

## **Traditional Islamic Education in Asia and Africa: A Comparative Study of Malaysia's *Pondok*, Indonesia's *Pesantren* and Nigeria's Traditional *Madrasah***

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**Abstract:** The Muslim world has witnessed the emergence of several Islamic-based institutes and universities in the last three decades, in keeping with some of the recommendations of World Conferences on Muslim Education. Such a development has greatly improved the quality of higher Islamic education especially with regards to the contribution to Islamic scholarship of some of the graduates of such Islamic institutes and universities. However, the traditional system of Islamic education at the pre-university level has not been greatly influenced by such a development. There has not been a comprehensive study of the system as operated in various contemporary Muslim settings, with a view to assessing the degree of its efficacy. Therefore, there is a long-felt need for such a research endeavour. The purpose of this paper is to carry out a comparative study of Malaysia's *pondok*, Indonesia's *pesantren* and Nigeria's traditional *madrasah* system. The choice of the three educational settings was informed by the growing impression that Malaysia and Indonesia, both Asian countries, offer some of the best practices in traditional Islamic education, which may be used as standards in improving upon what operates in Nigeria, an African country with the largest Muslim population and largest number of *madaaris* (pl.). The paper traces the origins of the traditional Islamic education system, discusses the evolution of each of the three systems and addresses such salient issues as ownership of the school, the structure of the school, the curriculum, teachers' requirements and qualifications, teaching methods, evaluation procedures, teachers' welfare and salaries, the socio-economic status of the teacher, the schools and the challenges of higher education in the face of urbanization, as well as practical recommendations for reforms. The paper, which is both historical and analytical in nature, employs the philosophical method, in its critical perspectives and practical suggestions. The significance of such a comparative study lies in its potentiality to expose the strengths and deficiencies of each of the educational settings, as well as highlight their commonalities and differences.

**Key words:** Malaysia's *Pondoks* • Indonesia's *Pesantrens* • Traditional *Madrasah* Education in Nigeria  
• Comparative • Study of Islamic Educational Systems

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### **INTRODUCTION**

What is generally known today as *madrasah* originated from the *kuttab* system of the early days of Islam. The earlier variety of the *Kuttab*, was concerned only with the teaching of reading and writing. Shalaby [1] observes that by the time the significance of this art was deeply realized and beautifully expressed, it began to enjoy patronage and encouragement. However, Muslims were not involved in the teaching of the art at the early

stage because the few of them "who could read and write were mostly working as amanuenses to the Prophet and thus non-Muslims took over the task of teaching reading and writing" [1]. In other words, the curriculum at that stage of learning consisted mainly of the art of reading and writing. However, the curriculum of the other variety of the *Kuttab* revolved around the Qur'an and religious knowledge. That is the curriculum described by Totah [2] when he states that a boy was normally taken to the *Kuttab* at about seven years of age and there "he was

handed a primer...which was the holy Qur'an and he had to accomplish in about three years the remarkable feat of learning of it by heart" [2]. Teaching at this level of education did not transcend the boundary of the Qur'an and religious knowledge which itself was based on the Qur'an. Yet there was another level of education, i.e. elementary education, that was closely related to today's *madrasah* system, in the early days of Islam.

**Elementary Education:** The curriculum of this level of education is closely related to that of the *Kuttab* as they are both concerned with the teaching of children. However the difference lies in the fact that the latter was a product of the realization in the Muslim world that a curriculum should be cognizant of the future career of the student. It was such realization that led to the conduct of "a kind of elementary education in the Royal Palaces as well as the palaces of the leading figures in Muslim society" [1]. The curriculum of this kind of education "was usually drawn up by the father to suit his child and furthermore students of this class continued to receive their higher education in the Palaces after the elementary school age"[1]. Although the teacher was expected to infuse the curriculum with any learning ingredient that could facilitate both moral and intellectual development, some of such subjects as thought appropriate by the teacher were accepted or rejected by the father who had the final say on what his son learnt.

To prove that what was taught at that level was essentially determined by the father on whose instruction a subject may be added or omitted, it is pertinent to allude to an instructions given by 'Amr b. 'Utbah to the tutor of his sons which read: "The first thing to start with in educating my sons is to improve your own manners. My sons will be deeply influenced by you and will favour what you do and abhor what you avoid. Teach them the Qur'an but without wearying them of it, recite to them what is good in Traditions and chaste in poetry, do not substitute one subject for another, unless they perfectly know the former, teach them the virtues of wise men and keep them away from women's conversation" [1]. It is obvious in these instructions that the father had practically dictated the curriculum contents to the teacher thereby determining what should be taught. In an instruction given by Caliph Hisham b. 'Abd. Al-Malik to the teacher of his son, was contained the saying that: "Give him instruction first in the Holy Book, then in poetry and great orations, the knowledge of good and evil, accounts of famous wars and lastly the art of conversation" [1]. In order to further demonstrate that what a father omitted in his own instructions was, at

times, emphasized by another in his own, it is also pertinent to allude to al-Rashid's instruction to the tutor of al-Amin, in which he said: "O, Ahmar, I have given you the child of my blood, the fruit of my loins and give you power over him and made him obedient to you, therefore prove worthy of this position. Teach him the Qur'an, history, poetry, Traditions, appreciation of eloquence. Prevent him from laughing except on proper occasions. Accustom him to respect the Shaikhs of the Hashim family and to offer a proper place to the military commanders if they attend his Council. Do not allow any time to pass without having some useful instruction for him but do not make him sad. Do not be too kind to him or he will take to idleness. Improve him kindly, but if that will not suffice you can treat him harshly" [1]. The three varieties of instructions of fathers to their sons' teachers instanced above give a clear picture of the diverse nature of some aspects of the curriculum contents of the elementary level of education. It is evident from the foregoing that the curriculum contents varied from one father to another.

**A Comparative Overview of the Pondok, the Pesantren and the Traditional Madrasah:** The traditional system of Arabic Islamic education takes different forms in different settings. It takes the *pondok* form, in Malaysia, the *pesantren* form in Indonesia and the *kuttab* or traditional *madrasah* form in Nigeria. Given that the purpose of this article is to carry out a comparative analysis of these three systems of Islamic education, this section is aimed at providing an overview of the systems in the three Muslim majority countries under investigation. Hence an analysis of each of the three systems in the following subsections.

