

Islamic Education in Hausaland: History, Problems and Prospects

Sabi'u Ibrahim Fago Ph.D.

General Studies Unit,
Federal University of Technology,
Babura, Jigawa State
Sabiuibrahimfago@gmail.com
08065848862

Abstract

Education, as understood to be the process of acquiring and transmitting knowledge for effective behavior change, is given high impetus in Islam and ranked second to none in its practice (worship). Islamic education, therefore, becomes the bedrock of performing all religious activities. Islamic education in its entity is married and never divorced from Islamic practices. Hence, performing any Islamic act without its corresponding knowledge is null and void and rejected by the Islamic Sharia. This is supported by the first verse revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), which directed him to "read." This injunction, therefore, applied to all Muslims that they should seek knowledge before practicing the religion. It is about this divine injunction that Muslims of all ages made it a duty to search for knowledge, especially in Ibadat, Hadith, jurisprudence, Nahwu, Sirah, etc. The search for this knowledge begins from birth and ends when a person dies. Anybody involved in the search is either a student (Almajiri) or a Teacher (Malam). The search for Islamic education is characterized by the movement of Teachers and students to various destinations, especially when peace prevails and Government policies are favourable. This paper discusses the history of Islamic education in Hausaland and its problems and prospects.

Introduction

Hausa represent the name of the people, land and language found in Northern Nigeria and parts of the Niger Republic. Defining a Hausa person is now becoming difficult as many people speak the language and dialects fluently. The language, according to J.H Greenberg, belonged to the Chadic languages substack of the Afro-Asiatic family distributed chiefly in Northern Nigeria, Niger Republic and Cameroon Republics. Other members of this family group include the Bolewa, Angas, Ankwe, Tangale, Bura, Margi, Higi, Mandara, Musgu, Mubi, Sokoto and Kotoko-Buduma (J.H Greenberg 1973:75).

The Hausa, according to Abdullahi Smith, are those people who lived in *Kasar* Hausa at the end of the 15th century when the Hausa Kingdoms were established, lived there from time immemorial, even though their distribution changed from internal and external migrations within and outside the land (Abdullahi Smith 1987:8). Hausaland is characterized by plain land and low distribution of mountains and light vegetation which make it accessible for commercial and evangelical intercourse as well as intrusion by foreigners as witnessed in different periods of its history. This aided the coming of Islam into the area.

Introduction of Islam in Hausaland

There are opinions on the period for the introduction of Islam in Hausaland. Some writers attributed it to the activities of the Muslim Merchants across the Sahara, which dated back to the 10th century A.D (Habibu, 2000:55). On the other hand, some relate this to the activities of the Wangarawa scholars from North Africa in the 14th and 15th centuries which represented a stage of Islamization in Hausaland (Bugaje, 1997:78). Sheikh Nasiru Kabara opines that, long before the coming of the Wangarawa under Malam Abdur-Rahman Zaghaite, Islam was introduced in Hausaland. He holds that, even with the arrival of Malam Al-Zaghaite, he met with Malam Amadu

(Wali Maigeza), who was then teaching the book of Mukhtassar (Ibrahim M. 1989). Another point supporting the introduction of Islam in Hausaland earlier than the Wangarawa is the belief by some scholars that Islam was introduced into Hausaland from Borno, which was believed to have been there since the time of Caliph Umar bn Abdul'Aziz, who sent ten learned men to come and teach Tauhid. According to this source, by 900 AD, an Islamic scholar called Malam Wasami by the Bare-bari visited Njimi and preached up to Hausaland (Mustapha 1982). Whatever the case, Islam was introduced in Hausaland and has been accepted by the masses and chiefs and sometimes made a state religion. According to its teachings, the religion can only be performed by acquiring correspondence knowledge of worship. This marked a starting point in the search for knowledge, which called for an educational system.

Islamic Education System in Hausaland

As earlier noted, Islam and education are married together, and a good practising Muslim must be knowledgeable in Islamic education. This was corroborated by the first revelation, which directed Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) to read. In Africa, for instance, as Sambo says:

"When Islam entered, it did so with education as an integral part of its culture. Islam and learning to the Africans were equal. No sooner was he converted than he was taught to read, and the importance of knowledge was impressed upon him. Consequently, the desire to acquire knowledge of the religion led to establishing schools and centres of learning in various parts of the continent (Sambo, 1989)".

