

THE TRADITIONAL QUR'ANIC SCHOOLS IN NASARAWA STATE: A STUDY OF EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR MUSLIM UMMAH

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Abstract

The "Kuttab (System of teaching al-Qur'an to young children) and Adult educational systems were the two Islamic educational systems established during the life time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Through these medium of education, several notable Saliabahs and their children became great personalities and famous scholars in al Qur'an, Hadith and other Islamic sciences. These Islamic educational systems expanded far and wide along side with the spread of Islam. They are part and parcel of Islam. Wherever Islam goes, the Islamic education goes-along with it. Therefore, ever since the emergence and consolidation of Islam in notable towns and places in Nasarawa state and its environs, the establishment of the Kuttab and Adult educational system have become compulsory duties of the Muslims. Most of the Qur'anic schools began to spring up as parts of Mosques or living houses constructed by the Muslims. Others are located under trees or tents. The system is and still operating popularly in Muslim communities or settlements up till today; but the graduates are still relegated to the background. It is the intention of this paper therefore, to study and examine some of the emerging issues and challenges associated with these local Quranic schools within Nasarawa state. Solutions will be propounded for the amelioration of the problems or challenges emanated from the Qur'anic school system in the state under review.

Introduction

Nasarawa state of Nigeria; a young and virile state was carved out of Plateau state in 1996. during the regime of General Sani Abacha. It is one of the 19 Northern states of Nigeria situated in North central geo-political zone of the country. Its headquarters is located at Lafia and it has a population of about 1.8 million and more than sixty percent of its citizens are practicing Muslims. It consists of thirteen officially recognized Local Government Areas.

Although, the arrangement of carving out the state into a geo-political entity, twelve years ago, was a recent development, but it is no doubt that the area that consisted Nasarawa state is made up of some notable Emirate councils that have witnessed the advent of Islam and Islamic education system before the coming of Colonial masters in the area. There were emirate councils like Keffi established by Abdu Zanga; Nasarawa established by Umaru Makama Dogo; Lafia emirate established by Mai Dunama; Wamba emirate; Nunku emirate by Nzonja Abdullah; Doma emirate council and others. All these emirates came in contact with Islam and since Islamic education and the religion of Islam are one which cannot be separated, it is obvious that wherever one finds Islam, one is sure of finding Islamic education. Based on this premise, one can confidently say that, following several clear directives in both the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (SAW) to all Muslims to learn the reading and understanding of the Holy Book and then teach it to others, Qur'anic schools and Madarasas were established in most of the Muslim communities within the emirate councils mentioned above. The Islamic communities and their educational system were modeled on that established in Arabia between 610 - 632 A.D. by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

Most of the Jihadists and reformers and flag bearers of Islam in the emirates mentioned above were influenced by the injunctions of the Qur'an and Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) which gave clear directives to all Muslims to learn, understand and teach the Holy Qur'an to others. For example, the first revelation given to the Prophet (SAW), Surah 96:1-5 placed great emphasis on knowledge and education: Read in the Name of Your Lord and Cherisher Who created (all that exists). He created man from a clot (a piece of thick congealed blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who has taught man by the Pen. He has taught man that which he knew not. (Q. 96:1-5).

These Qur'anic verses were corroborated by many Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW) such as:

"The best among you is he who learns the Qur'an and teaches it (to others)". "Teach your children al-Qur'an".

Therefore, as you can see, this Qur'anic injunction and these Ahadith compelled the parents, reformers and scholars to individually teach their children, and other adults (new converts) al-Qur'an. Those who could not do it personally employed the service of a teacher to do it for them. The necessity for the establishment of Kuttab (where children would be taught) along with madaris (for adults) arose.

Muslims from the period of the Prophet (SAW) up to this 21st century have realized that it is an obligatory duty not only to acquire the knowledge of al-Qur'an, but also to impart same to others. It has become the greatest legacy that every parent wishes to bequeath on his children. To this effect, Ibn Batuta, the great Islamic scholar and historian narrated that "quite a number of children were tied with a rope to a state or chain until they were able to memorize the Holy Qur'an". This narration, therefore, indicated the great concern that the people in the subcontinent of Africa have about the study of the Holy Qur'an.