**The Pondok System:** The word *pondok* is a derivative of the Arabic word *funduq* which philologically means an inn or hotel [3]. It is employed in referring to the traditional Islamic schools typical of Java, which are religious boarding schools for male students. Students in these schools "reside and study under the direction of a teacher known in this case as a *guru* or, more appropriately, a *tuan guru*" [4]. The residential nature of the pondok educational system is confirmed by Rosnani who describes such an institution as consisting of "a centrally located building, usually the teacher's house or a mosque, surrounded by rows of small huts or dwelling" [3]. According to Buang [5], such small huts as constituting the pondok around the residence of the *guru* are normally built by students in order for them to live around his residence and his *surau* (prayer house) thereby keeping in close proximity with him.

However, it is noteworthy that Nor *et al.* [6] insist that although the pondok educational system appears traditional, it is merely an improved version of the religious education known to the Muslims during the early days of Malacca. Accordingly, the pondok system may be described as a continuation of studying Islam in the mosque or house including a specific area where students stay and study under the guidance of the teacher” [6]. Historically speaking, the *pondok* system started in Pasai during the reign of Sultan Malik al-Zahir in the 14th century (1345-1346,) became known to Aceh during the time of Sultan Iskandar Thani in the 16th -17th century (1636-1641), spread to Patani after the collapse of Aceh and flourished concurrently in Patahi and Trengganu from the late 18th century to the 19th and 20th centuries, during which time Kelantan, which had been exposed to religious education since the 16th century, also witnessed the establishment of pondoks in the 19th century [6].

Rosnani identifies Pondok Tok Pulau Chondong as the first pondok in Kelantan and specifically puts the date of its establishment at 1820 [3]. The traditional Islamic schools of the pondok orientation that are characteristic of Kelantan are one of the notable bases of the strength of Islam in the region and have been of distinct significance. Such pondoks in the region “are concentrated in the plain, though one of the largest and most important is located in the foothills of the interior (*ulu*) and in particular in the sector of the plain nearest the Thai border” [4]. Farish graphically captures the essence of the idea of the pondok where he writes,

The pondok... has for centuries been a core institution of Malay society, as the centre where the indigenous elite were trained. The pondok school takes its name from the dormitories in which the students (predominantly male) live, often simple huts clustered around the home of the teacher or teachers. In the past, states like Kelantan, Trengganu and Patani (which today is a province in Southern Thailand were known for their pondoks that produced successive generations of Muslim scholars who in turn contributed to the Malay world of letters. Pondok schools also played an important role in the development of early Muslim political consciousness and were instrumental in the early stages of the anti-colonial struggle in Malaya, much in the same way that madrasas did in many other colonized Muslim societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [7].

Among the Muslim settings that were under colonial masters during the period were Indonesia and Nigeria whose traditional Islamic education systems namely the

*pesantren* and the *kuttah* or traditional *madrasah*, will be discussed respectively in the following sub-sections. It should be noted that the relevance of the pondok system did not last partly due to the rise of more formal educational system of Madrasah in the face of the challenges posed by urbanization.

**The Pesantren System:** It may not be improper to state that the pesantren is to Indonesia what the pondok is to Malaysia. However, while the pondok has lost popularity and relevance in Malaysia, sequel to the rise of the Madrasah system in the country, pesantren flourishes in Indonesia till date and there are no fewer than 17,000 pesantrens in the country [5]. The continued popularity and relevance of the pesantren system is better explained by the commendation and financial support it received from the Asia Development Bank for its active participation and effective contribution to the Indonesian system of education by improving the literacy rate in the country especially among the rural, poor and marginalized [8].

The word ‘pesantren’ derives from the root word ‘santri’ which refers to students with wander-lust for Islamic knowledge or a comprehensive understanding of Islamic religious matters by enrolling in pesantren and other centres of Islamic learning. Learning in a pesantren normally takes place under a *kiai* (Islamic teacher or scholar) who is normally assisted by a number of his senior *santri* or other family members [9]. The pesantren is regarded as central to the *kiai*’s life, “since it is a medium through which he expands his preaching and influence through teaching” [9]. A number of elements constitute the pesantren system. One and the most important is the *kiai* who is normally regarded as the major factor instrumental to the founding of the pesantren. Another element of the pesantren comprises the *santri* who are the students learning under the *kiai*. Yet another element is the pondok which, in this context, refers to a dormitory system provided by the *kiai* for the accommodation of the *santri* who may share a room in a group of five to ten individuals [10]. A major commonality between the Indonesian pesantren and the Malaysian pondok is that the former, like the latter, comprises, “a complex of housing which includes the houses of the *kiai* and his family, some pondok and teaching buildings, including a mosque” [10]. According to Suparto, pesantrens which are not only distinctly Islamic but are also indigenous Indonesian institutions are considered reservoirs of cultural values and norms and public and private morality [10].

Bruinessen [11] observes that the oldest pesantren still in existence was founded in the late eighteenth century in the village of Tegalsari near Ponorogo in East Java. He adds that most of the prestigious old pesantrens that are known today do not date further back than the late nineteenth century, as many do not even date that far. They were mostly founded by people who had, for several years, studied in Mecca or Cairo. That explains why most of these late nineteenth and early twentieth century pesantrens are modeled after institutions with which their founders were directly or indirectly associated during their studies in the Arab world. Such pesantrens, according to Bruinessen derived some ideas or inspiration from the study circles (*halqa*) in the Great Mosque of Mecca (the *Masjid al-Haram*), Cairo's Azhar, which had a dormitory assigned to Southeast Asian students (the *riwaq al-Jawa*) as well as the emerging modern madrasa system of Mecca, at that time [11]. Pesantrens have earned reputation as the last bastion of Indonesian's "pure" Muslim education, although attempts have been made by the pesantrens to "include some secular subjects such as arithmetic and geography into their curriculum" [11]. However, it is noteworthy that pesantren and other Islamic education institutions are regarded by some scholars as fast losing their relevance owing to their failure to function in the face of modern challenges [9]. This is an unfortunate fate that has also befallen the traditional madrasah system in Nigeria as will be demonstrated in the following sub-section.