Education is thus the fundamental bedrock of Islamic activities and is based on the Book of Allah (Qur'an) and the sayings and deeds (Sunnah) of the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W). Along this line, the search for knowledge becomes mandatory for all Muslims irrespective of nation, traditions,

sex, etc. Invariably, the search for knowledge is tantamount to fear of Allah as indicated by the Qur'an as follows:

"The only people who truly fear Allah among His servants are the learned ones, verily Allah is exalted in might, oft-forgiving".
(Qur'an 35:28).

Many verses in the Holy Qur'an complement this verse, which encourages the Muslims to seek knowledge in order to be exalted by the Creator. Similarly, the sayings of the Prophet (S.A.W) mandated and encouraged the Muslims to search for knowledge. One of these sayings is the one in which the Prophet (S.A.W) says: "Go in search of knowledge even if in China." Knowledge (or sciences generally) is the lost property of the faithful Muslim; wherever he sees it, he should take it." This divine injunction compelled Muslims to search for knowledge in all parts of the globe. Those who engaged in this movement or process are referred to as "Almajirai", meaning those who migrate out of their places of domicile in search of knowledge; "Almajiri" is a corrupted Arabic word of *Almuhaajiroon* (immigrants). The system of this search for knowledge is called "Almajirchi," which refers to the activities of the Almajirai (Inde, 2006:1). This system became more pronounced in Hausaland and elsewhere, which might have been for the apparent reason that the Glorious Qur'an in chapter 59 verses 8 and 9, and chapter 3 verses 92 and 134 equates this migration of the "Almajira" to those who followed the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) to Medina on Hijra and as a result lost their wealth and families. In most parts of Hausaland, Islamic schools in both cities and villages are either in Mosques, Malam houses (azure) or at separate places on the outskirts of the cities or villages called "Qisqads".

The duration is full days and nights except on Thursdays and Fridays in some cases. The course's main content is the Glorious Qur'an, intended to be committed into memory at the end of the programme. Two broad classifications of Islamic schools are obtained in Hausaland; the primary

stage is called the "Makarantun Allo", and the advanced stage is called the "Makarantun Ilmi". As the name connotes, the primary or Makarantun Allo centred on teaching and training young children to learn Arabic letters, vowels and consonants and consequently reading, writing and memorizing the verses and chapters of the Glorious Qur'an. All these are done in stages under the guidance of the Malam and senior students. When taught, a pupil is issued with "Allo" or wooden slate and can recite up to Suratul fil. Children in this school are classified into three main classes according to their ages and abilities. These are the "Kolo" or "Kotso" classes, ages between 4 and 11 years. In this stage, the main concentration of the content curriculum is "Babbaku", which is the identification of the letters. The second stage is "Titibiri", which ranges between 12 and 16 years of age, and the corresponding curriculum under this is "Farfaru", i.e. teaching and learning the vowels. The third stage is "Gardi", which comprises young adults in teacher-in-training. At this stage, the students could read and write all parts of the Qur'an and prepare for graduation. The curriculum is, therefore, both "Haddatu" and "Satu", i.e. memorizing and writing the Qur'an off-head (Inde, 2006:27-28).

Advanced Islamic education starts immediately after graduation from the Makarantar Allo. However, this is not centred on one Teacher but depends on specialization. Teachers specialized in different areas such as Hadith, Tafseer, Fiqh, Sirah, Hisab, Poetry, etc. It is worthy of note that the "Gardawa" who plays a central part in the process of Islamic education, i.e. being part of Makarantun Allo and Makarantun Ilmi, are those who mostly move out of their towns and villages. These movements are either short or long-term. The short term is mainly during the dry season, to spend about three to five months and return home before the rainy season. Some also go during the rainy season and return before the harvest in a period called "kakkabar raba." The long-term movement is when the almajirai spend one year or more outside their hometowns. In each of these

cases, they established temporary houses. They engaged in light business like cutting fingernails, washing clothes and caps, hiring labourers, hawking, etc., but not forgetting their primary objective of searching for and teaching knowledge.

