical dilemmas or creative autonomy. Conversely, Iqbal insists that humans possess innate capacity to act intentionally, make choices, and influence their environment from within, rather than being solely shaped by external forces. He has been endowed with the freedom and responsibility to act upon divine trust.[47] Iqbal identifies action as the path to self-realization, where learners must choose, resist, and create rather than merely adapt. In Iqbal's pedagogical vision, agency is cultivated through inquiry, metaphysical reflection, and engagement with existential tensions such as free will vs responsibility, life and mortality, freedom and slavery etc.[48] The educator must challenge learners to confront meaning instead of merely complying with norms. This is a fundamental divergence from Behaviorism that is focused on training habits for conformity and compliance without having any free will. The power of conscious will and capacity for self- transformation is disregarded by Behaviorists.[49] Chomsky [50] criticizes Skinner's approach for its mechanistic view of human behavior which is incompatible with the richness of human language, thought, and agency, ignoring internal mental states. Chomsky's seminal review of Skinner's Verbal Behavior dismantled the Behaviorist account of language acquisition, asserting that Behaviorism fails to explain generativity, syntax, and meaning-making. Accordingly, Skinner's framework disregards the creative aspect of language use, implying a denial of human agency and freedom. Chomsky sees human language as a uniquely creative and generative system, not explainable by conditioning alone. He believes that the ability to produce and understand novel sentences reflects an innate mental structure, the "language faculty" which Behaviorism is unable to explain.

With the freedom to choose and director his behavior, Iqbal highlight's human capacity to take initiative and cooperate with

Divine Will to alter personal and collective conditions. He is able to face obstacles as they stimulate his creative resistance and provide further insight. (13:11, 84:16–19

Iqbal offers a depth psychology of the autonomous human self, whereas Behaviorist constrain autonomy by external control which may lead acts of imagination, dissent, or questioning as a dissent against conformity. Overemphasis on reinforcement diminishes the child's volitional power as self-direction is essential to khudi. Learning thrives on intrinsic motivation, imaginative resistance, and ethical creativity for learners who prefer navigating inner challenges.

Environment as Moral Eco-System and Spiritual Catalyst

Earth and its Environment for centuries have been treated as a wealth of material resources. Decades of scientific research confirm that global ecosystems are deteriorating due to unsustainable industrial production and consumption patterns (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Commissioned by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the assessment based on contributions from over 1,360 experts warned of collapsing fish stocks, climate disruption, and pollution threatening essential resources for billions, pushing the planet toward mass species extinction (p. 3). Lester Brown (2003) further emphasizes that humanity has shifted from living off nature's sustainable yield to depleting its core endowment, calling for urgent, globally coordinated action to stabilize ecological systems at a pace akin to wartime mobilization. While Iqbal favors intense interaction of human beings with the entities in their environment, he also views the natural world imbued with divine signs (*Ayat*), designed not just for survival but for spiritual awakening. Nature according to Iqbal is a teacher, reflecting the Creator's attributes and calling humans to respond with reverence, creativity, and ethical leadership (Iqbal, 1930; Al-Attas, 1991). Education must therefore include ecological, aesthetic, and spiritual literacies that equip the learners to read the world as a sacred text. Iqbal calls the earth as a holy ground equipped with signs of Creator making nature reading as an act of worship.[51]

In contrast, Behaviorism approaches nature purely as a behavioral field in which a set of stimuli can be manipulated for learning outcomes.[52] There is no room for wonder or awe, only functionality.

Iqbal's view encourages learners to transcend appearances, while Behaviorism anchors them in conditioned responses. This spiritual elevation of the environment makes Iqbal's pedagogy both transformative and culturally resonant, especially in contexts where ethical and metaphysical questions are central to human development. According to Iqbal, nature is not to be conquered for domination but engaged for spiritual ascent. The Qur'an legitimizes both empirical and intuitive modes (*qalb*) to harmonize outer reality with inner being (*32:7–9, 30:22*). The environment is relational and revelatory, requiring inner response, whereas Behaviorist systems can reinforce compliance without compassion, overlooking spiritual yearning, or personal meaning. Iqbal considers the environment as a moral field where the self meets trials, develops resilience and chooses integrity which serves as catalysts for spiritual ascent and character formation.

Behaviorist View: Moral reasoning is not emphasized; behavior change is evaluated based on outcome, not ethical intention. The spiritual dimension is entirely excluded.

Discussion

Iqbal's educational thought, though not systematized in formal treatises, is richly embedded in his poetry, lectures, and philosophical writings. Iqbal and Behaviorism present fundamentally different views on human and nature and how learning occurs. Iqbal emphasizes the development of self (Khudi) through education focusing on both physical and metaphysical, cognitive and emotional and psychological and moral growth. On the other hand, Behaviorism focuses on modifying external actions through environmental influences. Iqbal recommends freedom in education, enabling learners to experiment, make choices, and learn through direct experience, whereas Behaviorists propose observable behavior only as they can be measured objectively, allowing for replicable experiments and empirical validation. Internal states like thoughts or emotions are subjective and difficult to quantify reliably.[53]