**The Traditional Madrasah System of Nigeria:** The traditional system of Arabic Islamic education otherwise known as the *madrasah* system, in Nigeria covers four categories which can be divided into three main phase [12]. The first phase began at an early age of about five when the young Muslim children are sent down to the piazza schools managed by some *mallams* (i.e. teachers). The pupil, according to Gbadamosi, could be in this long but crucial stage for about four to seven years. In such a setting, a single *mallam* could have as many as forty pupils some of whom might attend the schools regularly. In some of the schools, the teachers were not paid as there are no school fees or special levies [12]. This indeed was the case in the informal setting where the Arabic teachers normally had their own vocations such as farming, weaving e.t.c., to support themselves. Gbadamosi further opines that even where there they were professional teachers and clerics, they drew no salaries from the conduct of these schools relying only on the various gifts and alms which the parents of their wards might send them from time to time [12].

**Ownership of the Schools:** Traditional Islamic schools or institutions come into existence in several ways. However, there are communalities and differences in the factors responsible for the establishment of such schools in different settings. The ownership of pondoks, for instance, finds a meaningful description in the words of Winzeler who writes:

A man who has studied and perhaps taught elsewhere and who has aspirations may return to his own village and build a madrasah with the help of other villagers on his own land or on land provided by his father or someone else in the community; or such a man may marry into a village and be assisted by his father-in-law, who may be a pious wealthy man and other villagers to establish a school. Similarly, such a man may marry the daughter of the guru and teach in his pondok and when the guru dies, develop his own school. Once opened on the other hand, the school may grow if a man has or gains a reputation and adolescent boys and young men are attracted to his school as students [4].

Winzeler's words as quoted above are corroborated by Buang who opines that the existence of a pondok depended upon "one charismatic, highly knowledgeable religious teacher" [5] under whose guidance male students of various age groups may attend classes and conclude their course of study. In a similar token, Rosnani opines that the founding of a pondok was characteristically a product of congregation of students around a famous and reputable teachers of whose knowledge, charisma and spiritual influence people were thirsty from far and near [6]. The implication of the foregoing is that pondoks are usually owned by individuals who, at times, enjoyed support from their associates, relatives or community. This, to a large extent, is also true of the ownership of pesantrens as will be demonstrated shortly.

Pesantrens were usually owned by individuals who had studied for years in some parts of the Arab world especially Mecca and Cairo [3]. Such individual owners of pesantrens are described as belonging to "families that already enjoyed some religious prestige while others were bright young men who could make the vogue to Mecca due to patronage" whereas "others again supported themselves by engaging in trade" [13]. Generally speaking a pesantren is usually owned by a *kiai* who is assisted in its running by some of his senior students and relations. This dimension of the ownership of the pesantren explains why the pesantren is an important part of the *kiai's* life. This is so in view of the fact that the pesantren, as noted earlier, serves as a medium through which he spreads his message and influence through his teaching and *da'wah* activities.

The history of the Madrasah System in Nigeria is replete with information on private enterprises in the area of traditional Islamic education. Such personal efforts as made by individual Muslims culminated in the establishment of Madaaris in various parts of the country. That explains why individual ownership of such schools prevailed more than community ownership. Most of the notable traditional Arabic schools in Nigeria are identified with some leading Islamic scholars and personalities in the country. For instance, the Al-Mahad traditional Arabic school that later metamorphosed into the Shariah College of Kano was founded in 1934 through the individual effort of Shaykh Nasir Kabara. Similarly, the effort that led to the founding of an Arabic School known as Al-Mahad al-Azhari of Ilorin, since 1947 is associated with Shaykh Kamalu-d-din Al-Adabiyyi. In a similar token, the founding of Markaz-ut-Ta'limil Arabiyyi in Abeokuta in 1950 and later in Lagos in 1952, both in the southwestern part of the country, was attributed to Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Iluriyy in the same manner that Al-Mahadal-Arabiyyi founded in Ibadan, in the Southwestern part of the country in 1957, was a product of individual effort by Shaykh Murtadha Adbdus-Salam. This is the situation with several other Arabic schools in the country.

Notwithstanding, the prevalence of individual ownerships there also are few which were established through joint action or community efforts. For instance, Olurode found that two of the 21 traditional Arabic schools studied in Epe, admitted of some substantial community participation [13]. He added that "these were mainly the results of youths' activism' because in an attempt to give a competitive start to their children, Muslim youths have come together in Epe, Iwo and Ilorin to influence the direction of Madrasah" [14]. In Ilorin, however, individual ownership was prevalent community participation in the founding of Madrasah "flourished through the involvement of parents' among other stakeholders who could be invited to the board to serve as advisers" [14].

Although individual ownership was prevalent in Iwo too, it is interesting to note that it was gathered from interviews that "most sole proprietors of Madrasah had resisted past attempts by communities to be involved" [14]. In Lagos where most Arabic schools are owned by individuals, the Jamat-ul-Islamiyyah of Nigeria operates what could be regarded as a good example of community-owned Madrasah, as "classes are tuition-free for teachers are paid by the Jamaah." [14].

**Survival of the Schools:** The survival of a pondok is dependent upon the status or reputation of its founder. For instance, a pondok may grow rapidly in a situation where the founder's knowledge and charisma are attractive to adolescent boys and young men who flock around him and study in his school [3]. Another source of survival for a pondok is "property which may be acquired as gifts given by the parents of students or by local people or others whom the teacher has assisted and additional teachers who may be advanced students and begin to assist with the teaching" [3]. According to Rosnani the maintenance of the pondok in terms of expenses is done through donations, clarity and zakat as the teachers were not remunerated [3]. Winzeler confirms that pondoks charged no payments in the form of fees or tuition. He however notes that when a boy enters a pondok for the first time, he may be accompanied by his father who calls upon the guru with a gift and requests that his son be accepted as a student" [4]. Rather than pay the guru any fee or tuition, a boy's parents will make periodic contributions according to their means particularly at harvest time and at the time of major holidays when payment of charity (zakat and fitrah) is required or when it becomes known that the guru wishes to make the pilgrimages or requires assistance for any other purpose" [4].

