

**THE RELEVANCE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN THE MODERN
WORLD: A LESSON FOR THE 21st CENTURY GENERATION**

By

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**BEING A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
NUSRET EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL CO. LTD. NIGERIA AND HIRA
MAGAZINE ON THE THEME; *EMPLOYING PROPHETIC STYLES IN MOULDING
THE BEHAVIOURS OF GENERATIONS*, AT AL-QALAM UNIVERSITY KATSINA
KATSINA STATE, NIGERIA.**

ON 22nd MAY, 2017

ABSTRACT

Prior to the Judeo-Christian missionaries' exploit in Nigeria, Islam was regarded as a complete way of life and Islamic system of education was referred to as a holistic approach to learning as was the case in the early ages of Islamic civilization. Islamic education was, therefore, considered and placed in a very noble position as it emphasises the importance of acquisition and dissemination of knowledge than any other human activities. It is against the backdrop of this that the present paper sets out to appraise the Relevance of Islamic Education in the Modern World: A Lesson for the 21st Century Generation. In this regard, the paper discusses the nature of the Divine education, the value of education in Islam, the syndrome of un-Islamic education, the critique of western (un-Islamic education) and finally proffers possible solutions to the problem of un-Islamic education in Nigeria.

Key words: education, education in Islam, un-Islamic education and western education.

INTRODUCTION

“Every child is born a Muslim; it is only his parents that either turn him into a pagan, a Christian or a Jew”. – Transmitted by Bukhari and Muslim

The above quoted Hadith extols the virtue that Islam engraves on its adherents. A Muslim is believed to be of refined moral character, modest, humble and forbearing. These innate qualities make the life of a Muslim worthy of emulation. Thus, a child, brought up in this kind of environment and trained by such personalities, would be none else, but Muslim. This paper attempts to survey the two systems of education and show how they differ in moulding personality as well as character and the impact they have on both the personality in question and the community.

The religion of Islam gives an important place to the search of knowledge. This can be justified from the definition of Islamic education which refers to the process of nurturing and training of the mind, physique, emotion and the spirit of human based on Islamic values which are sourced from the Qur’an and Hadith and “intended to bring forth humans who are God conscious and subservient only to Allah (Wan Mohd Nor, 1998)”. In this regard, the messenger of Allah says: *“The search of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim”* Transmitted by Ibni Majah. According to Dauda (1994) “Education being the fundamental bedrock of Islamic activities is divinely recognised and highly rated as almost second to nothing”, as it occupies an important place in Islam. This could be attested in the first Surah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, who was seeking for Allah’s guidance in Mount Hira, years before his investiture as a prophet. The first five verses of the Surah outlined the three processes of acquiring knowledge – through reading, writing and God-given (Ulum-Ladunniy). Thus, Allah says:

Read in the name of your Lord who created
Who created man from clots of congealed blood.

Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One,
Who taught by the Pen,
Taught man what he did not know... (Qur'an 96:1-5).

The next three verses went on to discuss the importance of character-building. Islam affirms the importance of character side by side with knowledge-seeking. Without good character, knowledge is of little or no significance. That is why the subsequent three verses of the Surah, Al-alaaq (Iqra'a) attacked the negative trait of arrogance – a cancerous traits that has negative impact on human personality as Allah says:

No! (But) indeed, man transgresses
Because he sees himself self-sufficient.
Indeed, to your Lord is the return. (Qur'an, 96: 6-8)

This means that, man becomes arrogant the moment he sees himself blessed with the bounty of knowledge, power or wealth. Each of these bounties tend to make man arrogant as we witnessed in Iblis (Satan) in his refusal to prostrate to Adam (Qur'an, 2: 30-38), Pharaoh as he is bewitched by power and subjects his people to unjust treatment (Qur'an, 79:24; 28:4; 28:38; 28:76) and Qaruun, as he romanticized over his enormous wealth and attributes its source to his personal initiative and deny others his personal initiative and denies others the benefit of it (Qur'an, 28:77-79). The watch word concluded the verse, is that: at the end of this transitory career, man, is finally going back to Allah: *"To Allah is the final return"*.

