



Al-Wifaq Research Journal of Islamic Studies  
Volume 5, Issue 1 (January - June 2022)  
eISSN: 2709-8915, pISSN: 2709-8907  
Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55603/alwifaq>  
Issue DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55603/alwifaq.v5i1>  
Home Page: <https://alwifaqjournal.com/>

Journal QR Code



Article	A Historiography of the Educational Institutes (Pre-Islamic Arab to Prophetic Era)
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## Indexing



Published	30 June 2022
Article DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.55603/alwifaq.v5i1.e6">https://doi.org/10.55603/alwifaq.v5i1.e6</a>



## QR Code



Citation	Amira Sami, and Qurshi, Hafsa Ayaz, "A Historiography of the Educational Institutes (Pre-Islamic Arab to Prophetic Era)", Al-Wifaq, June 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, 71–84
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Publisher Information:	Department of Islamic Studies, Federal Urdu University of Arts Science & Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan.
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# A Historiography of the Educational Institutes (Pre-Islamic Arab to Prophetic Era)

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was an effective educator and instructor. Being a keen and enthusiastic promoter of learning, he built educational institutes in an Islamic state Madina. This paper investigates the key characteristics, core principles, and contributing factors of Prophet (PBUH) in building educational institutes. The purpose of the study is to explore the institutes built for educational activities in the initial years of Islam, particularly during the prophetic era. The current study employs a qualitative review approach because the observed object is related to history. It is concluded that education has a momentous value in Islam, therefore, Prophet (PBUH) took steps to promote education and stabilize educational institutes.*

## **KEYWORDS:**

*Historiography, Education, Institution, Teacher, Islamic state*

## **Educational System in Pre-Islamic Arab**

In pre-Islamic Arabia, there was no educational institute comparable to that of today. Few individuals were capable of reading or writing. Most of them were not very eager to learn these arts. The second caliph of the Muslims, Hazrat Umar (R.A.) was one of them who were able to read and write before the emergence of Islam.

Historians believe that oral learning predominated in pre-Islam time period. Poetry was the pagan Arabs' greatest intellectual achievement because of having sharp memory.<sup>1</sup> Arabs excelled many nations in the world in composition of epic poetry. William Muir in his book "Life of Muhammad" writes;

"The greatest collection of Arabs was the collection of seven poems and collectively known to be golden odes, was an excellent poetry full of eloquence. Poetry in ancient Arab was the authoritative source for describing them in that period and for historian, the Arabic pre-Islamic poetry is the primary source to know about the social and political condition of Pre- Islamic Arab".<sup>2</sup>

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Arabs claimed that they are blessed by quality of tongue shown in poetry and eloquence. To assess poetry's to Arabs significance Margoliouth remarked:

"In nomad Arabia, the poets were part of the war equipment of the tribe; they defended their own, and damaged hostile tribes by the employment of a force which was supposed indeed to work mysteriously, but which in fact consisted in composing dexterous phrases of a sort that would attract sign, and would consequently be diffused and remembered widely."<sup>3</sup>

According to Ryding, due to a dearth of written documents, nothing is known about the nature of Arabic between the third and eighth centuries. He continues by saying; "The only written evidence is in the form of epigraphic material found in the Northwest and Central Arabia."<sup>4</sup>

Subsequently, it wasn't until the eighth century that the literary treasure of poetry was recorded and documented in a systematic written form. When Islam was introduced and Quran was revealed, Makkans were the first to make Arabic, a written language. Holes asserts that;

"The only direct evidence we have of the linguistic structure of Arabic before the time the Prophet Mohammed (570-632) is to be found in orally composed and transmitted poetry."<sup>5</sup>

Lyric poetry was the pinnacle of its artistic and intellectual achievement. Poetry is an advanced form of expression that was delivered orally. The language and poetry of pre-Islamic Arabs were so rich that it is comparable with the developed languages of the modern Europe. Pre-Islamic Arabian poetry is one of our most important sources for studying this period's history. They shed light on pre-Islamic Arabia from every angle.

