

Foundations of Modern Muslim Education in Nigeria: Reflections on the Legacies of a Muslim Leader

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Abstract: The essence of man's progress is hinged on the resources of his history which he utilises in combating diverse challenges. The search for credible strategies for addressing existing threats to Muslim education in Nigeria requires revisiting the historical milieu and significant factors that produced legacies in Muslim education in the 20th century. This critical review should assist in determining the extent of the relevance of such legacies and their application within the contemporary education framework. This paper surveys the history of Nigerian Muslims' acquisition of Western education focusing on the crucial roles of Jibril Martin (1888-1959) especially the various dimensions of his prioritisation of Muslim education. The paper explores the possibilities of a re-enactment of the precedent interventions against the backdrop of the current problems of disequilibrium in the range of content offered to Muslims, the commercialisation of Muslim education and the concomitant limited access to a standard-based Islamic education.

Key words: Muslim Education • Education in Nigeria • Modern Education • Muslim Leaders • Jibril Martin

INTRODUCTION

Education in its broadest conception incorporates all the efforts made by society to accomplish desirable objectives at personal and social levels. However, education in this paper is focussed on Western education and the efforts of Muslims in Nigeria to acquire it. Without doubt, Western Education, in Nigeria, is the official yardstick for measuring an individual's level of knowledge and training while other forms of education merely play a second fiddle. The successes and failures recorded by any society are usually traced to the quality, dynamism and focus of its education. Islam, in fact, treats education in all its beneficial facets as a fundamental requirement for the spiritual, moral, economic and social development of man and his society. The primary sources of Islam emphasize the acquisition of knowledge in the strongest possible terms.

The Qur'an reports that immediately after the creation of Adam, God taught him the names of all things. In providing an exegetic insight into this account as contained Quran Qur'an 2: 31/41, Ibn Kathīr submits that "The Names of Things" incorporates the names,

characteristics and functions of creatures in existence [1]. The divine command of reading and engaging in educational activities heralded the prophethood of Muhammad as clearly enunciated in the first six verses of Qur'an ever revealed [2]. All the 25 prophets of God mentioned in the Qur'an functioned as leaders, teachers and exemplars. Islam favours all forms of education with the proviso that such education is capable of contributing positively to the overall well-being of man and his environment. By implication, all forms of knowledge that leads to destruction should be discountenanced. More importantly, such knowledge must not contradict the unity (*tawhīd*) of God, the fundamental determinant of success in this world and afterlife. Islam holds that the lack of or insufficiency of the spiritual and material components of education results in crises.

The Qur'an projects the '*Ulul-Albāb* or Possessors of Knowledge in an exceptional manner. Muhammad Hasan's exposition on the Qur'anic model of integrated knowledge as opposed to the autonomy of human reason which the modern paradigm of development promotes is instructive here [3]. This submission views the '*Ulul-Albāb* as intellectuals or scholars par excellence

who have acquired integrated knowledge comprising both divine revelation and human reason. It is this holistic knowledge that forms the fulcrum of Islamic education.

Current practice among most Muslim schools de-emphasizes the spiritual component of Islamic education in order to attract clientele across religious divides. The facilities provided are used as justification for the prohibitive fees charged. The issue of affordability, of course, creates the demand for low rate schools hence the indiscriminate mushrooming of Muslim-owned schools which has resultantly turned education, a vital social asset, into a caricature. The Islamic traits in such schools are perhaps confined to the schools' name, motto, articulated vision and mission as well as the teaching of Islamic studies as an academic subject. Strict Islamic principles such as the performance of *Ḥalāt* and exhibiting the values of Islamic culture are either haphazardly implemented or entirely non-existent. The Muslim teachers who should provide the necessary orientation to students are extremely limited in population particularly in southern Nigeria. Thus, there is marginal difference between contemporary Western education offered by Muslims and those available in non-Muslim schools when the missionaries first introduced Western education.

The dangers of exposing Muslim children to the deficiencies of Western education propelled Jibril Martin, a Muslim leader, lawyer, politician and philanthropist to coordinate the founding and resourceful management of Muslim schools in mid 20th century to address the peculiar needs of Muslims in a multi-religious society. This paper examines the circumstances under which the Martin contributions became imperative, the factors responsible for the success recorded and the lessons for contemporary stakeholders and practitioners.

