

ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIYYA SCHOOL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ITS FORMATION, DEVELOPMENT, IMPACTS AND PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

The traditional system of Qur'anic education and Islamic heritage was established and in placed in Northern Nigeria before the colonization, but it was completely abandoned by British Colonialist. Neither the Almajiri education, nor the Ajami system that were existence as the official source of knowledge, and means of communications among the majority people in the North was recognized officially by the British officials; Moreover, the Islamic teachers and teaching were also relegated to the background. This signals a deliberate attempt by the colonialists to undermine the Northern people's Islamic lifestyle and introduced the Western education. Despite the initial resistance, it became necessary for Muslims to enroll their children in Western education schools or lose the opportunity to participate in running the affairs of the country. This led to the establishment of many Islamic institutions and schools that adopted features of Western school system. This paper defines the concept of Islamiyya education, and discusses: the origin of Islamic education, the founding and developmental trends of Islamiyya school education in Nigeria, types of Islamiyya schools, objectives of Islamiyya schools, impacts of Islamiyya school education, prospects for the future sustainability of Islamiyya education, challenges facing Islamiyya school education. The paper offers possible solutions to the identified challenges; in addition, the paper recommends that mandatory registration of all Islamiyya schools in Nigeria is necessary for uniform administration and proper planning.

Keywords: Education, Islamiyya, Islam, Madrasah, Qur'anic-school

Introduction

Education is accorded much priority in Islam, Muslims are encouraged to seek knowledge and disseminate it to others, as contained in the Qur'an and the excellent traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. Among these is where the Prophet emphasized the value of knowledge seeking, as narrated by Abu Hurairah and recorded by Imam Muslim: "Allah makes the way easy for him who makes the path in search of knowledge" (Sahih Muslim, Hadith no 2699). This paper discusses the conceptualization of Islamiyya education, the origin of Islamic education, the formation and developmental trends of Islamiyya school education in Nigeria, types of Islamiyya schools, objectives of Islamiyya schools, impacts of Islamiyya school education, prospects of Islamiyya education future sustainability, and the challenges facing Islamiyya school education.

Conceptualization of Islamiyya Education

Education according to Saleh (2022) is the light, without which the world would be in darkness. Jiboyewa (2022) also affirmed that education is a moral undertaking concerned with the development of human beings and human interaction. It is the basis for modernization,

scientific and technological breakthroughs, which make all nations of the world to priorities with it.

Islamiyya is a Hausa word that originated from the word Islam; in Hausa, it refers to a school where Muslim children learn basic Islamic education. It is also known as Islamic school or Madrasa is an educational institution that focuses on Islamic studies and teachings. Islamiyya education is a model of Qur'anic education that combines elements of traditional models inspired by Western and Arab models. Islamiyya schools compete directly with secular primary and secondary schools and feed into the same university system, though there is some overlap between the two models (Dalhatu, 2015).

Ibrahim and Idiris (2020) states that Islamic education refers to studies in religious knowledge starting with the Qur'an and matters of worship, it also involves learning matters like the etiquettes of eating and drinking, Islamic dress, family relations, business transactions, criminal law, and inheritance. Islamic education can also embrace knowledge in general, within a framework where the teacher, the student, the school, and the curriculum comply with Islamic values and teachings. In modern term, a student learns reading, mathematics and the various sciences. The curriculum includes generous courses devoted to Islamic studies, and the syllabus does not include texts that contradict Islamic beliefs and teachings.

Origin of Islamic Education

From its inception, Islam has accorded priority to education and its acquisition, as seen from the revelation received by the Prophet (SAW) that ordained him to read, as contained in Qur'an (96:1) *"Read in the name of Your Lord who creates everything."* This verse is the first revelation received by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Islamic education began with that revelation and marks the beginning of the Qur'an. This means that man is ordered to lean in order to know about his Creator, about creation, and about life as a whole.

The Prophet launched this task immediately and secretly with members of his family and those near him. *Dar Al-arqam*, a house in Mecca, Saudi Arabia served as meeting point and the first Islamic education center for the Muslims. It was there that the first set of Muslims gathered to learn the recitation of the holy Qur'an and Islamic principles from the Prophet (SAW). Whenever he received revelation, he taught it to his companions, who in turn passed it to others. After the Hijrah to Medina, the Prophet's house served as the center of learning, which later shifted to his mosque. That mosque became a famous and recognized institute for learning fatwa and judgments (Dan'Asabe, 2025).