In yet another verse, Allah stresses the importance of knowledge by saying "Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know' Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding." (Qur'an, 40:9)

THE VALUE OF EDUCATION IN ISLAM

It is plainly established that Islam has placed education in a very noble position. This is important because education in Islam is not merely acquiring intellectual knowledge but it is a means of moulding the nature and character of individuals, “so that they can collectively represent Islamic values, behave as Khalifatullah Fil-Ard (vicegerent of Allah on earth) to serve witnesses to truth and noble conducts (Firdaus and Shah, 2013)”. Its acquisition and practical positive utilisation, therefore, attract Divine promotion for the learned person to higher grade levels spiritually and socially. Allah says: “Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do” (Qur’an, 59: 11). Moreover in several places, the Quran invites mankind to ponder, to reflect and to inquire over the natural phenomena – an invitation that opens windows of opportunity towards learning.

The second importance of learning is to enable one to know his creator because it is only when one knows one’s creator that one may be able to worship Him. In other words, it is only when one has knowledge that one can do Ibadah (worship). Hence the adage: *“He who does not know God, would not be able to worship God”*.

Thirdly, it is only through knowledge that man can build a material culture, a civilization, in fact, a lasting civilization. This could be seen in the Golden Age of Islam, a period attested by western European scholars as Islam’s most prime moment. It was during the Abbasids that Islamic scholars made their impact on the entire human race. It was the contribution of the Muslim scientists during the Abbasid period which triggered the Renaissance in Europe in the 14th century. Ibn Sina’s compendium on medicine is to this day an important reference material in many European universities. Other great scientists like Al-Khuwarizmi, Jabir bn Hayyan, Al-

Razi, Az-Zahrawi, Ibn Haytham, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Idris, Al-Biruni, each had left an indelible mark on the pages of history in different aspect of learning.

Fourthly, the current deplorable state of the Muslim world is an attestation of what the future looks like for any nation that abandons learning or the pursuit of knowledge. When the Muslim world abandons scholarship and embraces Taqlid (imitation) it fell out of fortune and began to eclipse from the world scene. From this singular mistake of abandoning scholarship and learning, the Muslim world is yet to recover and is still struggling to find its place in the community of nations.

Lastly, ever since the Renaissance and the exit of Europe out of the dark age into the limelight of learning and scholarship, Europe began rising into prominence until it assumed world dominance in the heydays of empire. All these successes are attributable to learning.

THE UNISLAMIC (WESTERN) EDUCATION

Western education is a bi-product of Judeo-Christian mission. It owes its origin to colonialism – the curving of Nigeria by Britain as a colony in the earliest 15th century with a complete secular system that differentiated life and religion and focuses on materialism. This is supported by the claim of Dauda, who asserts that:

When the British imperialists were in total physical control of Nigeria, they controlled the education system and ensured that it was designed in such a way as to Christianise whoever goes to their schools, as it happened in the former western region or atleast is de-Islamised, secularised and westernised or Europeanised. (Dauda, 1994:13)

Consequently, the early western education started by Christian missionaries with the primarily to win converts. Similarly, Fafunwa (1974) opines that;

The European Christian missionaries educational commitment was informed by the realisation of the enormous benefits associated with a literate Christian congregation. They also realised that an effectively functionally literate Christian congregation will help in no small measure towards the conversion of the fellow tribesmen and women into the religion of Christianity.

Later when the British colonial administrators took over; the syllabi changed very little and the purpose was primarily to produce ready-made material of personnel that could read and write. The highest level of education in those days was middle school certainly not any more than a mere secondary school. Only on a rare occasion could a candidate get the chance of passing beyond middle school. Thus, with the coming of the National Curriculum on Education not so much has changed. From this, and many other reasons, the average Nigerian elite has little or no respect for his people, community or nation. Neither the people nor the nation possesses any real value to him.

A CRITIQUE OF WESTERN (UNISLAMIC EDUCATION)

Judging from its origin (Judeo-Christian) western education is fundamentally secular (Dauda, 2002). This secular nature deprives it of the very ethos of religious inspiration, guidance or spiritual traits. The modern Western system of education, according to Hashim (2004) “does not consider the relationship between God and human being socially or intellectually relevance, hence revelation or the revealed knowledge are ignored even when modern secular subjects are introduced in the curriculum for the traditional older system.” Also, its total denial of the Day of Judgment makes its content morally negative and therefore inimical to a young mind as a source of knowledge. The Holy Qur’an challenged this negative element in which Allah warned Prophet Musa against dogged subservience to persons or ideologies that thrive on denying the Day of Reckoning as Allah poses a question to them that “Then how can you fear, if you disbelieve, a