History Is Imperative: In Nigeria, the indigenous African education preceded the advent of education systems introduced by both Islām and Christianity. The system stressed functionalism and prompt social orientation. Muslims were the first to acquire literacy. In fact, the only system of literacy available prior to the introduction of Western education was provided through the Qur'ānic schools popularly called *Makarantar Allo* or *sari* in Northern Nigeria and *Ile Kewu* among the Yorubas of the West. They are usually located in the mosque or near the

teacher's house. The schools were mainly for children whom the *malams* or *alfas* taught the reading and writing in Arabic. After demonstrating ability to read the Qur'ān fluently, they advanced their studies to receiving instruction in *Tafsīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis), *Haṭīth*, *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), Islāmīc history, Arabic literature and so on. Since education is a life-long activity in Islām, the students continued to learn until the teacher's demise. The *malams* who are responsible for the students' upkeep and training thus served *in loco parentis* to the students. The trainees were taught how to preach by observing the proselytisation of their teachers and taking a cue from that, they developed the skills of *da'wah* (Islāmīc propagation) and officiating during Islāmīc ceremonies.

Before the arrival of the Christian missionaries, Nigeria operated a dual education system of traditional and Islāmīc instruction for over a century [4]. The first western-oriented school was founded in Badagry in 1843 by the Methodist Church. The missionaries established schools to facilitate the training of the clergy and as an instrument of conversion of Muslims and animists. They stressed knowledge of the Bible, the ability to sing the hymns, recitation of catechism and competences in oral and written communication. Between 1845 and 1882 exclusive Christian missionary education prevailed since the colonial government paid little or no attention to the educational needs of the populace. It is not surprising that Muslims were averse to this form of education hence few privileged Muslims who have acquired Western education initiated moves to provide formal education devoid of vulnerability of losing the Islāmīc faith. Pressures from the Muslim community led to the founding of the first government primary school in Lagos in 1899.

However, only one primary school could not take care of the educational needs of the teeming population of Muslim children. Moreover, Muslim primary school leavers would require secondary education which at the time was exclusively provided by the Christian missionaries. Direct Muslim intervention occurred in 1922 with the founding of the Ta'īmul-Islām Ahmadiyya Primary School at Elegbata, Lagos. Further significant progress was not recorded until 1940 when Jibril Martin as President of the Ahmadiyya opened new frontiers in Muslim education. The Martin interventions resulted in his appointment as life president in 1958 through an amendment of the group's constitution.

Who Was Jibril Martin? Jibril Martin led the secular and spiritual segments of society simultaneously for about three decades. This fact is reflected in his leadership roles spanning religion, law, politics and the educational enterprise. His career and social elevations culminated in the record of becoming the first elected Muslim Lagos legislator in the Federal Legislative Council, the pioneer President of the Nigerian Bar Association, foremost Chairman of the Muslim Pilgrims' Welfare Board (Western Region), first Proprietor of a Muslim secondary school and foundational President of the Council of Muslim Schools' Proprietors in Nigeria [5]. Born on 22nd November, 1888, he inherited vestiges of Islāmic culture from his paternal and maternal backgrounds. The Qur'ānic school he attended served as a good foundation as well as a shield; two facilities that proved useful, to him in adulthood especially his role later as an eminent Muslim leader. Muslim children such as Jibril Martin who passed through catholic primary and secondary schools had no option but to be Christian in school and Muslim at home. The chapel has been and still remains an integral feature of the Catholic educational environment. According to MacGregor, Akinsola and Amenechi, the chapel in a Catholic school functions as "the moral and religious factory in the Catholic Church's uncompromisable view, the education of a child is grossly incomplete without at least an awareness of a religious interpretation of life" [6].

Martin's only stint in paid employment was a sixteen-year career in the Civil Service which commenced with a clerical status in 1907 but climaxed in his appointment as Superintendent of Branch in 1923, Fasinro observed that he "was among the few Nigerians who held such a position at that time" [7]. His self-sponsored law education and subsequent emergence as the second Nigerian Muslim lawyer in 1926 placed him in good stead of playing significant roles in the annals of the history of the Ahmadiyya in Nigeria and the evolution of the Nigerian Bar Association [8].

Jibril Martin was in fact at the centre of Ahmadiyya activities since its inception in 1916 up to his death in 1959. However, it is noteworthy that the Ahmadiyya Jibril Martin piloted its affairs from 1940 became fragmented into many groups with different ideologies. The most prominent factors for the division, in Nigeria, was the issue of whether or not Ghulam Ahmad, founder of the Ahmadiyyah, should be regarded as a prophet or just a *mujaddid* (reformer) and the introduction of a new constitution called, the *Qanun Am* by the global leadership of the group.

Jibril Martin led the opposition against the undemocratic way the *Qanun Am* was introduced and some of its obnoxious clauses. The matter became a subject of litigation which the Martin group substantially won. Thus the Martin group severed relationship with Qadian and also opposed the prophethood of Ghulam Ahmad.