Among the outstanding issue of education during the life of the Prophet was the "Pledge of *Aqabah*." While preaching on the outskirts of Mecca, the Prophet met Medinans who converted to Islam (the Yezribens) and promised to invert others to assist him when needed. At that point, the Prophet sent Mus'ab ibn Umayr to Medina to teach the new converts the Qur'an and basic teaching of the religion. This shows how the Prophet encouraged education as a necessary tool for learning the tenants of Islam. Similarly, after the Battle of *Badr*, in which Muslims gained victory over the Meccans, the Prophet allowed the *Quraish* war prisoners who were unable to pay ransom to bail themselves, to do so by teaching ten Muslims how to read and write. This helped tremendously in dissemination of reading and writing skills among Muslims (Dalhatu, 2015).

As a result of the companions' exposure to the expanding Islamic state and their interactions with other races and civilizations, efforts were made to learn the Qur'an in its correct form and pronunciations. Ali ibn Abi Talib introduced the vocalization of the Qur'an and encouraged the study of Arabic grammar and standard Arabic language. Many schools were built in Mecca, Medina and Iraq. The Meccan school was headed by Abdullahi ibn Abbas. Sayyadi reported from Ibn Taimiyya that the people most acquainted with Qur'anic exegesis were the Meccans, because they learned it from Abdullahi ibn Abbas. The Medinan school was under the leadership of Ubay ibn Ka'ab (Dan'Asabe, 2025). The spread of Islam in the world is also connected to Islamic education. By the 15th-century, most of Northern Nigeria had witnessed the penetration of Islam and its educational system. Islam and its educational curriculum were introduced to Nigeria through the effort of Arab merchants via trans-Saharan trade routes.

Formation and Developmental Trends of Islamiyya School Education in Nigeria

The Northern Provinces Law School (NPLS) was established by the British colonial authority in 1934 to train judges to administer Islamic law in its territories. State governments in Northern Nigeria capitalized on this initiative to establish colleges that offered a combination of Western and Islamic education for the training of Arabic teachers. These colleges become established in Northern Nigerian cities (Baba, 2011).

The first Islamiyya school in Northern Nigeria, according to Thurston (2012), was run by the British colonial administration. The Shahuci Judicial School, founded in 1928, and the School for Arabic Studies, founded in 1934, both located in Kano, they aimed to train judges and Arabic teachers. The instructors came from Sudan and used materials from core Muslim scriptural and legal curricula. However, they changed the physical layout from schools in scholar's yards to Western-style schools with desk, blackboards, regimented time schedules, and the pedagogical approach, and also from student recitation and teacher commentary to teacher-led student debate and role-playing in legal training.

Graduates of these schools defended themselves against attacks from traditional scholars, some of whom depicted the new graduates as anti-Islamic. However, the graduates sometimes unfairly stereotyped traditional education as pedagogically narrow. Graduates of these colonial Arabic training schools, young Western-educated politicians, and other Muslim activists began founding their own Islamiyya schools. The colonial authorities became suspicious of these schools, especially those by the leftist Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU), the main Northern opposition party of the 1950s. However, the authorities generally allowed the schools to operate, though under surveillance (Thurston, 2012).

The idea to reform *Almajiri* education system using Islamiyya schools started during the reign of the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Abdullahi Bayero. When he went to Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage in 1943, he brought a new idea and pattern from the Middle East. He proposed what was known as "Northern Province School." It was realized as an Islamic school with formal organization. Students offered courses in Law and Islamic Studies and were employed as judges and clerks in the administration of Northern Nigeria. The school continued until 1947, when it became the "School for Arabic Studies" (SAS) Kano, under government control. With the change in ownership, nomenclature, and mandate, its task became the training of teachers in Arabic,

Islamic Studies, English, and Arithmetic (Dan'Asabe, 2025).

As early as 1950s, there was a yearning to transform *Almajiri* education into a more refined system that meets conventional realities. People like Malam Aminu Kano advocated the establishment of Islamiyya schools in place of *Makarantar Allo* (slate schools) to reflect the socio-economic dynamics of the modern world. In this system, children could attend schools within their immediate community under the watch of their parents or guardians (Khalid, 2018).