Shiq ibn Anmar ibn Nizar, Satih ibn Mazin, Fatimah bint Murr al-Khathlamiyah, Zarqa bint Zuhair and others, were some of the important poets in pre-Islamic Arabia.<sup>6</sup>

Commonly, traders from Makkah, Madina, and Taif, had the opportunity to write because they had communicated with people from neighboring states such as Yemen and Ethiopia in the south and Syria and Persia in the north. Groups of intellectuals known as *Hukām* existed in Makkah and other parts of Arabia. They were the ones who take decisions. People come to them to defend their heritage, conflicts, and land and water cases, among other issues.<sup>7</sup> Their decision was based on their previous experiences, trustworthiness, personality, and intelligence.

The pre-Islamic Arabs were also well-versed in prose literature such

as stories, tales, speeches, descriptions, proverbs, and maxims, or prose literature based on history and genealogy.<sup>8</sup> They simply rely on their memory to keep track of important information. They even memorize lengthy paragraphs and, if necessary, reproduce the entire paragraph. Some professionals delivered recorded speeches, publicly.<sup>9</sup>

People from various tribes memorized their history, major incidents in the tribe's history, and other significant events during the pre-Islamic period. They competed and were able to show off their talents. They employed rhyming phrases that were short and to the point. Thus, some literate men and women practiced Arabic prose literature during the pre-Islamic period.<sup>10</sup> Quss bin Saidah and Amr bin Ma'dikarib were both influential in the field of Arabic prose literature during the pre-Islamic Arab.<sup>11</sup>

There were many orators in the pre-Islamic Arab who used proverbs in their speeches. Arabic proverbs played an important role in the development of Arabic prose literature and poetry. Poets used proverbs to encourage their soldiers even in the battlefields. Some speakers use proverbs in their speeches to draw the audience's attention.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the people of Arab before Islam were never blank in education but there were some learned individuals in them. It is the definite fact that people used to give importance to retentive memory than writing but there was custom of writing verses, eulogiums and agreements. Testimonies, agreement and every year seven laudatory poems were hanged in Ka'ba. From this we estimate that, in that era, in Makkah there were certainly some educated person.

Prior to the arrival of Islam, the Jahiliyyah educational institute named Kuttab, were established. For the benefit of the community, people of Hijaz learnt reading and writing. The Hirah community had discovered the Himyariyin community of education. Sufyan Ibn Umayah and Abu Qais ibn 'Abd al-Manaf, were the first people in Makkah to learn reading and writing. It's likely that when Muhammad (S.A.W.) set out on his Islamic mission (around 610 M), seventeen (17) men and five (5) women of Quraish could read and write.<sup>13</sup>

## **Educational Institutes in Prophetic Era**

Muhammad (S.A.W.) not only constructed the educational institute but also stabilizes educational system. Besides his prophetic mission, his teaching methods were affected and polished by learning in his early years at Makkah and its environs, as well as during his later business journeys.

Prophet (S.A.W.) received his first revelation at the age of 40. The very

first revelation he received was a command to read, praising the pen and attributing all human knowledge to it.

اقرأ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

الَّذِي عَلِمَ بِالْقَلْمَنْ<sup>14</sup>

“Read In the name of your Lord, who created... Read, and it is your Lord, Most Bountiful Who taught by the pen, taught men which he knew not.”

Allah gave man the ability to write and read, and it is He Who is capable of establishing the origin of all sciences, knowledge, and civilizations in him. Allah exalted and honored him by bestowing knowledge upon him, and this is the dignity with which the Father of Humanity, Adam, was compared to angels. Knowledge can be found in the mind, on the tongue, or in written form, thus, it can be mental, spoken, or written. Written knowledge necessitates the intellectual and spoken knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

Prophet (S.A.W.) placed a high value on learning. The acquisition of knowledge is a Muslim's primary responsibility.

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَريضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ<sup>16</sup>

“Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim.”

The basic aim of the education in prophetic era was to spread the knowledge of Islam, and to bring change in society, morally and ethically, thus, molding the habits of people in morality of Islam. An educated man cannot be compared with an uneducated person.