Other sources of survival for pondoks include the proceeds of prayer sessions which may be funerals or other Islamic rites or functions, for which such pondok students as involved are paid some little amount or served some me [4]. This practice of non-remuneration of the pondok guru was on for long until the expansion of the pondok system when the payment of tuition fees by students was introduced [3]. It is of great value to point out at this juncture that there is no significant difference between the pondoks and the pesantrens with regards to survival or sources of maintenance. In both systems, students, at times, "met some of their needs by learning skills such as barbering and particularly tailoring from someone in the pondok" [4]. The pondok here applies to the small huts built around the residence of the guru or the kiai in either the pondok or the pesantren. However, the pesantrens are currently enjoying governmental support as about 17,000 pesantrens now cooperate with the central government of Indonesia in the area of national poverty reduction [5]. This development has been of great benefit to pesantrens at it provides them a rich source of finance.

In most parts of Nigeria, the ownership of traditional Arabic schools is normally passed from one generation to the other. That explains why some of the first and second generations of Madaris are currently in the hands of second and third generation of owners as is the case with Az-Zumratul-Adabiyah, in Ilorin, Markaz-ut-Ta'lim in Lagos and Al-Ma'hadul-Arabiyy in Ibadan. The transfer of the ownership of a Madrasah after the demise of its original owner is normally regulated by inheritance features which, usher in a new leader of the Islamic work of the deceased. The survival of the Madrasah system in Nigeria is not unconnected with the perception of most owners of such schools that such an endeavour is meritorious and spiritually fulfilling. In other words, the thinking that founding and running a Madrasah is a source of barakah is central to the survival of the Madrasah in Nigeria system. Another factor contributing to its survival are schools fees paid by students or their parents as most teachers take such fees as their means of livelihood. Yet another factor in the survival of the Madrasah system is the Walimah ceremonies, which most proprietors of such schools exploit for money-making. As they maximize the materials benefits of such event by prescribing the payment of money as seek material offering at every stage of the programme. Other events that have been turned to money-making sessions by some owners of Arabic schools in Nigeria are the Mawlid Nabiyy (i.e. commemoration of the birth of the Holy Prophet), Lailat-ul-Qadri (i.e. searching for the Night of Majesty during Ramadan), Hijrah (celebration of the Muslim New-Year) and others. All these are known to both the pondok and pesantren systems, too, in some form. However, Olurode found that some of the traditional Islamic schools in Nigeria are enjoying funding support from external sources, although he maintained that there was no disclosure about the specific form of external funding [14]. He opines that such external funding as might have been enjoyed by such schools "was known to include staff development, book, donation and personnel support" [14].

**Teachers' Welfare and Remuneration:** Traditional Islamic teachers, as noted earlier, are remunerated by both pupils and their parents. The type of remuneration of teachers described by Total [2] as being known in early Islam, still holds sway in connection with Madrasah education in contemporary Nigeria. Such remuneration took "the form of children, eggs, milk, brad and vegetable and such

teachers were treated much as clergymen in certain rural districts in America are treated in the present time, their meager salary being supplemented by donations of food stuffs, clothing, etc [2].

This is also true of the Madrasah system in contemporary Nigeria where teachers who are mostly former students of the proprietors of such schools depend on such type of remuneration as described above. It is not out of place to add at this juncture that such teachers, too, benefit from some of the money-making events described earlier, at least, to an extent. As regards monetary remuneration, in terms of salaries, most of the Madrasah teachers in today's Nigeria earn salaries ranging from a monthly pay of about Ten Thousand Naira (N10,000.00) to a sum of Fifteen Thousand Naira (N15,000.00). these sum are equivalent of seventy American Dollars (\$70) and One Hundred American Dollars (\$100). It is remarkable to note that a handful of Arabic teachers earn relatively lower salaries while others do not anything other than the voluntary donation of foodstuff by students and parent s as well as proceeds from payer offerings at Islamic force.

In the northern part of Nigeria, particularly after the influx of the Europeans to Nigeria, much of the responsibility for financing Islamic education fell upon the parents. According to Malami, "Teachers' salaries came from parents contributions on weekly basis, that is, each Wednesday [15]. These contributions were locally called Kudin Larba, which literally means 'Wednesday contributions'. Such contributions as are made by parents are intended to cover all the expenses involved in running the school. Yet such meager salaries are not sufficient to meet the essential needs of the teachers. This explains why Malami holds the government responsible for the deplorable condition of Islamic schools and Islamic teachers. He argues that the government provides basic education in Islamic studies, in the school curriculum without adding any incentive for either the students or their teachers to pursue the studies vigorously, "which is why there are limited job opportunities for graduates of Islamic schools which now experience neglect from the government to finance Western Education at all costs and at the expense of Islamic Education" [15].

**Structure of the Schools:** Although there are no classifications with regards to levels of learning in the pondok system, three different levels can be identified namely primary, secondary and higher levels [5]. At the

primary level students were exposed to basic teachings of Islam otherwise known as *fard 'ayn*, after which they proceeded to the secondary where they studied subjects of Islamic studies in a wider scale. Their completion of this stage led to the higher level where halaqahs are conducted openly for any interested student to join [5]. Students stayed in the pondok for varying lengths of time “though it is held that if a student wishes to become a scholar, the period of time of study is long, more than ten years” [4]. Dhofier offers a similar analysis on the structure and stages of learning at the pesantrens [10].

As regards the traditional madrasah system of Nigeria, however, Trimmingham has accurately observed that “there are two grades of schools distinguished in Hausa as *Makarantar allo*, ‘tablet school’ and *Makarantar’ ilmi*’, ‘law school’ [16]. In the first, children are taught to recite the Qur’an without understanding. The second embraces all further studies. Generally, an *ilmi* school merely teaches details about the performance of *salat*, prayers for occasional events like funerals, some exposition of Qur’anic texts and perhaps the study of a book of law. Commenting on the nature of the subjects taught in the Arabic schools, Doi maintains that the courses of instruction differ from school to school and that they do not have a well planned uniform mode of instructional operations [17]. The inappropriateness of the instructional strategies used in the Arabic school system is normally a product of the careless or deficient handling of the input variables which automatically affect the output variables in any educational setting. The quality of the teachers goes a long way in affecting the successful implementation of any curriculum [18].