The possible questions that come to mind in this paper are:

- i. What were the structures of the local Qur'anic schools in Nasarawa state?;
- ii. What does the curriculum of the schools look like?;
- iii. What are the emerging issues and the challenges emanating from the Qur'anic schools in the state?; How can we arrest the menace of the teenager beggars on our streets and other health related problems associated with these Qur'anic schools?

For simplification and easy access to relevant and related data on the problems enumerated above, our study will be restricted to some Qur'anic schools in Akwanga, Lafia, Keffi and Nasarawa..

Traditional Qur'anic Schools in Nasarawa State

As pointed out in the introduction above, ever since the emergence and consolidation of Islam in some notable emirate councils and towns in Nasarawa state and its environs, learning of the Qur'an has become compulsory. Most of the Qur'anic schools in the area began as parts of mosques which were constructed by the malam or Muslim community or chief. While some others are located in the residences of the malams; others are organized under the shade of trees. The Qur'anic schools studied in respect of this paper are located in the residences of the malams who established them. These schools in Akwanga, Lafia, Keffi and Nasarawa have the following facilities and organizational structure namely: wooden slates being used by pupils for their study, mats and goat skin/cow skin which they sit on, local ink (Tawada) and pen made of corn stalks (al-Qalam) for writing on the slates. There are volumes of the Qur'an, Qa'idatu Baghdadiyyah.

The schools under review are Alhaji Abdulsalam Ibrahim Qur'anic school in Akwanga; Zauren Kwana Buzu Qur'anic school of malam Muhammad Isa in Lafia; Hayatul Iman Islamic school in Lafia; Alhaji Muhammad Ashiru Indo Qur'anic school in Bakin Kogi Nasarawa; Malam Habun-Kofa Qur'anic school in Nasarawa town; Malam aule Qur'anic school and Malam Mai Hakuri Qur'anic school Gangaren Karofi Keffi.

They maintain similar organizational structures, facilities and characteristics with the Kuttab (children Qur'anic school) and Adult classes established by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) for the children of the companions (Sahabah) and the companions themselves respectively. All the schools listed above were established by the malam in their premises for their children and the children of their neighbourhood with the sole aim of teaching them how to recite and memorize the Holy Book of Islam - al-Qur'an. Along side with this, some aspects on worship (Ibadah) and Hadith of the prophet (SAW) were introduced into the curriculum. There is no organized sitting arrangement and no classroom setting. The mode of admission was informal and the pupils come to the school as early as when they can walk the distance to and fro their homes and the schools. To be precise, the pupils commence school as from the age of three (3). As regard the funding of the schools, the teachers (malams) and the head teacher of the school (usually the founder) unanimously lamented that they all depend on charity (Zakat or Sdaqah) for the maintenance of the schools and the feeding of the pupils who are residing in the school as boarding students.

A very pathetic situation is that of Alhaji Abdulsalam Ibrahim School in Akwanga. The school has about four hundred pupils (400) out of which only one hundred of the pupils come from the neighbourhood .while the remaining three hundred are from Fulani settlements in the south eastern states, south western states, north eastern states and north western states of Nigeria. Rooms of various sizes were rented (or at times loaned out as *fi sabilillah*) to accommodate the pupils. No school fees is charged and the malam hires the services of other teachers (his junior brothers, family members and senior students) to help to teach and supervise the pupils. All in all, there are ten teachers in this -school. None of them is given salary for the services they are rendering. Other schools in Lafia and Nasarawa have similar characteristics with the one in Akwanga, but they have fewer pupils in their schools. (Lafia - 100 pupils, and 90 pupils; in Nasarawa 60 pupils and 65 pupils respectively). In some rare cases, #20.00 or #50.00 are charged weekly per pupil.

Teaching Method

The pupils are taught to recite and memorize the Arabic alphabets and or Qur'anic chapters or verses written on their wooden slates (Allo) individually with a view to developing their mental and intellectual capability. The pupils will only be promoted to another stage of the study if he can reproduce the old lesson to the satisfaction of the teacher (malam), i.e. no formal written examination is given to the pupil for evaluation. School days start from Saturday and ends on Wednesday and they all have three shifts thus: morning (7-10 am); afternoon (4-6 pm) and evening (8 - 10pm).