The significant divergence in Iqbal's and Behaviorist perspectives regarding personal agency and the core process of learning reveals a basic conflict between the empirical focus of Behaviorism and the spiritual, metaphysical orientation of Iqbal's philosophy. Behaviorism

treats the environment as an instrument for conformity,[54] whereas Iqbal elevates it as a landscape for the self to discover its essence. Behaviorism considers environment as a passive container for stimuli, whereas Iqbal calls it a testing ground where natural forces, society, and historical struggles become pedagogical agents that invite the learners to read the Divine Signs, question inherited norms, and develop their personality through purposeful action. Besides personal autonomy, Iqbal recognizes the reciprocal influence of community and culture and employing a creative balance between the material and spiritual aspects of human nature. Intellect in Iqbal's view is a valuable tool, but modern thought has neglected intuition and love.[55]

The differences between the views of Iqbal and that of Behaviorists also result in distinct approaches in educational methods, student empowerment, and moral development. Although Behaviorism's systematic reinforcement strategies provide clear operational guidance, its disregard for inner experience makes it less effective in addressing the full psychological and ethical needs of learners.[56] Further research supports these distinctions between Iqbal's educational philosophy and Behavioristic values. Iqbal's ideas underscore holistic personal development, integrating spirituality and self-awareness as essential aims of education. An ideal learner is someone who unites body and soul, striving for ethical and spiritual excellence (Bahronfi, 2015; Masluhah et al., 2021; Nuryamin, 2020). In contrast, Behaviorism's focus on observable behavior and environmental conditioning does not address these inner dimensions. Since Behaviorism's pedagogy supports control and predictability, it principles are well-suited for behavior management and skill acquisition. Yet, as Azima[57] points out, it often fails to inspire intrinsic motivation or moral deliberation.

Iqbal's model, rooted in *khudi and* human nature (fitrah), ensures the learner's internal transformation, hence demands an educational shift from conformity to creativity, and from reaction to reflection. His emphasis on environment as a moral terrain brings a sacred dimension to learning spaces, thus invite facilitators to design experiences that nourish awe, self-awareness, confidence in learners' potentials, and ethical clarity.[58]

Implications

The discussion unveils critical implications for curriculum design. Behaviorist strategies may yield short-term behavioral compliance but lack the philosophical elasticity needed for lifelong learning and moral leadership. Iqbal's approach challenges educators to cultivate depth, meaning, and the conscious will in the learner. Such an approach allows the learner to take charge of the psychological process of choosing, initiating, and persisting in actions aligned with one's goals and values. Hence the urge for psychological growth and change is fulfilled as the learner is allowed to unfold his potential through deliberate effort, reflection, and resilience.[59]

Ultimately, the comparative lens suggests that though Iqbal's approach is non-empirical, he examines the cosmic environment from a thoroughly Islamic view-point; he can enrich Behaviorist structures with ethical intentionality and metaphysical insight. Rather than abandoning Behaviorist tools, educators can re-contextualize them by aligning with Iqbal's metaphysical and Khudi-driven pedagogy. Through dialectic of environment and inner creative powers, the learner is shaped by both external forces as well as his internal creative resistance. According to Iqbal,[60] when the individual is thwarted by environment, he has the ability to construct his inner realm with inspiration and purpose. Such an integrative approach may well respond to the contemporary call for educational models that honor both empirical rigor and Khudi-centric formation.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the profound philosophical and pedagogical divergence between Behaviorism and Iqbal's educational thought, revealing not merely two theories of learning but two distinct visions of human development. Behaviorism offers a structured, stimulus-response model that prioritizes observable behavior and environmental control. While effective for behavior modification and skill acquisition, it remains limited in addressing the learner's inner life, moral agency, and spiritual growth.[61] In contrast, Iqbal's philosophy, rooted in metaphysical selfhood (*Khudi*), positions education as a sacred journey toward ethical individuation, individual choice and accountability, strength, and divine proximity.[62] His conception of the environment as a moral eco-system and spiritual

catalyst reframes learning as a dynamic interplay between the self and the cosmos, where struggle, intuition, and action refine the self.

The comparative analysis underscores that while behaviorism offers operational clarity, it lacks the philosophical elasticity required for transformative education. Iqbal's model, though less prescriptive, provides a richer framework for cultivating emotionally literate, ethically grounded, and cognitively attuned learners. For educators working in culturally diverse and spiritually resonant contexts and especially in postcolonial Muslim societies, Iqbal's vision offers a compelling alternative to mechanistic paradigms. Ultimately, this study advocates for integrative pedagogies that honor both empirical structure and metaphysical depth, enabling education to serve not only the intellect but the complete human self.

Recommendations

Building on the comparative insights of this study, several pedagogical and curricular recommendations emerge accommodating culturally diverse and spiritually resonant contexts. First, curriculum design should integrate the operational clarity of behaviorist models with the metaphysical richness of Iqbal's educational philosophy. Environments that support both skill acquisition and ethical growth require conceptualizing the learning environment as a moral and spiritual ecosystem that cultivates Khudi. Teacher training programs should incorporate modules on psycho-spiritual pedagogy, equipping educators to facilitate reflective, emotionally literate, and ethically grounded learning experiences. Furthermore, the development of educational resources using Iqbal's metaphor-rich story booklets, visual guides, and nature-based activities can support learners' engagement with Iqbal's vision of selfhood and cosmic relationality. Finally, educational policy must expand beyond mechanistic paradigms to embrace holistic frameworks that recognize the learner as a complex, intentional being. Such integrative approaches can reorient education toward its transformative potential, aligning instructional practice with both empirical efficacy and metaphysical depth.

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