قُلْ هُلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ<sup>17</sup>

“Are they equal those who know and those who know not?”

Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) excelled as a teacher and a passionate promoter of education. By ensuring that Muslim men and women have access to education, he emphasized two key principles of modern education; the concept of lifelong learning and the need for democratic action.<sup>18</sup> Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) used every accessible method to spread knowledge and established educational institutes or academies at the outset.

Educational institutions are a component of social institutions of society. It is a zone where all the other social institutions interact with each other, affecting each other through interactional and cooperative influences. Therefore, Islamic education concentrated *Ta'līm*, *Tarbiyah* and *Ta'dīb*. *Ta'līm* means “to be aware”, “to know”, “to perceive” and “to learn” implying that knowledge is imparted through instruction, whereas *Tarbiyah* is “to grow”, “to increase” and “to rear” suggesting spiritual and

ethical upbringing according to the will of Allah. *Ta'dīb* refers to good manners and being cultured, with an emphasis on social behavioral development.<sup>19</sup>

Schools were established in Madina's Masajid, which served as both house of worship and educational institutions. Each community had its own elementary school for young boys and girls. Beside schools, a number of higher learning institutions arose. Following are the educational institutions that were built in Madina during the Prophet's (S.A.W.) period;

### Dar-e-Arqam

From the beginning of Islam, there were incongruous circumstances for learning. Dar-e-Arqam was considered as pioneer regular educational Institute. Dar-e-Arqam was established at Hazrat Arqam bin Makhzumi (R.A.)'s house who was one of the early convertors of Islam, by Prophet (S.A.W.).

Arqam's house was initially chosen as a gathering spot because it was hidden behind the *Safa* Mountain, away from the pagans and chieftains who surrounded the *Ka'bah*. It was also close to Khadija's (R.A.) house, where the Prophet (S.A.W.) dwelt. Prophet (S.A.W.) gathers his followers in a modest cottage and lays the ground work for a thriving society that has resulted in incredible blessings and innumerable human role models.

Companions of the Prophet (S.A.W.) learned the Quran and other religious and moral teachings in the direct supervision of Prophet (S.A.W.), in Dar-e-Arqam. A number of students studied there; some were day scholars and others were hostelled in Dar-e-Arqam.<sup>20</sup>

Many people embraced Islam at Dar-ul-Arqam including Ammar bin Yasir (R.A.) and Suhayb bin Sinan (R.A.) who embraced Islam together. It was narrated that the maximum number of companions in Dar al-Arqam was forty men after the conversion of Hazarat Umar (R.A.) and Hamzah (R.A.).<sup>21</sup> It is certainly true that Prophet (S.A.W.) selected some and was spiritually, intellectually, physically and religiously prepared the future leaders of Islam.

Ammar (R.A.) met Suhayb ibn Sinan (R.A.) in front of the door of Dar al-Arqam. They then entered the house and asked the Prophet (S.A.W.) about Islam and subsequently converted to Islam. Ammar (R.A.) narrated:

لَقِيْتُ صَهْبِيْا عَلَى بَابِ دَارِ الْأَرْقَمِ وَفِيهَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، فَدَخَلْنَا،

فَعَرَضَ عَلَيْنَا الإِسْلَامَ فَأَسْلَمْنَا<sup>22</sup>

"I met Suhayb in front of the door of Dar al-Arqam and the Prophet (S.A.W.) was there. We entered and he presented Islam to us, so we embraced Islam."

The companions used to lead non-Makkans to inquire about Islam, such as Abu Dharr, Ibn Adsa, and other converts arriving from outside Makkah to the Prophet (S.A.W.) in Dar al-Arqam. This suggests the Prophet (S.A.W.) entered Dar-al-Arqam very early after a few months of Ba'thah. There appears to have been a plan in the Prophet's (S.A.W.) mind for having a meeting place where he could meet with his followers and give them education.

The same happened when he migrated to Madina, his gathering was intended to outline educational instructions during the succeeding centuries. His Masjid (Masjid-e-Nabwi), where he habitually arranged his assembly, was not only the seat of the first educational institution in the Muslim history, but also came to set a tradition for the Masjids to be a seat of learning.