Day that will make the children white-haired” (Qur’an, 74:17). In another Surah, Allah stresses that:

Indeed, the Hour is coming - I almost conceal it - so that every soul may be recompensed according to that for which it strives. So do not let one avert you from it who does not believe in it and follows his desire, for you [then] would perish. (Qur’an 20:14-16)

It is this belief that often holds mankind on check. In another Surah, Allah insists that no IMAN is valid when the Day of Judgment is denied. Thus, Allah says:

And leave Me with [the matter of] the deniers,
Those of ease [in life], and allow them respite a little.
Indeed, with Us [for them] are shackles and burning fire.
(Qur’an, 74: 11-12)

Moreover, because of its secular nature, western education develops little of characters; consequently, the average Nigerian elite whether trained at home or abroad, takes relish in moral debauchery. If he is not a drunkard or a drug addict he may take pleasure in licentious lifestyle. It is this moral debauchery which erodes both character and personality and therefore negates the learning potential of those affected.

Another negative effect of western education is its emphasis on individualism. The average wholesale consumer of this negative education suffers from chronic isolationism – a trait that makes one take pleasure in isolating oneself from the community thereby distancing oneself from one’s people. A person in this kind of situation lacks simple *Mu’amala* (human relations). He sees himself as a Whiteman whose immediate family comprises of his wife his two sons, himself and his dogs. He hardly identifies himself with his extended family – that being backward.

The last negative trait inherent in un-Islamic education is the lack of transparency. The early leaders of Nigeria were the nationalists who though young, made tremendous sacrifice to build a strong and virile nation. They schooled at a time when western education was loathsome and Muslims were paying little or no interest in it. Enthused in their Islamic education, The Tafawas, the Sardaunas, the Aminu Kanos did wonders to Northern Nigeria until the region was able to provide for the whole country.

Compared to the present crop of Nigerian elite, transparency today is in short supply. The recent startling revelation of stolen money abandoned in counties, sunk-aways, water tanks, uninhabited houses leave one baffled, bewildered and averse wondering what and who could have been responsible? But the reality is our nation is robbed, robbed indeed by none else but her own illegitimate children born and bred in Nigeria but fed with a toxic educational system which encourages them to see nothing wrong in corruption and petty thievery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having seen the negative traits in the un-Islamic education and bearing in mind the great potentials inherent in Islamic education, now what are the recommendations? This paper wishes to proffer the following solutions.

1. There is the need for specialists in Islamic education to host a conference, national or international in which basic syllabus or comprehensive curriculum will be designed to cover nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in almost all subjects in accordance with the Islamic tenets, designed purposely for implementation.
2. Al-Qalam University should as a matter of urgency start operating a day-care and nursery school unit in accordance with Islamic tenets. The syllabus of the nursery should capture

Islamic education during the first two years of pre-nursery and nursery. This should remain the practice for at least a decade before making a debut for a five year primary system.

3. Parent Teacher's Association should take responsibility of providing Islamic and religious teachers from primary to secondary and ensure that IRK is taught to both Arts as well as science students even if optional and even if it will not be sat at WAEC or NECO levels.
4. Each Juma'at Mosque community in any location in the Muslim community should take the responsibility of public lecture series on public morality on general Islamic education and Mu'amalaat to students of whatever clime in the neighborhood as well as members of the general public.
5. Members of the working class in the community, technocrats, the ruling elite and the well-to-do should ensure and take responsibility supporting and guiding students in their endeavors to get education in their respective communities.
6. Business as well as Muslim entrepreneurs should endeavor to invest private Islamic institutions to ensure rapid spread of Islamic learning and scholarship.

CONCLUSION

Islamic education is fundamental and imperative to a Muslim as it is the only system of education that attains the Nigeria's philosophy of education which stresses that:

For the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria's national goals, education has to be geared towards self realisation, better human relationship, individual national efficiency and effective citizenship. National consciousness, national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. (NPE, 2004)

The absence of it, or its denial brings along with it an avalanche of catastrophes of immeasurable dimension as it is the only gateway to a Muslim's success and no doubt the only way for his safe and successful return to Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala.

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Sahihul Bukhari

Sahihul Muslim

Sunanu Ibni Majah