No formal graduation or holidays are given but all the Id festivals (Id al-fitr, Id al-kabir, Maulud and Ramadan periods) are observed as school free days and at times three weeks break is-given as holidays.

Alhaji Abdulsalam Ibrahim in Akwanga, malam Abubakar Alhassan of Malam Habu Kofa Qur'anic school in Nasarawa; Alhaji Muhammad Ashiru of Bakin kogi Qur'anic school Nasarawa and-malam Muhammad Isa of Zauren Kwana Buzu Qur'anic school in Lafia, confessed that they are spending huge sum of money on the feeding, accommodation and health care of the pupils' residence in the schools. For instance, Alhaji Abdulsalam Ibrahim said that he used to pay #80,000 and #100,000 for the twenty rooms he rented for the pupils and again he used to prepare between 15 and 20 measures of corn for their meals every day without any subsidy from the government nor any support from the parents of the pupils.

However^ some of these schools have started modifying the organizational structures and facilities in their schools in order to arrest the ugly situation that the traditional Qur'anic schools are facing today. For instance, the Hayatul Iman Islamiyyah school of Shaikh Muhammad Sarki Baba in Laafia has introduced all the facilities, characteristics and organizational structures found in the modern system into his own-school. Under the directory of his son Muhammad Sarki Muhammad as the head teacher. Islamic and Arabic studies were combined with some aspects of modern education. The pupils were taught basic principles of Islam including the pillars of Islam and Ibadat. They also learn rudimentary principles of ethical values of how to behave at homes and in public places; how to respect parents, teachers and elders generally. And at times, they learn occupation like farming. In this school (Islamiyyah model) we observed that the pupils/students are divided into sections and classes thus: Children section (male and female); Adult section (male); and section for the married women. The school has classroom accommodation with black board, chalk and exercise books to replace the slate system (allo). Written examinations and tests are administered to evaluate the students' performance and then promote where and when necessary.

Again, in adult section or Urn school section of the reviewed schools in Nasarawa state, the curricula include subjects like Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), theology (Tauhid). Arabic (Adab), commentary of the Qur'an (Tafsir), grammar and syntax (nahwu and Sarf). biography Prophet (Sirah) and Arithmetic (Urn al-hisab). Although the contemporary traditional Qur'anic schools are modeled after the Kuttab or Adult (Ilm) classes organized and maintained in the early period of Islam, but there are enormous problems and challenges emanating from them.

The Emerging Issues And Challenges Emanating From the Traditional Qur'anic Schools in Nasarawa State

In this rapidly changing world of ours which is dominated by the west economically, socially, culturally and politically, the world of elaborate material complexity in which everything is monopolized by the west, including education, the challenges before the Muslims in enormous, lamented Galadanci (1993:105). To this effect, we observed that the traditional Qur'anic schools under review are characterized by some enormous problems and challenges. Prominent among the emerging problems and challenges associated with these schools may be categorized into the following groups:

- a) Lack of official recognition;
- b) Economic related problems;
- c) Socio-cultural related problems;
- d) Intellectual related problems and
- e) Health related problems.

Lack of Official Recognition

It is observed that most of the traditional Qur'anic schools in the state are not organized under any central body or authority to coordinate their activities but they are all left entirely in the hands of their proprietors. As a result, the standard varies and the system remains static without any improvement. No adequate arrangement was made for the students though many of them used-to travel from one town to another in search of competent teachers. This, no doubt, caused a great deal of hardship to many students. This school system has been expunged from the National Curriculum of Education. That is, it has no place in the

6-3-3-4 educational system in vogue in Nigeria today. The graduates and students of these schools are always relegated to the background and considered as non literates. This explains why the parents of students lack faith in the schools. They have lukewarm attitudes towards lending support to the schools when they are asked to do so. They used to feel reluctant in paying the meager school fees for their wards in the traditional schools, but they are eager to pay high school fees on those in the modern western oriented schools.