Even during the prophet's (S.A.W.) time, Madina had at least nine Masajid, each of which served as a school.<sup>23</sup>

### **Masjid Quba**

Masjid Quba, located to the south of Madina, was built as a first educational institution by the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). The property included a well that belonged to Abu Ayyub Al-Ansari (R.A.). When Prophet (S.A.W.) arrived in Madina, Prophet's she-camel knelt to drink from a protracted drought. He decided to build a masjid there and accompanied his comrades in carrying stones, pebbles, and sand for the construction of the masjid.

The residents of the area send their children to masjid Quba. People used to go there and physically supervise the school at the Masajid. Salim, Abu Huzaifah's slave, a brilliant Quranic scholar was appointed as Imam and teacher in this Masjid.<sup>24</sup> Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) himself used to visit Masjid Quba on Saturdays. Ibn 'Umar (R.A.) said;

"The Prophet used to go to the Masjid of Quba every Saturday (sometimes) by walking and (sometimes) on riding."<sup>25</sup>

It is believed that the Masjid of Quba as the Quran mentions was founded on piety and devoutness.

لَا تَقْمِنْ فِيهِ أَبَدًا لَّمَسْجِدٌ أُسِّسَ عَلَى التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْ أَوَّلِ يَوْمٍ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَقْوَمَ فِيهِ فِيهِ  
رِجَالٌ يُبَيِّنُونَ أَنْ يَتَطَهَّرُوا ۚ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهَّرِينَ<sup>26</sup>

"Never stand you therein. Verily, the mosque whose foundation was laid from the first day on piety is more worthy that you stand therein (to pray). In it are men who love to clean and to purify themselves. And Allah loves those who make themselves clean and pure."

## Masjid Bani Zareek

The very first educational institute in Madina was Masjid bani Zareeq. It was the first institute of Quranic education. Ibn Qayyim has written

فأول مسجد قرئ فيه القرآن بالمدينة مسجد بنى زريق<sup>27</sup>

"The very first mosque in which Quran was recited is  
Masjid Bani Zareek."

Hazrat Rafi bin Malik Zarki (R.A.) was the instructor of this institute. He belonged from Bani Zareek, a branch of Khadraj tribe. He became Muslim in Bait Aqaba oola.

وأن رافع بن مالك لما لقي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم بالعقبة أعطاه ما  
أنزل عليه في العشر سنين التي خلت، فقدم به رافع المدينة<sup>28</sup>

"And Rafi bin Malik, when he met the Messenger of God (S.A.W.) and his family, in Aqaba, he gave him what was revealed to him in the ten years and he went."

It is also narrated that he taught surah Yousaf

أن رافع بن مالك أول من قدم المدينة بسورة يوسف<sup>29</sup>  
"He taught surah Yousaf for the first time in Madina."

When surah Taha was revealed in Makkah. Rafi bin Malik wrote it and taught Bani Zareek in Madina and become first teacher of Masjid Bani Zareeq. Later on, his place of teaching turned into masjid which was situated in the mid of city. Most of the teachers and students of this mosque were from bani Zareek.<sup>30</sup>

## Naqee' al-Khimsat

The third seminary was about a mile north of Madina in the house of Hazrat Asad bin Zarara. This settlement was in an area called "Naqee' al-Khismat" after the settlement of Banu Salama. After the acceptance of Islam, the chiefs of the two Ansar tribes, Aus and Khazraj, in the Bai't of Aqaba, submitted to the court of the Prophet (S.A.W.) that a teacher should be sent to Madinah to teach the Quran and religion.

According to the tradition of Ibn Ishaq, only after the pledge of allegiance of Uqbah, the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) sent Hazrat Mu'sab bin Umayr to Madinah with the Ansar;

فلما انصرف عنه القوم بعث رسول الله معهم مصعب بن عمير وأمره ان يقرء لهم  
القرآن ويعلّمهم الاسلام، يفقههم في الدين فكان يسمى المقرئ بالمدينة مصعب،  
وكان منزله على اسعد بن زراة بن عدس ابى امامۃ<sup>31</sup>

"When the Ansar began to return after pledging allegiance, the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.), sent Mu'sab bin Umayr with them and ordered him to teach the people Quran,

Islam, and to inculcate in them the insight and correct understanding of the religion."