Islamic education during the 19th Century Jihad

The 19th-century Hausaland was opened with revolutionary movements in almost all parts of the globe. In West Africa, the Jihad movements were initiated by Sheikh Usman Danfodio in Hausaland, which later spread into Masina led by Seku Ahmad Labbo and in Futa Toro by Alhaji Umar. Among the most important legacies laid by the Jihadists were the establishment of the Sharia legal system based on the Qur'an and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and the emphasis on education. To buttress this, a famous slogan in Fulfulde by Sheikh Usman Danfodio was "Jange, Duro, Dame" (reading, rearing and farming). The emphasis on reading was more pronounced because the Jihad leaders engaged in writing books on different subjects in Arabic and Fulfulde, covering several aspects such as Ibadat, Jurisprudence, faith, medicine, history, etc. (Webster, Boahen and Idowu 1967:12-13). According to Dauda (1994), Sheikh Usman Danfodio maintained that the process of education involves the development of a sound faith, a substantial amount of knowledge and a practical realization of all these in a very comprehensive way, governing every nook and corner of the societal life.

A critical methodology evolved by Danfodio in teaching and learning was the encouragement given to his students to vigorously go for independent learning and conduct research, as well as extend the message (Islam) to others by teaching and preaching. This was by one of the teachings of the Prophet, which says, "Extend the message from me even if it is a single verse you know". This signifies that Islam is opposed to concealing and monopolizing knowledge and should be spread and not held static in one place. The main subjects taught by Sheikh Usman Danfodio and

his lieutenants are Arabic language, logic, Balagah, Fiqh, Sirah, politics, especially the obligation of migration from non-Muslim to a Muslim territory and that of living under the umbrella of an Imam, a Khalifa or Ameer-al-Mumineen (Dauda 1994:50).

One of the prominent areas affected by the Jihadists was the education of women. In particular, Sheikh Usman Danfodio emphasized women's education. His views on this were expressed in his Book *Nur-al-baab*, in which he queried the treatment given to wives and daughters like that of household implements, which are used until broken and thrown onto the rubbish heap. According to him, Teachers were imparting knowledge daily to their students but abandoning their wives and daughters, which was not supposed to be so. To this end, Shehu's two daughters (Asma'u and Maryam) became highly educated and contributed to the fields of Islamic studies, law, and jurisprudence of poets (Fafunwa 1974:56).

Islamic Education during the Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods

With the conquest of Nigeria by the British colonial powers, the system of education was thought to be amalgamated, i.e. the traditional, religious and western into a secular system. However, the Muslims were not to be deceived because the British occupation of Nigeria was synonymous with Christian evangelism, and the concept of civilizing mission-helping the benighted Africans to accept Christianity and Western civilization became the order of the day (Ayandele 1966: 144-145). In addition, the Christian Missionary Organizations were given grants-in-aid to pursue their business of establishing schools geared towards conversion to Christianity. According to Fafunwa 1974, for instance, between 1870 and 1876, the colonial Government in Lagos made spasmodic attempts to assist some of the Missions in their educational work. It earmarked the sum of £300 for the support of the missions. It was raised to £600 per year in 1887 (Fafunwa 1974: 93). These

schools opened by the Christian Missions prepared their scholars for the school certificate and matriculation in secondary schools. Therefore, those who received this training could easily get jobs under the government, while the graduates from Qur'anic or Islamic schools were negated.

On the other hand, colonial attitudes towards Islamic education were initially supportive. However, the Koranic schools were generally regarded as irrelevant; some administrations envisaged the development of a civil service cadre in Muslim territories through fostering advanced training in Arabic and Islamic Law, along with such subjects as geometry, mathematics and surveying. Along this line, Hans Vischer, the first education officer of Northern Nigeria, drew on Sudanese experience for the school he opened in Kano in 1911 and subsequently at Sokoto and Katsina. The schools were integrated with Western and Islamic advanced education (Roberts 1990:204). In response to an appeal by some Muslim organizations, the colonial government also established some schools in the 1930s. This was also complimented by such organizations as the Ansar-ud-deen Society, the Nawar-ud-deen Society, the Ahmadiyya movement, jama'atul Islamiyya, Zamratul Islamiyya, and other Muslim organizations that established primary and secondary schools in western and mid-western Nigeria (Fafunwa 1974:69). Despite all these attempts at integrating Islamic education with the western system, a vast majority of the Muslims objected the idea especially in the North for the fear of the said secular system and the risk of automatic conversion into Christianity. Thus, the old system of the Koranic and the advanced level (Makarantun Allo and Makarantun Ilmi) were maintained.