Islamic education normally starts with the proper grounding of the young ward in the Qur’an. The learner was made to read and memorise the Qur’an in well drawn-out stages. This may consume from four to seven years as well as the use of the lash by the teacher on slow pupils. There were and are still cases where the course is occasionally punctuated by some kind of festivities following the pupils’ successful completion of the study of certain parts of the Qur’an. Needless to say that the Qur’an was central in the formal education of pupils here. This stage normally dovetailed gradually into the second stage where attention was concentrated on the translation of the Qur’an after which came the third stage where there was specialization. Students in this stage could also go down to what Gbadamosi calls “the major centres of Islamic education” [12] which are in nearly all towns such

as Epe, Ibadan, Iseyin, Ilorin, Kaduna, Kano and some towns in Bornu.

The structure of the Madrasah system in Nigeria is one in which students are grouped or divided into classes. Such groupings or classifications are normally done according to age and academic ability. There is a remarkable uniformity in the structure of the Madrasah system in Nigeria as most of the well established of such schools operate three levels of education namely: Tahdhiriyy(Preparatory); I’dadiyy (Junior secondary); and Thanawiyy (Senior Secondary). The preparatory level takes one year, the Junior Secondary, four years and the senior secondary, three years. However, it is noteworthy that the Ibtiduiyy (Primary) level is not provided for in a number of Arabic schools. Yet, what is meant to be studied at this level is being taught at a certain stages of the iidadiyyah level. Such a practice is unfaithful to the dominant system of Madrasah education in most Arab countries from which some of these schools derive their inspiration. It should be noted also that a handful of Arabic schools provide only for Talidiriyy and iidadiyy while some did not group or classify students but only assemble them together for instruction. It is noteworthy that the Madrasah system set no age limit for enrolment and stipulates no entry requirements or admission criteria, which is why it is open to students from diverse backgrounds.

**Curricula:** Qur’an reading is a prerequisite to pondok education. This is so because students are admitted into the pondok after completing elementary study of the Qur’an which is normally commenced among Malay children at age six or seven and completed several years after [4]. According to Rosnani, the curricula of the pondoks in Malaysia shared some common features which involve the teaching of the basic subjects of *tawhid*, *tafsir*, *fiqh*, Hadith, *nahu* (Arabic grammar, *tasawwuf* and *tarikh* [3]. She adds that some pondoks taught “tajwid, nashid (Islamic, songs), mantiq and skills in producing traditional medicine that integrate the use of herbs with Qur’anic verses [3]. In the opinion of Winzeler [4], of the various subjects taught in the pondok system, Arabic grammar is regarded as central owing to its facilitation of disciplined study and memorization of lessons. The various subjects taught were textbooks-based. The textbooks used in teaching them varied from one pondok to another depending on the teachers and students abilities [3].

The curricula of pesantrens are similar to those of the pondoks. They are normally implemented through the studying of textbooks. There are various sessions for the teaching of various textbooks, from the lowest to the highest. Given that each session focuses on one section of the textbook, it normally takes a couple of weeks, or even months to cover the entire textbook in learning. The subjects for which the textbooks are meant are not different from those taught in pondoks. Hence a commonality in the curricular provisions of pondoks and pesantrens.

The curriculum of Madrasah in Nigeria is textbook-based rather than subject-based. The implication of this is that there is no uniform curriculum in use in the system. In a recent study entitled "An Evaluation and Validation of the Curricula of Arabic Schools in Southwestern Nigeria" Adedeji emphasized the need for uniformity in the curricula which, according to him, are deficient in many respects [19]. Rather than a uniform curriculum, different schools use different Arabic texts and each of the schools claims superiority over the other. According to Olurode, when asked to trace the origin of their subject combination, some of the proprietors and teachers of such schools mentioned "Saudi Arabia, some Kuwait, Egypt and Iran while others made reference to some highly respected local clerics in Ilorin, Iwo and Lagos" [14]. However, the influence of both Shaykh Nasir Kabara of Kano and Shaykh Tahir of Bauchi was prominent in the learning experiences of Arabic schools in Northern Nigeria while that of Shaykh Kamal-ud-din Al-Adabiyy and Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Iluriyyis obvious in the Southwest. Some of the subjects that are offered by virtually all the traditional Islamic schools in Nigeria include the following An-Nahw (Arabic Grammar), As-Sarf (Arabic Morphology), Fiqh (Jurisprudence), Tafsir (Qur'an Exegesis), Hadith, Tarikh (History), Balaghah (Rhetoric), Mantiq (Logic), Adab (Literature), and al-Insha' (Arabic Essay Writing).

Students are expected to memorize the contents of the textbooks recommended for these subjects. This explains why memorization is generally regarded as central to learning in the traditional Arabic schools where students, at times, are compelled to commit to their memories contents of Arabic texts of which they have little or no understanding. However, it is of great value to note that such learning experiences as offered in the Madrasah system in Nigeria are intended to prepare students to play a number of roles in the society. Such

roles include the transmission and simplification of religious knowledge. The roles also include spiritual guidance and protection. This probably explains why most Arabic school teachers expose their students to knowledge of Qur'anic healing and clairvoyance-related activities. The current situation in Nigeria is that most people can hardly draw a line of demarcation between Arabic scholarship and Qur'anic spiritual healing with clairvoyance activities. It should be pointed out however that such knowledge of spiritual healing may only be regarded as part of the hidden curriculum of the Madrasah System, given that specific textbooks are hardly recommended for them even though there is hardly an Arabic subject that is taught by a traditional Arabic teacher without reference to some spiritual implications of Arabic words.

**An Analysis on the Textbook-centered Nature of the Curriculum:** The curricula of traditional Islamic schools under discussion are textbook-centred. That explains why much has not been achieved in terms of educational goals. This is because; text-book-based learning does not require any statement of objectives or identification of goals in the form of skills. According to Allen, although the textbook-based curriculum has produced Arabic scholars with incredible linguistic skills as well as exceptional ability to understand simplify and demystify the contents of highly technical Arabic text, the deficiency of the method lies in the fact that students often do not find it easy to use the language outside academic settings [20]. Alluding to Allen, Mohamed, maintains that the implication of Allen's thesis is that "a genuine ability to read comes from building up the listening and speaking skills owing to the fact that the completion of texts does not constitute proficiency that requires the focus on functions such as introducing yourself, describing what you did yesterday or giving a synopsis of a newspaper article" [21]. Every subject in the Madrasah system has its own textbook. Accordingly, students in the Madrasah system in Southwestern Nigeria are exposed to a spectrum of textbooks the contents of which determines both the learning experiences and teaching activities in the classroom. There is no gain saying that such a method does not provide for insightful learning let alone stimulate critical and creative thinking in students, which is why products of the Madrasah system are grossly deficient in these skills.