Economic Related Problems

The funding of the schools studied has continued to be based on individual efforts. All the malams and proprietors of the Qur'anic schools confirmed that they do not collect school fees from the pupils/students but they only depend on charity (Zakat, Sadaqah or fisabilillah). The head teacher and other assistants are not placed on any salary rather they are contented with the belief that their teaching the word of Allah to the servants of Allah, it is only Allah that can reward adequately.

The schools are not grant-aided by the government and so the development of the schools is based on self efforts and some assistance rendered by philanthropists which had never been satisfactory.

Socio-Cultural Related Problems

Due to non payment of fees and lack of any grant from any constituted authority, the schools made no adequate arrangement for the welfare of the students in the boarding houses. This, no doubt, caused great deal of hardship to many students, especially the minors who invariably ended up as al-majirai or teenage street beggars, roaming about, going from house to house, shop to shop and restaurants to restaurants, asking for alms. These minors created other social problems to the society. They are vulnerable to various crimes and abuses. They may be picked up for menial jobs, child trafficking, juvenile delinquency and other crimes; and this negative behaviour of the children will be blamed on the malam or Ulama and Muslim community in general. However, we suspect that the behaviours of the children is motivated by their socio-cultural background, i.e. cultural milieu where the parents will produce the children and send them out to go and fend for themselves or be used as domestic servants. By this act, the parents give up their responsibilities for catering for the children needs for food, clothing, shelter as well as socialization, i.e. they neglect their divine rights and duties to their children.

Intellectual Related Problems

Another serious issue or problem associated with the traditional Qur'anic schools reviewed is that they did not provide adequate opportunity for research and serious efforts on scientific investigation. As such, they could not produce erudite scholars and learned men as was the case in the early periods of Islam. No any serious academic research works are attributed to the graduates of these traditional Qur'anic schools.

Health Related Problem

One of the worrisome problems before the Muslim ummah in the state is the congested nature of the accommodation given to the students of the traditional Qur'anic schools who are residing in rooms provided for them. There is likelihood that epidemic may break out there. This is because the students are always exposed to severe cold and heat during the harmattan and summer periods. The rules of cleanliness are not always observed by the students.

The Challenges Ahead

The challenges before the Muslim Ummah in Nasarawa state, worthy of mentioning are that; the Muslims should try to bring back Islam in to their daily life; endeavour to change their mental attitude towards modern education they should seek and utilize modern education for the benefit of Islam and Muslim community. The Muslims in the state should Islamize every aspect of education that they have or are seeking for by relating them to Islamic sources. If this is done, we will be able to produce doctors, nurses, engineers, sociologists, psychologists, administrators, etc. who are not only good in their respective professions but also truly are good Muslims and useful citizens who are ready to give assistance to Islam and Islamic education. Galadanci (1993:105), opined that universities and other research centres in the states, where Muslims constitute the majority, should undertake intensive researches and make the results of such researchers available to one another for mutual benefit. Workshops and conferences should be organized regularly for the Ulama and teachers of Qur'anic schools to be able to equip them with modern techniques and methodologies of imparting useful knowledge on the younger generations of the Muslims.

Recommendations

1. For proper organization and development of the traditional Qur'anic schools, there should be

collaboration of effort between all the stakeholders in education sector to change the phenomenon associated with the system.

2. Parents should, as a matter of fact, be ready to pay reasonable fees and then support the schools financially and materially to be able to provide conducive environment for teaching and learning activity.
3. A body of scholars in Islamic education should be constituted as in the case of primary and secondary schools (NSPBB, and Z.I.E.) to strategize, plan and supervise the activities of the traditional Qur'anic schools.
4. The traditional Qur'anic schools should be grant-aided by the government and other philanthropists.
5. The curriculum/content of the Qur'anic schools should be expanded to include subjects like Akhlaq, Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), theology (Taushid), commentary of the Qur'an (Tafsir), Arabic literature (Adab), grammar and syntax (Nahwu nd Sarf), and other modern subjects; so that the schools can be seen as a training ground where Muslims are intellectually, culturally and morally prepared to meet the challenges of life.

Conclusion

The emerging issues and challenges emanating from the contemporary traditional Qur'anic schools in the state are enormous, but the paper has deliberated on few of them with the hope that the stakeholders (Muslims in particular) concerned will be conscientized and then play their required roles judiciously for the development and progress of the Qur'anic schools.

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