However, with the return of Alhaji Abdullahi Bayero, the emir of Kano from Mecca, in 1934, he brought new ideas based on what he saw in the Middle East and Arabia. Consequently, he set up Northern Provinces Law School to train Alkalis. All Native Authorities jointly maintained it. In 1945, the Law school was changed into the School for Arabic Studies (S.A.S) and came under

Government control. On the eve of Nigeria's Independence and beyond, the government introduced a scheme by which untrained Junior Primary School Teachers attended courses at the S.A.A. Thus, between 1954 and 1961, more than two-thirds of all Primary School Teachers received this training, which enabled them to improve their position and raise their standard of education (Fafunwa 1974:65). In 1960, this school organized a post-secondary course in Arabic and Islamic studies as a preliminary to the establishment of the Abdullahi Bayero College to accommodate students from the Ilmi schools and Muslim Higher Institution towards University and Post-secondary modern education.

Problems of Islamic Education

Many problems about the search and bequeathing of Islamic education in Hausaland are identified. Most of these problems are grouped into three Viz: The Government/Educational system, the society and the participants. The Nigerian government, since independence, has evolved an educational system tailored towards "harmonizing" the different systems into a secular one. However, priority is given to those who obtained the certificates from schools recognized by the government. These certificate holders are employed in various Government establishments – Ministries, Boards, Parastatals, Public services, etc. The paper qualification also determines one's employment, promotion and retirement benefits. On the contrary, Islamic schools which are not issuing certificates at all levels are neglected in terms of employment in terms of employment in Government establishment, no matter how hard or brilliant they may be in their fields of studies. The Sheikhs, Alarammas, Hafeez and "Gardawa" are therefore not accorded any paid job responsibilities as their Diploma, Degree, Master or Doctoral counterparts in the Government schools.

A major problem militating against Islamic education emanates from society. As Islam has mandated the Muslims in the search for knowledge and equates those who engage in its search with those who perform the Hijra, the recipient communities of the Muhaajaroun (Almajirai) should behave like the people of Medina (Ansar) in order to emulate them. In other words, communities should warmly receive the Almajirai and provide them with the necessities – food, shelter and clothing. Alas! On the contrary, they abuse their position and disregard the Almajirai to the extent of changing their name to beggars. Most people in Hausaland view the "Almajirai" as less privileged and, therefore, approach them with less concern. Very few of them have concern and sympathy for the Almajirai. This might have been why some people employ the Almajirai as paid labourers, domestic servants, and hawkers and perform immoral activities in motor parks, markets, beer parlours, brothels, etc. The parents of the "Almajirai" on their side contribute to creating problems in the system. Once the parents gave their children to the Malam, they felt relieved of their parental responsibilities. They do not even bother to know about the whereabouts of their children let alone visiting or providing essential needs to them.

Those who participate in the "Almajirci" system constitute a problem. Many blame and allegations are labelled against them on how they present themselves. Starting from the students, most of them present themselves in a very backward manner – not taking a bath, having shabby hair, and not even keeping the five daily prayers constantly. This disposition makes them relegated to the background of the people in the society. The "Gardawa", who are both students and Malams' assistants, engage in commercial "assistance" to the people by writing parts of the Holy Qur'an for drinking and smearing. They sometimes concentrate more on this than on the Qur'an recitation. They also make amulets (Layu) for prevention, protection, and treatment. They also perform very

low in terms of the five daily prayers, as the type of their prayer is characterized by quick performance.

Conclusion

Islamic education was introduced in Hausaland concurrently with the Islamic religion. This is a system of education based on the Glorious Qur'an's teachings and the Prophet Muhammad's deeds (S.A.W). The Muslims are compelled to search for this knowledge as it is the backbone of worshipping. Over the years, the system of its teaching had been developed from Mosques to schools of both Makarantun "Allo" and "Ilmi." It has become a tradition in Hausaland that searching for knowledge carries the searchers outside their hometowns. However, it does not mean the search for knowledge must only be outside the home town; it can be done in their hometowns. The process of migrating outside in search of knowledge has created several problems for the system identified as governmental, societal and the participants. These problems identified above could be curtailed or minimized if the causes are addressed positively. For instance, the government should provide a corresponding weight of Islamic education attainment to that of the 'Boko' type and some opportunities in employment, promotion and retirement. The society, on their part, could be re-oriented on their approach and manner to the "Almajirai," and the parents could be more concerned about their children in the "Almajirci" system. The "Almajirai", "Gardawa", and Malamai should also be part of the re-orientation system and stand by the principles of Islam in the search for knowledge to achieve the blessings to the maximum.

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