**Requirements and Qualifications of Teachers:** It is derivable from the analysis so far that pondoks and pesantrens were usually founded by Islamic scholars who had spent some years studying in the Arab world. The implication of this is that the gurus and kiais are normally former students of distinguished Islamic scholars in certain Arab countries especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, among the major requirements or qualifications of the guru and the kiai are Islamic knowledge, previous teaching or learning under the guidance of a notable Islamic scholar or cleric, charisma or reputation to attract adolescent boys to learn under him, as well as wander-lust for Islamic teaching and preaching.

There is no clear-cut requirement or qualification for teaching in the Madrasah system in Nigeria. Given that Arabic schools, as noted earlier, are mostly founded and owned by individuals, it has been observed that most of them venture to founding such schools whenever they deem it necessary. However, it has been observed that most of such proprietors are former students of some notable Islamic scholars and clerics and that they founded their own schools after their completion of their own education at the feet of their teachers. The degrees of the mastery of Arabic and Islamic studies by such teachers vary as some of them demonstrate high standards in learning, in character whereas others are substandard.

However, most Madrasah teachers in Nigeria hardly encourage freedom of inquiry in the scholarship as they probably owing to their limitations, hardly encourage their students to debate issues with them. That explains why it is regarded as an abomination in the Madrasah tradition in Nigeria for a student to disagree with his teacher over any issue. This is in contrast to the Islamic tradition of scholarship known in early Islam where the teacher encouraged his students to raise critical issues for discussion or debate with him as a way of instilling in him the need to imbibe the tradition of disputation. "in addition, to a good mastery of the subject of teaching, an Arabic school teacher in Nigeria is also expected to possess which moral and spiritual qualities as will enable him fulfill the role of a moral guide and spiritual refuge to people.

It is worthwhile to recall that Trimingham has identified a despicable weakness in the quality of Arabic school teachers in Nigeria where he opines that "a characteristic weakness of Islamic education is its individualism" [16]. Anyone who can recite the Qur'an and write Arabic characters is qualified". Notwithstanding

that "there has been tremendous improvement in the system," it is saddening that Adedeji still maintains erroneously that "ability to read the Qur'an and write Arabic" [22] regardless of what he calls in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, is "the required qualification of an Arabic school teacher." It is pertinent to allude to Fafunwa who maintains a somewhat similar standpoint:

The qualifications of Qur'anic school teachers differ from person to person and from place to place. Sometimes they are highly learned *'ulama*, well versed in Islamic Studies, but this is rare. Then, there are those whose only qualification is that they can recite the Qur'an and write Arabic characters [23].

Indeed, the above stated opinion is shared by Doi who says that the teachers in Arabic schools do not have formal or professional training and required qualification [17].

Commenting on Fafunwa's opinion, Adedeji maintains that "there are some teachers in the schools who are not adequately trained and that a significant number of the products of the schools, after graduation, are sent to Arab land for further studies, after which they come back to form part of the teaching staff in their various schools" [22]. He instances the fact that some Arab scholars are sent from Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia e.t.c., as expatriates and that they play major role in the development of Arabic schools in Nigeria [22].

Although, most teachers in the Madrasah system in Nigeria, had only formal primary school education in addition to their training in traditional Arabic and Islamic education, the country is currently witnessing the emergence of a new generation of Madrasah teachers most of whom "could lay claim to university diplomas, first degrees and in some cases as well as a masters degrees" [14]. This sophistication of the Madrasah teachers is now the vogue in Ilorin and Ibadan both of which are the most reputable centres of Madrasah education in Southwestern Nigeria, as well as various parts of the Northern Nigeria where this type of education is in higher demand.

**Teaching Methods:** Teaching methods in pondoks were dependant on the teacher's level of mastery of Arabic and the subjects involved. For instance, if a teacher had a good mastery of Arabic, his method was for him to read in Arabic and then translate into Malay. Otherwise, he depended on the Malay versions of the textbooks and

taught his students in Malay [4]. Methods used included lectures, reading, memorization, *mudhakara* (recalling of a lesson). According to Rosnani, the open book procedures was most common in the teaching learning process in this pondok [3]. This procedure was one in which students sat in a semi-circle face-to-face with their teacher whose lessons they followed carefully through their books. After listening to the teacher's explanation of concepts, elaboration of difficult words, phrases and passages, the students committed the lesson to their memories and then copied the text studied. The teacher normally did not entertain questions in order not to punctuate his lessons. It was rather his teaching assistants who were normally his senior students, who answered questions raised by the students [24]. The students were expected to complete a textbook from the beginning to the end before moving to another textbook which would be studied through the same process.

According to Buang [5] every student was expected to own a textbook for a particular subject and bring it with him to every lesson. The student is also expected to jot down some notes while the teacher's explanation lasted. Such notes as taken by the students is known as *dabit* and written at the periphery of the textbook being studied. The notes normally covered explanation of words, errors contained in the book, the cross references and any other remarks given by the guru or the kiai. The notes taken also fulfill the role of a chain of transmission from one generation to another. It should be noted that the methods of teaching in the pondoks are the same at those employed in the pesantrens. However, Dhofier observes that the pesantrens usually use a traditional system of learning [10]. He describes this as comprising various techniques of teaching but the most commonly used are *bandongan* and *sorogan* [10]. *Bandongan* is described as a religious instruction conducted by either the kiai or his senior santri and attended by a large number of santri ranging from 5 to 200 [10]. *Sorogan*, which is the other teaching arrangement, refers to the learning session normally organized for beginner santri or those who want to have more explanation of the problems identified in the textbook. Such a session is usually attended [10]. By only two to five santri and is provided by any senior santri who is knowledgeable. According to Dhofier, the purpose of the sorogan session is to provide santri with special training with a view to developing in their certain knowledge, skills and values [10].