Hazrat Asad bin Zararah led the Friday prayer in Madina even before the obligatory Friday prayer. It seems that this educational institution of Qa'i al-Khismat was not only a Quranic school and a seminary, but it was an Islamic center in Madina before the migration. Hazrat Mu'sab bin Umair used to lead Aws and Khazraj, a joint gathering.<sup>32</sup>

### **Masjid-e-Nabwi**

When Muhammad (S.A.W.) arrived at Madina, he resided in the Banu Najjar neighborhood, close to Abu Ayyub Ansari's house. There, Prophet (S.A.W.) chose to build a Masjid. The land was owned by the two orphan brothers, Sahl and Suhayl. They wished to offer the land, free of charge for the construction of a Masjid, but Allah's Last Messenger (S.A.W.) refused and ordered Abu Bakr (R.A.) to pay money.<sup>33</sup>

In the month of Rabi' al-Awwal, Prophet (S.A.W.) laid the foundation for the Masjid. The structure was made up of stones, unbacked bricks, palm tree trunks, and branches.<sup>34</sup> On that piece of land, there were palm palms and non-Muslim graves. Graves were dug up, trees were cut down, and a Masjid was built on the site. Palms were utilized as pillars to support the roof, stone bricks were used to construct the walls, and branches were used to construct the Masjid's roof. Thus, educational institute i-e Masjid was constructed. Muhammad (S.A.W.) imparted education and taught Islam through the Masjid. He bolstered Muslim solidarity while scraping away at the last vestiges of animosity.<sup>35</sup>

Muhammad (S.A.W.) created a covered area for the poor sahabah at the back of the Masjid, where they stayed for the night. This location was known as as-Suffah, and for the accommodation of Muhammad's family, they built two huts.<sup>36</sup>

Masjid plays a vital role in construction of Muslim Society. Masjid acted as a center for all religious, political and social activities. At the time of Prophet (S.A.W.), Masajid have enjoyed the role of multifarious institutions, like religious institution, political institution, social institution and educational institutions.

Prophet (S.A.W.) designated the big Masjid in Madina, Masjid-e-Nabvi, as the major basis for disseminating Islamic knowledge and learning, as well as himself as the first instructor of this Islamic academy, permitting Arabs to assemble around him for the purpose of learning.<sup>37</sup> Beside education institution Masjid-e-Nabvi also used as a main office where decisions related to the state and government were made and finalized.<sup>38</sup>

Muslims used to attend several lessons on scientific subjects led by Imam Ali (R.A.), Zaid ibn Sabit, Maadh Ibn Jabal, and Abi ibn Ka'ab in order

to learn the Quran and Islamic law. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) himself used to be present at these gatherings to encourage and facilitate the outstanding followers and to spread knowledge. Aside from this, students were taught arithmetic engineering, medical, astronomy, and other subjects.<sup>39</sup>

Prophet (S.A.W.) promised Muslims a large reward if they conduct religious duties in Masjid-e-Nabawi. He once claimed that a prayer offered in congregation is twenty-five or twenty-seven times greater than one offered alone in terms of reward.<sup>40</sup> Masjid-e-Nabawi was utilized for numerous other religious events, including dhikr and i'tikaf, in addition to prayers.

In the Masjid, Muhammad (S.A.W.) and his companions used to assemble and discuss issues. People were drawn to the Masjid by the logical, sensible, and intellectual debates, and they cannot avoid but join the Prophet's company. Males were not the only ones who participated in these debates; females and children were also there. Prophet (S.A.W.) set aside time for women to be taught and educated about Islam, and also to be able to discuss their issues and receive crucial guidance from Prophets (S.A.W.).

Aishah (R.A.), the Prophet's youngest wife (S.A.W.), once said regarding the native women of Madina.