Ibrahim and Idiris (2020) note that as many parents realized it became necessary for Muslims to enroll their children in Western education programs or lose the opportunity to participate in running the affairs of the country, new Islamic institutions were established in the 1950's by private organizations. These adopted all features of the formal school system that were lacked in Qur'anic and *Ilm* schools.

Islamiyya schools gained popularity in the 1950s and proliferated in Northern Nigeria, responding to popular demand for mass education. Government schooling initiatives, especially Universal Primary Education launched in 1976 heightened but did not fulfill the demand for education. Islamiyya schools partly filled the gap. Different groups have sometimes been seen as dominant within the Islamiyya movements, for example NEPU in the 1950s and anti-Sufi reformers in the 1970s and 1980s, but many different groups, including *Sufis*, have been involved (Thurston, 2012).

The introduction of *Tahfiz* Islamiyya is another effort where students study only Qur'an. Thus, in 1956, the first model Islamiyya school was established in Zaria. With its success, others followed in Northern Nigerian towns and villages. The curriculum included: *Nahwu* (Arabic grammar), *Shari'ah* (Islamic law), *Sirah* (Islamic history), *Tauheed* (Islamic theology), Hadith (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), Hausa language and English language (Dalhatu, 2015). Western education in Northern Nigerian was initially perceived as a way for indoctrinating Christianity in the region dominated by Muslims. However, the continue resistance of Western education and the prioritization of Islamic education among Northern Muslims made the colonial government bend to the people's demand. Bano (2009) states that the continued demand for Islamic education made the colonial government recognized the need for school models that combined secular and religious education. In 1938, the first conference for designing an acceptable curriculum for Arabic language and Islamic education for primary and junior secondary schools in Northern Nigeria was held in Kano. At that time, there were no relevant textbooks for the subject, and the teachers were not trained.

Thus, the British reluctantly added Islamic subjects to their educational system to persuade parents to enroll their children. Muslims scholars realized the antics of colonials as stated by Ibrahim and Idiris (2020) that all Islamic subjects were taught at the last period in schools, when students were tired, and Islamic studies teachers were given the dirty job of administering corporal punishment. These deliberate tactics led to hatred of Islamic subjects and teachers by Muslims children in formal schools.

After Nigerian independence, the government recognized the need to balance investment in secular and religious education and took the following measures:

- i. Appointment of inspectors and supervisors of Arabic and Islamic education
- ii. Giving grants for capital and recurrent costs and working materials
- iii. Giving financial and technical assistance to Islamiyya and Qur'anic schools

iv. Developing methods and patterns for integration Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools.

State emphasis on evolving an integrated school model that combines religious and secular education is old. Many state governments in the North and federal institution, such as: Universal Basic Education (UBE), Education Tax Fund (ETF), Northern Education Research Project (NERP), Arewa House, National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, and Kano State Education Sector Project (SESP) are currently supporting it (Bano, 2009).

The development of Islamic studies education and schools led to the production of books written in English to cover the syllabus of Islamic Religious Knowledge in Western schools. Government-run post-secondary Advanced Teachers Colleges and Colleges of Education offered three-year courses in Islamic Studies, as well as Christian Religious Knowledge. The subject became widely available in universities. Gradually, Arabic-speaking Islamic studies teachers were replaced at the secondary school level by English-speaking young teachers who were products of the mainstream educational system (Ibrahim and Idris, 2020).

State Governments initiated secondary schools aimed at teaching Islamic education and Arabic language, especially in Northern Nigeria. These gained momentum in almost all Muslims-majority states. The medium of instruction in these schools is Arabic. They have a special final exam known as the Higher Islamic Secondary School Examination, initially under the supervision of the National Board of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NBAIS) at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Now, NBAIS is a national board on its own. However, Ibrahim and Idris (2020) add that the inception of the ideology of Islamization of knowledge in the late 1970s served as another facet for restructuring Islamic education curricula in Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Nigeria, the curriculum of primary and secondary schools became integrated, combining Islamic and modern education.

To produce versatile Muslim students in Nigeria, many Islamic universities were established by Islamic bodies and Muslim philanthropists, including: Al-Qalam University, Katsina; Al-Hikma University, Ilorin, Kwara State; Crescent University, Abekuta; and Fountain University, Oshogbo. Despite concerted effort to bring Islamic education to different level, some parents are still not satisfied with how their children learn Islamic education in public schools. These and other reasons gave rise to the development of Islamiyya schools or Madrasa in different sessions: morning, evening, and night, depending on the type of public school a child attends. Students at any level of formal educations attend Islamiyya schools or Madrasa.