After the break-up of the Ahmadiyya, the group led by Jibril Martin began to make insightful strides in the educational sector as a direct response to the educational needs of Muslims. The commitment of Jibril Martin to his organization did not prevent him from playing key roles in the formation of the Nigerian Bar Association which led to his emergence as its first president in 1958. Similarly, his presence at the political scene was also significant because he participated in politics at a time Muslims were relegated to the background in Nigeria's pre-independence political activities. His foray into politics and the significant roles he played within the Nigerian Youth Movement resulted in his election as the first Muslim legislator representing Lagos (1940-1943). He not only represented his constituency but also served as the mouthpiece of the voiceless in the government of the day till he died in Makkah, in 1959 while serving as the pioneer Chairman of the Western Region Pilgrim Welfare Board. The life of Martin epitomizes service to all as seen in the diversity of his social engagements, the most profound of which remains his interventions in Muslim education which he diligently pursued and propelled.

The Context: The discriminatory policies of the Christian missionaries who used their schools as instruments of conversion commenced in the late 19th and continued for five decades without any formidable response. This development created a huge gap between the educational attainments of Muslims and non-Muslims. Many Muslims were faced with the dilemma of either losing their children to Christian evangelisation through Western education or the backwardness associated with illiteracy. Fafunwa reports:

Between 1850 and 1960, Muslims and animists were merely tolerated because a good citizen in Nigeria then must be one who is African by blood, Christian by religion and British or French in culture and intellect. The Muslims saw the utilitarian benefits of Western education but unsure of maintaining their faith. This was a big dilemma [9].

The few Muslim parents who enrolled their children in Christian schools discovered that the content of the education was heavily Christian. The children were taught

the New Testament, Catechism and the Commandments. Moreover, the classes were initially located in church buildings giving the impression that the schools were indoctrinating grounds rather than normal schools. As a result, many Muslims could not access Western education. Again, Fafunwa sheds light:

Muslim education was thus retarded not because the Muslims were unprogressive or because their religion was opposed to formal education but because 'education' in those days tended to mean Bible Knowledge, Christian ethics, Christian moral instruction, Christian literature, some arithmetic, language and crafts- all geared to produce Christians who could read the Bible. The system also helped train Christian clerks, Christian artisans, Christian carpenters, Christian farmers, Christian husbands and wives and Christian Nigerians [10].

Jibril Martin mobilised human and material resources to ensure that Muslim education was transformed. He contended that Muslims had the potentials of equalling if not surpassing the educational attainments of Christian missionaries if their resources were pulled together. To prevent Muslim children of school age from roaming the streets without formal schooling, he produced a blueprint on the founding, funding and management of Muslim Primary and Secondary schools including modalities for the award of scholarships to deserving students. The search for a suitable curriculum and competent personnel to implement it extended to Muslim countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Sudan which he traversed.

The frantic efforts to rescue Muslim education is not only a manifestation of the pragmatic dimensions of the strong emphasis Islām places on knowledge acquisition but also a direct response to the exigencies of the time and the conviction that education is indispensable in building useful lives. Thus, it was concluded that the solution to the educational backwardness of Muslims remained the establishment of schools. Such schools must be well staffed and backed by an effective management in order to ensure that their products competed favourably with their counterparts' world-wide.

Strategies and Legacies: Amidst voices of scepticism and in some cases outright opposition, the utilisation of self-help, direct labour and spirit of philanthropy led to the establishment of the first Muslim secondary school, the Saka Tinubu Memorial Secondary School, Elegbata-Lagos in 1948. The approach used in the construction which involved direct physical participation of the rank and file of the membership of the

Ahmadiyya introduced a new dimension into the demonstration of commitment to striving in the cause of Islam not witnessed within the locale. The donation of materials, cash and the services of volunteer artisans and professionals ensured that limited expenses were incurred in building school infrastructure and furniture. Within a spate of two decades of his leadership, the number of the Movement's group of schools of which Jibril was the proprietor had reached thirteen. The schools (primary and secondary) were strategically scattered across the Western region covering the present Lagos, Oyo and Edo States.

Each of the schools was administered through a Board of Governors. Jibril Martin coordinated activities of the Boards paying attention to details but minimising bureaucracy. He donated both cash and land to the schools and encouraged Muslims to do the same. Apart from the Talimul Islam Ahmadiyya Primary School established in 1922, the thirteen schools the Movement established before Nigeria's independence in 1960 are listed in Table 1.

The names of these schools and others established by the Ahmadiyya Movement have been changed following the disagreements over the prophethood of Ghulam Ahmad in 1940 and a further change of name to Anwarul-Islam of Nigeria by a break-away organisation from the Ahmadiyya Movement in 1975. The Anwarul-Islam inherited many of the Ahmadiyya schools. After government take-over of the schools in 1976, ten schools were returned to the Anwarul-Islam. These are:

- Anwar-Ul Islam Model College, Agege 1948
 - Anwar-Ul Islam Girls High School, Ojokoro (established originally as Ahmadiyya Grade III Teacher Training College in 1954).
 - Saka Tinubu Memorial High School, Orile Agege
 - Jibril Martin High School, Agege 1986
 - Oniwaya High School, Agege 1980
 - Onipetesi High School, Iloro, Agege 1984
 - Jibril Martin Memorial Grammar School, Iponri 1961
 - Ebute Metta High School, Iponri 1982
 - Jibril Martin High School, Iponri 1980
 - Iponri Grammar School, Iponri. 1980
- Source: Field Trip: November, 2013.