Bruinessen gives a clear picture of the methods of teaching in pesantrens when he writes that:

The teaching method in Indonesian pesantrens followed those of Mecca and Cairo and educational reforms in these centres (classrooms, a grading system, changes in curriculum) gradually spread from there to the Indonesian pesantrens ... An important aspect of the pesantren tradition is the emphasis on the oral transmission of knowledge, even of written texts. In the traditional didactic styles, that are still maintained in many pesantrens, the student studies a specific text with a specific teacher and upon finishing this text may move on to another pesantren, to study another text. The student may sit with others in circle (*halqa*) around the teachers who reads the text aloud while students read along with him in their own copies of the book. The teacher stops from time to time to comment on a point of syntax or vocabulary, but he seldom if he ever offers a critical interpretation or comments on the applicability of the text. In a more individual mode, the student may himself read passages of the text aloud while the teacher listens, questions and comments on his reading [13].

The teaching methods used by teachers in the Madrasah system in Nigeria are generally traditional. Teachers read from the textbook and interpret the contents to the students who as noted earlier, are compelled to memorize such modern methods as involving the use of chalk, chalkboard, exercise books and even some ordinary instructional materials alongside textbooks. And the dictation method is predominant in the traditional Islamic education system in Nigeria.

#### **An Elaboration on the Methods**

**Traditional and Modern Approaches:** The classical and the modern approaches have generally been classified as the two main approaches to language teaching [25]. Mohammed has elaborated and related these two broad approaches to methodological trends within specific contexts [20]. Alluding to Dadoo [26], Mohammed identified such methodological trends as the textual (or cognitive) approach and the functional (or communicative) approach. He elucidates that the former focuses on the understanding of scripture (with the conversational skill given a lower priority) while the later attaches importance to conversation (with the other skills given lower priority)" [20]. He further elucidates that "out of a compromise of those two approaches emerges the election approach that contends that each method has its

uses which should be exploited and that the different methods complement one another” [20]. In his analysis of the historical and pedagogical and syntactical textual analysis of the grammar-translation method with little attention given to the oral component”, however, Mohammed opines that such pedagogical approach has been effective “at universities and Islamic Seminaries where Arabic is taught for academic and theological reasons”. It is interesting to note that this same method is dominant in the pedagogical practices of the pondok, the pesantren and the traditional Madrasah system in Malaysia, Indonesia and Nigeria, respectively.

**Evaluation Procedures:** When students completed the learning of the textbooks meant for the primary level, they automatically proceeded to the secondary from which they proceeded to studying the textbooks meant for the higher level, upon their mastery of such books. The implication of this is that there are no formal examinations of the paper-pencil type. That probably explains why Rosnani states that the same text might be read a second time before the teacher moved on to another text, depending on the students’ “comprehension” [3]. As far as evaluation procedures are concerned the experiences recorded in the pondok system were not different from those of the Indonesian pesantren and the traditional Islamic schools in Nigeria, the only difference being their settings or locations.

**The Status of the Teachers:** Pondok gurus are considered as exemplifying traditional Malay norms of piety and religious property [4]. He is revered and held in high esteem in the society. The respect accorded him by people is, though to a lesser extent, accorded his students, associates and family members. That probably explains why parents gladly give their daughter’s hand in marriage to graduates of pondoks in order to receive blessings and secure paradise in the afterlife [4]. This is also true of the pesantren where some of the early founders are considered as belonging to religiously prestigious families. Accordingly, a kiai’s son “shared his father’s prestige irrespective of learning and a bright and learned young man of low descent could only join their ranks by marrying an established kiai’s daughter” [13].

The status of the Madrasah teacher in Nigeria is not distinct from his status. The Islamic tradition where he is rated high in social status and expected to be of high normal standards. Yet it should be pointed out that the

“degree of respect (or lack of reverence as is the case in the Islamic tradition for the teacher,... depended upon two factors:

- (I) The place where he taught... and
- (II) The level at which he taught” [2].

In the Nigeria context, a number of notable Madrasah teachers have earned themselves high reputation even in the estimation of various governments and distinguished personalities of their days. Shaykh Kamalud-din, Al-Adabiyy Shaykh, Adam Abdullah Al-Iluriyy, Shaykh Abubakar Gumi and Shaykh Nasir Kabara are among such Madrasah teachers. Some of them matters so much that they were consulted by governments on issues of national interest. That explains why each of them enjoyed royal treatment in his life and state burial after his death.

The high considerations accorded them by the government made them enviable in the sight of the people and also made Madrasah education attractive to most parents some of whom even withdrew their children from Western-oriented schools and enrolled them to study at the feet of such great Islamic scholars. A handful individual was fortunate enough to have accomplished their mission of taking after such distinguished Muslim scholars both in learning and material possession. That explains why their schools and those of their former students or disciples became a Makkah for most knowledge-seeking youths and spiritual-protection seeking adults. There is no gain saying, such Islamic scholars successfully earned themselves and enviable status.

However, there is another side to the coin representing the status of the Madrasah teacher in Nigeria. For instance, Babalola observes that a handful of students who completed their Madrasah education and are expected to found their own Madaris and therefore become teachers, “leave the school only to serve as bus conductors, touts, apprentices, house boys, maids, gardeners, where their Madrasah education is of no avail to them”. He adds that “on the campuses of Nigerian universities, we have a lot of such Qur’anic school graduates or drop outs in various domestic jobs as house boys or gardeners earning the same amount as their uneducated counterparts” [27].

There is no gainsaying that there are no prospects of good jobs for products of the Madrasah system in Nigeria. Babalola graphically captures the deplorable condition of graduates of the system in when he affirms

that when these young men leave their Qur'anic or Arabic schools, the only career open to them is to become a teacher in one of the Qur'anic schools, of which the meager salaries and the tyranny of the individual owners" [27] are not encouraging. "They may also serve as part-time teachers in small villages on towns where they are registered as Alufaas (i.e. local Islamic workers). There, along with their teaching job they may be patronized by some traders or chiefs of that area because of their belief in the efficacy of the prayers of these teachers of Arabic and religious sciences or in the amulets and medicinal concoctions given by them to protect them or their trade from any known and unknown dangers" [27]. The implication of the foregoing is that the plight of Madrasah teachers and graduates in Nigeria is both pathetic and lamentable. This explains why such individuals as living in such a deplorable condition are hardly accorded any reverence in the contemporary Nigeria society where they are rather regarded as people of abysmally low state socio-economic.