Some of these schools have structured environments with Islamic imagery, such as Arabic calligraphy and mosques. Administrators actively foster Islamic identity and awareness among students and teachers, not only in the classroom but also in all school activities, like weekly lectures. Congregational prayers, particularly Asr prayer, are regularly observed in the school mosque. Islamic dress, particularly for female students, is used as a powerful way of fostering Islamic identity and awareness. It is also important to note that the old system of Islamic education, Qur'anic traditional schools and *Ilm* schools exists in some parts of Nigeria (Ibrahim and Idris, 2020).

In 1981, the Federal Government's National Policy on Education acknowledged the efforts of some state governments in absorbing Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools graduates into primary

education (Bano, 2009). The 21st century has brought innovations to the educational system, with positive impact on physical structure, curriculum, students, teachers, and school administration. Islamiyya schools, like others, have mixed student populations and have attracted international attention, much of it positive (Thurston, 2012). Many Islamiyya schools in Kano and other Northern states adhere to a state-implemented curriculum, with facilities and a formal administrative system. They also teach the Qur'an and other subjects; some have introduced secular subjects as well. Islamiyya schools operate everywhere in the North, with higher demand among females.

Types of Islamiyya Schools

By the late 1980s, when concerns over the quality of public schools became widespread, the penetration of the *Ulama* into the delivery mechanisms of public education produced two tracks of Islamic schools that became popular among urban Muslims in Northern Nigeria. The two types were those operating the Madrasa curriculum and those providing modified national curricula of public schools (Baba, 2011).

1. **Basic Qur'anic Schools:** Operated mainly in mosque or other convenient places. They open for learning activities on weekdays and weekends, except Thursday and Friday. Weekday time varies e.g. 4 – 7pm or between 7 – 10pm. weekends' times are usually 10am – 1pm. These schools are run by individuals or organizations and are mostly free of charge or charge little, meaning teachers do not earn salary. In a cases managed by individuals, the 'harvest' comes during Qur'anic graduation ceremonies. Examination, promotion, and term classification are usually absent. Admission is open at any time, and students are aged 3 – 15 years. The focus is mainly on teaching students to read the Qur'an.
2. **Arabic and Islamic:** Operated like conventional schools with structures comparable to secular schools. Their products usually further their education at the tertiary level. They operated with structures such as elementary primary and secondary level. Wearing uniforms, writing examinations, promotion, issuance of certificates, and graduation ceremonies are part of the system. These schools register with government bodies, collect school fees, and pay teachers' salaries. Schooling times vary, some operate Monday to Friday, others Saturday – Wednesday. Two levels of Islamiyya schools can be found.

Objectives of Islamiyya School

Islamiyya schools are established primarily to preserve and spread Islam within the Muslim community. In Nigeria, this includes:

1. Providing students with Islamic principles, knowledge, and practices
2. Teaching students how to read, recite, and interpret the Qur'an
3. Instructing students in the Arabic language, as the language of the Qur'an
4. Instilling Islamic values, morals, and ethics in students
5. Providing a strong spiritual foundation and moral guidance
6. Preserving Islamic mores and raising a sense of community and identity among Muslims

Impacts of Islamiyya School Education

Islamiyya schools contribute to the early upbringing of Muslim children by morally training them in the reading and memorization of the Qur'an. According to Aliyu and Gani (2013), their contribution to educational and national development cannot be over-emphasized. The graduates of Kano School of Arabic Studies, the first products, are among the high intellectuals who served as top governmental functionaries in Nigeria. This shows that Islamiyya schools have made remarkable contribution to developments in Nigeria.

Islamiyya schools have produce cultured and well-mannered Muslim individuals. Moral and spiritual development is crucial, as it illuminate the mind of Muslim children with the divine guidance of Qur'anic revelation and the exemplary model of Prophet's life and that of the righteous predecessors. It also helped preserve the cultural and civilizational heritage of Islam. There multiplication has facilitated the expansion of Islamic education in the country, despite non-governmental recognition (Aliyu and Gani, 2013).

