

## **The Challenges Facing Islamic Education System in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper attempts to examine some of the challenges facing Islamic education system in Nigeria. The paper highlights what could be the solution to many challenges facing Islamic education, especially in our present/modern day society, ranging from parental negative attitude, societal negligence, external influence particularly European culture, to mention but a few. To tackle some of these challenges, some recommendations were given to parents, teachers, government and the society in general to inculcate in to the Muslim children the basic Islamic knowledge. The paper begins with an introduction, traces briefly history of Islamic education in Nigeria, followed by some of the challenges mentioned earlier, provides certain recommendations and ends with a conclusion. The methodological approach used in this paper is descriptive, prescriptive and annalistic; meanwhile the method of data collection is historical and empirical.*

**Keywords:** Education, Knowledge, Islam, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Islamic Education System is a divinely revealed system of education that prepared individuals to be upright on earth and attain happiness in this life and in the hereafter. Education in Islam is regarded as a process that completely nurtures the individual aimed at the balanced growth of the total personality of human being through the training of man's spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses. Islamic Education is the best system of education which makes an ethical groomed person with all the qualities which he/she should have as a human beings<sup>1</sup>. In Islamic Theology, knowledge is gained in order to actualize all the dimensions of human and paradigm of perfection in Islam, and thus the goal of Islamic Education is for Muslims to live as the Prophets (SAW) lived and to imitate Him<sup>2</sup>. Education is an important factor in the development of any society, the level of development of any nation is usually determined by its level of education, be it moral, spiritual, temporal, etc. it is against this background that this paper intends to look at some major challenges that face the Islamic Education in Nigeria<sup>3</sup>.

## **Significance of Knowledge in Islam to both Genders**

This is a sad reflection upon Muslims and the societies that we have built since knowledge is one of the important pillars upon which the edifice of Islam has been raised. The very fact that the first revelation upon the Prophet (SAW) contained the commandment to 'read' speaks volumes of the emphasis Islam lays on Education. Within Islam there is no disagreement found on acquisition of knowledge being binding and obligatory. The importance and excellence of knowledge has been highlighted both directly and indirectly in over five hundred places in the Holy Qur'an indeed, one of the essential duties and responsibilities of Prophethood was the dissemination of knowledge and wisdom to all. Allah Almighty said:

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِنْكُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ.

*Likewise, We have sent you (Our) Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) from amongst yourselves who recites to you Our Revelations and purifies and sanctifies (your hearts and ill-commanding selves) and teaches you the Book and inculcates in you logic and wisdom and enlightens you (on the mysteries of spiritual gnosis and divine truth) which you did not know. [Al-Baqara, 2:151.]*<sup>4</sup>

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَئِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ.

*He is the One Who sent a (Glorious) Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) amongst the illiterate people from amongst themselves who recites to them His Revelations and cleanses and purifies them (outwardly and inwardly) and teaches*

them the Book and wisdom. Indeed, they were in open error before (his most welcome arrival). [Al-Jumu'a, 62:2.]<sup>5</sup>

A basic principle of Islamic Law (Shari'ah) states that when a commandment is revealed, even if masculine form of word is used the female gender is also included in this commandment. If this principle is rejected then the basic pillar of Islam such as Prayer, Fasting, Pilgrimage and alms-due will become null and void for women. So through God Almighty and the Holy Prophet (SAW) use form of sentence e the masculine to describe most of the commandments, women are also bund to act and follow those rules and regulations<sup>6</sup>.

The study of these verses clearly shows that the Prophetic responsibilities of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) through His Prophethood included recital of the verses, purgation of the self, education of the Book and wisdom and communication of knowledge<sup>7</sup>. However, if the doors of acquiring knowledge are closed for women or unjustified restrictions are imposed upon this acquisition, which religion will they act upon? How can they come to know the nature of the verses that have been revealed to them? How will they attain the wisdom and *hikmah* that Allah Almighty wished them to know through the Prophet (SAW)? How are they to teach the fundamentals of the faith to their children if they have no knowledge of it themselves?<sup>8</sup>

The Holy Qur'an also states:

أَمْ مَنْ هُوَ قَانِتٌ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ  
إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ.

Say: 'Can those who have knowledge and those who do not be alike?' So only the wise do receive the admonition. [Al-Zumar, 39:9.]<sup>9</sup>

The Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) said:

«طَلَبَ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ».

Acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims (both men and women without any discrimination). [Narrate by Ibn Maja in al-Sunan, 1:81 §224.]<sup>11</sup>

He (blessings and peace be upon him) said at another place:

«مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ».

Allah Almighty makes the path to paradise easier for him who walks on it for getting knowledge. [Narrate by Muslim in al-Sahih, 4:2074 §2699.]<sup>12</sup>

It is apparent from the Holy Qur'an and Hadith that the acquisition of knowledge is obligatory for women in the same way as in the case of men. The study of the life of the Holy Prophet (SAW) also shows that he himself made special arrangements for the education and training of women<sup>13</sup>

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri reports that some women said to the Holy Prophet (SAW): 'men have gone ahead of us, therefore, appoint a special day for our benefit as well' the Prophet (SAW) fixed one day for them. He (SAW) would meet them on that day,

advise them and educate them about commandments of Allah (SWT) [Narrated by al-Bukhari in al-Sahih 1:50]<sup>14</sup>

Nana A'isha (RA) the mother of the faithful, from the Abu Hurayra Abd Allah b. Amr and Anas b. Malik (RA) were the only ones from amongst male hadith-narrators who had narrated more traditions than she did. This itself illustrates that women could not only teach women but also men after fulfilling certain preconditions. [Narrated by al-Bukhari in al-Sahih 1:231]<sup>15</sup>

'A'isha bint Talha (may Allah be well pleased with her) reports:

I stayed with 'A'isha. People from every city would come to me including the old ones (who would put forward questions) because they knew that I am her servant. And the students who were young would treat me like their sister and would present gifts (to 'A'isha through me). Many would also write me letters (so that I could reply them back after soliciting answers from 'A'isha. I would submit: O aunt! Mr so and so has written a letter and there is his present as well. 'A'isha would say in reply to this: O daughter! Answer his query and give him present in exchange as well. If you have nothing to give, let me know, I will give. So she would return (the present in exchange and I would send it back along with the letter). [Narrated by al-Bukhari in al-Adab al-Mufrad.].<sup>16</sup>

It is important to note here that the concept of knowledge in Islam covers a broad spectrum of subjects. All interpreters of the Holy Qur'an are in agreement that the first five verses of chapter al-'Alaq form the beginning of the sending of revelation:

قَالَ تَعَالَى: اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ( ) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ( ) اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ( ) الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ( ) عَلَّمَ  
الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

*(O Beloved!) Read (commencing) with the Name of Allah, Who has created (everything). He created man from a hanging mass (clinging) like a leech (to the mother's womb). Read, and your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught man (reading and writing) by the pen, Who (besides that) taught man (all that) which he did not know. [Al-'Alaq, 96:1–5.].<sup>17</sup>*

### **Islamic Education System in Nigeria**

The history of Islamic Education in Nigeria is as old as the history of Islamic religion itself, because Islam as a religion goes or spread with its own form of education. Islam came to the present day Nigeria in the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE when Mai Umme Njilmi, of the then Kanem-Borno Empire accepted Islam and established the first Qur'anic School in his palace<sup>18</sup>. In fact, Islamic religion goes together with Islamic Education because without the latter the former cannot be well and firmly comprehended and understood<sup>1</sup>. The objective of Islamic Education is to thrive on the Islamic concept of life here and the hereafter, as stated in the Qur'an: *And I (Allah) created not the Jinns and humans except they should Worship Me (Alone),*

prescribing the individual's position and role in the earth as mentioned by the Qur'an: *Behold, your Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth."*<sup>19</sup>

The starting point of Islamic Education is to learn how to recite the Qur'an; a student would then begin to study further under an erudite teacher called *Malam*, who may not necessarily be the only teacher to handle the student till he/she becomes highly knowledgeable in the field<sup>20</sup>. With the introduction of formal Islamic Education system in Nigeria, where by students sit on benches in a typical classroom manner, it should be noted that there had not been any form of assistance from the government as at that time<sup>21</sup>. In spite of this segregate attitude of the government, Islamic Education system continued to grow along with the increasing number of Muslim population in the country. But today, there is a complete transformation of the system, a whole some improvement on the efforts of the early Muslims. It now competes with its western counterparts in structure and infrastructure<sup>22</sup>. Now there are all the categories of educational institutions from Nursery up to tertiary levels, and all these Islamic education institutions have all facilities of modern school system and operate programs and activities in a modern way. Yet, the government of Nigeria, especially at the Federal level has not accorded Islamic Education system its rightful recognition<sup>23</sup>.