“Blessed are the women of the Ansar, they didn't let their shyness stop them from learning more about their religion.”<sup>41</sup>

In Fiqh, twenty Sahabiyat of Prophet (S.A.W.) were Mufti. Hafsah (R.A.) was taught to read and write by Shifa, daughter of Abdullah (R.A.), who was a relative of Umar Farooq (R.A.). Masjid-e-Nabawi served as a center of Muslim unity. It encouraged Muslims to be more educated and civilized. The goal of Masjid-e-Nabawi was to bring religion and politics together. Masjid play an important role in Islamic education. Students benefit from a variety of education and knowledge approaches; teaching and learning patterns evolve with time, improving human adaptation to the environment.

## Suffah

Suffah was a regular residential school connected to the Prophet's (S.A.W.) masjid in Madina, where reading, writing, Sharia, memorizing Quran, Tajweed, and other Islamic disciplines were taught under the direct supervision of the Prophet (S.A.W.). At Suffah, Prophet (S.A.W.) spent a lot of time in teaching. He addressed questions about matters of belief and behavior by members of his community in and outside the Masjid, in addition to his regular sittings after the prayers, which were

more or less for teaching purposes.<sup>42</sup> Prophet's (S.A.W.) companions were also known to assist students with their studies. Prophet (SAW) used to deploy his well-trained companions to various lands in order to spread Islam.

Ubada ibn al-Samit was designated as a teacher in the Suffah school by Prophet (S.A.W.) for writing classes and Quranic studies.<sup>43</sup>

There were lectures on both Islamic and other moral teachings. The curriculum included Quran reading, Arabic language, and the art of writing. In addition to these, Prophet (S.A.W.) teaches swimming, law of inheritance, the fundamentals of medicine, astronomy, genealogy, and practical phonetics required for reading the Quran.<sup>44</sup> Suffah's school provided instruction not only for hostelite students, but also for day-scholars and travelers, who were always welcome.

This small area was designated for those people who had no family and had no place of living. The number of these people varied because traveler also used to stay there.<sup>45</sup> Those immigrants who had no place for residence, used to reside in Suffah were known as Ashab-e- Suffah and were approximately 70 in number at the time of Prophet (S.A.W.).<sup>46</sup> Ashab-e-Suffah were those people who endowed their entire life for the service of Islam. They seek Islamic knowledge and worship Allah with full devotion.<sup>47</sup> Some famous Ashab-e- Suffah were as follows; Abu Hurrairah (R.A.), Abu Dar Ghafari (R.A.), Salman Al Farsi (R.A.), Abdullah Bin Masood (R.A.), Amar Bin Yasir (R.A.), Bilal Bin Rabah (R.A.) and others.<sup>48</sup>

After the establishment of Suffah many other educational spots were opened who ensured educational services to the people of their respective communities.

Ashab-as-Suffah were fully committed to the teaching and learning process and to the service of Islam. Various members of Muslim community of Madina offered meals and other necessities to the residents of Suffah. They memorized the Prophet's (S.A.W.) lessons and passed them on to the other companions. Ashab as-suffah provided a unique service and job in the preservation and narration of Islamic rulings. This vast body of information played an essential role in spreading Quran's light in every corner of the globe, in such a short period of time.

## **Conclusion and Research Results**

1. Prophet (S.A.W.) was passionate about education and introduced means to spread education to all members of the community. Being a teacher, he established several institutes for learning and teaching. He stabilizes the learning and teaching of Muslim community by his outstanding educational endeavor, a once ignorant community has transformed into a respectable and educated one.
2. Islam takes a very broader view of education and made an education

obligatory for all Muslims. Prophet (S.A.W.) was a teacher of religion, and introduced the knowledge to the entire world. Therefore, in early years of Madina, Masjid-e-Nabwi, Dar-e-Arqam and Suffah became the center of learning in Prophetic era (S.A.W.).

3. Sahabah were transformed and empowered by education, which was a dynamic process. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was an excellent teacher and mentor who possessed great teaching methods and shown mastery of skillful tactics in imparting the Islamic education.

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