Islamic education is basic to the spiritual and material development of any Muslim and is considered a lifelong process. Searching for and possessing knowledge is one of the most important aspects of Muslim life anywhere in the world (Abdulraheem, 2020). However, the Islamiyya education system must be accorded its rightful recognition in Nigeria to render its contributions towards development. Government and non-governmental organizations are making efforts to address the problem, but these efforts often lack collective decisive will for actions.

Prospects for Future Sustainability

In Northern Nigeria, Islamiyya, Qur'anic and *Tsangaya* Education (IQTE) is an important aspect of education. Communities value these schools, and many parents prefer them. In some states, they account for over four-fifths of all schools. Many pupils come from poor families, and in many Islamiyya schools, two-thirds of the pupils are girls.

Both state governments and communities appreciate the value of integrating non-religious and religious subjects into the curricula of IQTE schools. This integration is regarded as essential for children to succeed in modern society, ESSPIN (Education Sector Support in Nigeria) supports this aspiration by helping deepen understanding of the issues and needs, and by developing and testing ways of integrating religious and non-religious subjects in primary school curricula (ESSPIN, 2011).

According to Baba (2011), a section of the *Ulama* and the schools they control have shown willingness to engage with the state and modern infrastructure of educational delivery to advance their participation in education. With this strategy, they have effectively increased their access to educational opportunities and mobility prospects to a large number of Muslim youths, including women, in a culturally sensitive setting. By positioning themselves as 'functional equivalents' to the state in providing education, these modernist *Ulama* are also seeking to enthrone Islamic values into Nigeria's largely secular, Western-oriented bureaucracy and knowledge structure. The new Islamic schools of the modernist *Ulama* are

producing a young Muslim men and women capable of engaging in national discourse and redirecting it in line with their religious values and teachings.

For the future sustainability; students must receive a high-quality education that prepares them for the modern world. Muhammad (2023) stated that religious elites have significant contributions to make in the conception and execution of development programmes in developing countries like Nigeria. The Nigerian government acknowledges the task of universal access to quality basic education and knows that its execution requires partnership with civil society. However, it has not put in place mechanisms to mobilize and engage communities and groups in this task.

Challenges Facing Islamiyya School Education

These challenges vary from one school to another and include:

1. **Limited Resources:** Islamiyya schools often face financial constraints and limited access to resources.
2. **Modern Education Integration:** Balancing traditional Islamic education with modern curricula and teaching methods leads to curricular overload
3. **School Fees:** Islamiyya schools struggle to collect meagre monthly or weekly fees.
4. **Dishonesty:** Some proprietors divert assistance from local, national and international philanthropists meant for their schools to personal use. Some sell donated items. For some Islamiyya is an avenue for seeking philanthropy.
5. **Marginalization:** Politics leads to inadequate government investment in Islamic education.
6. **Disdainful Attitude:** An average Nigerian Muslim parent spends heavily in Western education for their children but perceives Islamic education as secondary responsibility.
7. **Unregistered Schools:** Many Islamiyya operate without documentation with any government bodies, this affects their operation.

Furthermore, many Islamiyya schools need qualified teachers, better teaching/learning facilities, building for improvement and higher performance.

Conclusion

Education is the backbone of development in any country. The difference between more and less developed countries lies in education, whether formal, informal, or semi-formal. Religious education exists everywhere, and all countries have religious schools. If the Nigerian government, in line with its philosophy of “right to equal education for all,” fully utilizes Islamiyya education, it can serve as a means for education for all.

Recommendations

1. State governments should provide funds and modern infrastructural and educational facilities to Islamiyya schools as provided in Western schools
2. States Ministries of Education should jointly modify Islamiyya curricula to futuristic career opportunities, and organize capacity building training for teachers and proprietors.

3. Parents and guardians should be properly mobilized to pay their wards school fees, and defaulters to be punished accordingly.
4. Islamiyya school teachers, managers, coordinators and proprietors should ensure the judicious spending of funds and proper utilization of resources for their improvement.
5. Governments at all level should consider Islamiyya schools as a viable area of investment and accorded it priority without interfering with their traditional mandate.
6. Each Islamiyya stakeholders should conduct proper assessment of all problems and liaise with teachers and proprietors for solution.
7. States governments shall conduct the mandatory registration and documentation of all Islamiyya schools for proper management and coordination.

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