### **Challenges of Islamic Education System in Nigeria**

Challenge is what is posed to someone or group of people to stimulate progressive actions and competition which have not been originally planned for.

There are many challenges that are posed to Islamic System of Education in Nigeria especially in the modern time. Some of these challenges include: **Parents, the society and the External culture**. These challenges are briefly discussed below:

- **Parents:** An average Nigerian Muslim parent does spend heavily (financially or otherwise) on western education for their children in fact<sup>24</sup>. Some even took Islamic Education as secondary, while some send those children who cannot mentally cope with the western education or who have one form of disability or the other. They give more time to their children's exercises/home work/assignments of western education at home rather than Islamic Education. They also put more interest and show more concern on the performance of their children in the western education subjects than the Islamic Education, and does not count a credit in Islamic Studies as a pass.<sup>25</sup>

- **The Society:** The Nigerian Muslim society does not see anything beneficial in the Islamic system of education other than religious knowledge. The society generally perceived that anybody studying Islamic Studies can only serve as an Islamic teacher with teaching as the only profession which is already looked down as 'mere' teaching. In fact, in some religiously hostile communities, Islamic Education is being regarded as the education for the *almajiris* as it is a common thing to see

pupils that are put under the care of some teachers for Islamic studying, going about begging. Also, most of our western education schools operate from morning to evening, which is seriously causing setback for Islamic Education especially with the extra lessons been conducted for the preparation of WASSE and NECO in the evening classes and weekend coaching.<sup>26</sup>

**-External Culture:** External influence, especially European culture has demoralized Islamic education system in Nigeria. Europeans are people whose agenda was domination, either by colonization or neo-colonization as they aimed to create a situation that makes the world subservient to the leadership of the west. Meanwhile, education is a subtle but most effective and sure way of restructuring people's intellects and beliefs<sup>27</sup>. Western education and culture were therefore enforced and sponsored by the Europeans and discourage all other opposing means of education and its systems. When Europeans stepped into Nigeria, they considered Islam its ache-enemy and quickly replaced Arabic language with their language and all other opposing languages were regarded as vernacular and new alphabets (the roman alphabets) was introduced<sup>28</sup>. Immediately these policies were implemented, the entire Muslim community in Nigeria was declared illiterate. Based on the above, those who were opportune to study Islamic education abroad were not adequately recognized by the Nigerian government in terms of employment in government public schools, colleges or universities even with the highest degree at hand, so they end up frustrated to start learning western education.<sup>29</sup>

### **Recommendations**

Based on the above discussed challenges, the following recommendations were made thus:

- Parents should have tightened their belt in giving their children Basic Islamic Education before they were enrolled into any school system (daycare or nursery) especially Qur'anic and Fiqh Knowledge. This is to enable them have solid foundation of Islamic knowledge prior to their acquisition of western education, so as to prevent them from deviation from the Islamic teachings.
- The society should try and revive Community Islamiyyah Schools that will engage their children in evening classes at least one or two in each community. This is to engage them with Islamic teachings/activities rather than allow them roaming about playing computer games, playing balls, going to Dstv centers, watching reckless film (Hausa/India /Nigeria/ Ghana/ America, etc.)
- Teachers/Government should provide adequate teaching facilities and modern instructional materials in the teaching-learning processes of Islamic education. Teachers should avoid inferiority complex, show commitment to their profession and properly utilize all avenues in their schools to make

Islamic education lively, interesting, and jovial so as to allow both teachers and students avoid drudgery effect.

### **Conclusion**

The paper examines some of the challenges facing Islamic education system in Nigeria that include parental negative attitude to their children towards the subject/system, it begins with defining Islamic education as a process that completely nurtures the individual aimed at balanced growth of the total personality in him through the training of his spirit, intellect and rational self. It traces the history of Islamic education system in Nigeria as old as the religion itself, it identifies the starting point of Islamic education is to learn how to recite the Qur'an. The paper also shows that the Islamic education system grows and now competes with its western counter part in structure and infrastructure, yet the Nigerian Government, especially at the federal level has not accorded Islamic education system its rightful recognition. Finally, it is high time we turn things around for Islamic education system in Nigeria by putting our collective responsibility to enlighten the populace that Islamic education is a utilitarian education.

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