**The Challenge of Higher Education:** The informal nature of the pondok system had, for sometime, been an impediment to further education of its graduates in formal institutions of higher learning. This has brought about an unfavourable experience in the pondok system as further educational opportunities as well as job prospects to which Malays aspire require public school certificates for which the pondok system offers no way out [27]. Consequently, there was a decline in people's quest for pondok education. Rosnani attributes such a decline to a number of factors including the rise of modern education, lack of good success plan on the part of the gurus, lack of stable source of income and the intervention of the religious departments and councils in regulating the activities of the teaching *ulama*.

The above analysis is also true of the attitude of the pesantrens to educational change. Other factors include the inward-looking of the kiais towards spiritual matters with little attention to mundane issues, in-group solidarity against outsiders, parochialism, as well as lack of uniformity in the structure, curricula and administration of the pesantrens. However, the pesantrens unlike the pondoks have recently earned themselves, commendations and financial support from the Asian Development Bank and this has greatly boosted their image and rating especially in the estimation of Indonesians and Muslims in various parts of the world [5].

Most graduates of Madrasah in Nigeria find it tough to pursue further education at institution of higher learning. Their challenge in this regard is not unconnected with the dichotomy between the Madrasah System and the Nigerian Official System of Education. For instance, the Madrasah system provides for the study for religious sciences with a local language (i.e. Yoruba, Housa, Igbo, or any other Nigerian language) as the medium of instruction whereas, the English language is the medium of instruction in Nigeria's institutions of learning. Similarly, there is no provision for the study of English Language, Mathematics and science subjects, in the Madrasah system, whereas some of such subjects are part of the core curriculum at the tertiary level of education, especially the university in Nigeria. In a similar token, examinations into Nigeria's tertiary institutions are conducted by examination bodies whose primary concern is to evaluate the degree of attainment in the student's of educational objectives stipulated for various subjects, in the terminal examination of secondary school students, whereas graduates of the Madrasah are not exposed to such experiences as will enable them withstand the challenge of such examinations. Yet notwithstanding, few of such graduates work hard enough through private coaching and other means to secure admission into one tertiary setting. That explains why most of them choose to pursue diploma programmes in Arabic and Islamic studies, with a view to applying for further education in Arabic and Islamic studies in universities running such programme, yet the fact of the matter is that the Nigerian university i.e. system funds graduates of the Madrasah system generally inadmissible.

A situation where an individual pursues his education in one language and thereafter seeks admission into a higher institution of learning where the medium of instruction is a language neither mastered nor understood by him, call for great concern. This infact is particularly true of the Madrasah system and the university system in Nigeria. Such an unsystematic method of bridging an educational gap has not proved successful anywhere in the world. For instance, Ashraf and Bilgrami posit that "nothing has done greater harm to Muslim Education in Pakistan than the bill passed by the British Government allowing students, after passing the Alim, Fadil or Vernacular Examination of their various boards, to take the high school examination in the English Language only in order to obtain their high school certificate" [28]. Ashraf and Bilgrami further note that though this appeared to be a concession to Madrasah students, "it took away the

very life of Islamic education, ... made them concentrate money while in Madrasahs, on the English language at the cost of their studies in Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh and other Islamic sciences" [28]. The Pakistani experience in this regard is not dissimilar from the Nigerian experience with regard to graduates of Madrasah seeking admission into the university. The implication of this is that while preparing themselves for such examinations as prescribed for university admission, most products of the Madrasah system lose the real essence of Islamic education as they unknowingly purge themselves thereof in a bid to match the level of readiness and preparedness of their counterparts from Western oriented schools.

**Practical Recommendations for Reforms:** Given that no system of education can rise above the standards of the teacher who himself is the live wire of the system, there is need for professional development of teachers for the pondok, the pesantren and the traditional Madrasah system of Nigeria. While this is being put in place for such development of teachers, the educational blueprint i.e. the curriculum around which revolve all the activities going on in the school settings, too, need to be reviewed and reconstructed for improvement. In incorporating innovations and other necessary ingredients into the curriculum, it should be considered that students in the traditional Islamic system, like their counterparts in the Western-oriented system, are being prepared to contribute to nation building and should therefore possess all the requisite knowledge, skills and values that will enable them function well in that role. The implication of this is that such a curriculum as will be developed should keep cognizance of the philosophies of tertiary education in Malaysia, Indonesia and Nigeria, respectively. There shall be no challenge at the level of implementation as the teachers who will ultimately do the implementation are being upgraded in learning and pedagogical skills. There also will be need to restructure the learning environment to make for effective teaching and meaningful learning. It is not enough to introduce the teaching of English, Mathematics and science subjects into the curriculum, as instructional facilities have significant role to play in aiding the attainment of educational objectives. Also, the traditional Islamic education system in these three settings should be restructured into a feeder system or institution to various institutions of higher learning in the countries. Once the curriculum is reconstructed, the teachers retrained and prepared for the implementation of the new curriculum, instructional materials provided to facilitate learning, the environment made conducive for effective teaching and

internalization on the part of the students and appropriate learning experiences are provided in keeping with Modern challenges and realities of today then the pondok, the pesantren and the traditional Madrasah system in Nigeria is ready to complete with the Western oriented system in the area of qualitative education.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has located the reforms in the pondok, pesantren and traditional madrasah in Nigeria within the broader historical, political, socio-cultural and economic contexts beyond the events of 9/11. It traced the origin of the three systems in the Islamic tradition, addressed such salient issues as ownership of schools, structure of schools, the curriculum, teachers' qualifications, teaching methods, evaluation procedure, teachers welfare and salaries, the socio-economic status of the teacher and the challenge of higher education for graduates of the system. The paper offered practical recommendations for reforms based on the deficiencies identified in the system through a critical evaluation of its various segments. The paper has by so doing contributed to the growing body of scholarship on reforms in the traditional Islamic education in the contemporary Muslim settings.

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