An immediate threat the nascent schools faced was the unavailability of qualified Muslim teachers. There were very few Muslim graduates who could teach in and or manage the affairs of the secondary schools as principals. Considering the unavailability of a university

Table 1: Ahmadiyya Schools Established before 1960

	School Name	Location	Year Established
1.	Edaikan Ahmadiyya Primary School	Benin City	1945
2.	Ahmadiyya Primary School	Ijede	1948
3	Saka Tinubu Memorial High School	Olushi	1948
4.	Ahmadiyya Primary School	Ashipa, Ibadan	1955
5.	Ahmadiyya Primary School	Agege	1955
6.	Ahmadiyya Primary School	Emu, Epe	1955
7.	Ahmadiyya Primary School	Ebute Metta	1955
8.	Ahmadiyya Grammar School	Eleiyele, Ibadan	1955
9.	Ahmadiyya Commercial Secondary School	Orile Agege	1955
10.	Ahmadiyya College	Agege	1956
11.	Ahmadiyya Girl's High School	Surulere	1956
12.	Ahmadiyya Boy's High School	Surulere	1956
13.	Ahmadiyya Girls Primary School	Olushi	1958

Source: Field Trip: November, 2012.

in Nigeria at the time, it was realised that except intending Muslim children were offered scholarships to study abroad, the lack of Muslim graduate teachers was likely to persist thereby thwarting the objectives of establishing Muslim secondary schools. However, funding a huge scholarship scheme involving university education abroad was a heavy responsibility for the Movement to shoulder. The tour of a number of Arab countries with the hope of securing scholarships and or sponsorship for tertiary education of Muslim children did not produce the envisaged results.

The pragmatic approach of mobilising domestic resources for funding a tertiary education scholarship programme was evolved. The scheme was designed to cater for indigent but brilliant Muslims interested in the teaching profession or in-service teachers without a degree. The candidates must have passed the Senior Cambridge Examination and be practising Muslims. Prospective awardees were bonded to teach in Ahmadiyya schools for a minimum of five years after graduation to finally qualify for the scholarship which covered school fees, transport, feeding, accommodation and maintenance allowances. In the first instance, six awardees benefited from the scheme between 1948 and 1954.

Soon after its inauguration, the scheme ran into a crisis of sustainability due to inadequate funds. The negative attitude which some financial supporters of the scheme began to exhibit was rationalised under the absurdity of sponsoring the education of the awardees at the detriment of their own wards. However, in order to prevent the premature termination of the scheme, Jibril Martin expeditiously traded off his landed property in Lagos and remitted the proceeds to the scholars in

England with a letter apologising for the delay in payment of their fees and allowances as well as encouraging them to forge ahead in their studies. Fasinro captured this exceptional gesture in the following words:

It is gratifying to note that during his life time, Jibril Martin's dreams about the education policy of the Movement came to fruition. Many Scholarships to study abroad were offered by the Movement and on many occasions he had to be personally responsible financially for the upkeep of the scholars. On one such occasion when the Movement had not enough money to settle the students' bills, Jibril Martin had to sell one of his real properties to raise funds to meet the scholars' expenses [11].

It is noteworthy that the award of scholarship was subsequently continued as a policy of some of the schools established by the Movement. The success of these initiatives should not only be gauged by the quality of the products and the attainments of the beneficiaries but also the impact on other Muslim organisations. The feasibility of establishing and running private Muslim schools had been practically demonstrated.

The Outcome: Two dimensions of the Martin interventions are germane to prevailing educational challenges facing Muslims. Though access to formal education was generally poor, the unsuitability of the heavily Christianised western formal education demanded the evolution of a feasible alternative without compromising quality and the philosophy of Islamic education. The quality of the Martin education programme was authenticated through the mechanism of monitoring under the auspices of the education

inspectorate. The subsequent career attainment of the schools' products was another evidence of the standard-based Muslim education of the period. A robust endorsement of the high standard of the schools was evinced in non-Muslims' patronage of the schools. The 'risk' of conversion of their children to Islam did not constitute a concern. One of the most crucial needs of Nigeria's pluralistic society was the provision of qualitative educational opportunities for the indigenous population. The agency for actualising this objective a reality was less important.

The confidence the Martin educational initiatives inspired within the Muslim Community was quite significant. The establishment of Muslim schools no doubt increased access of Muslims to Western education. Thus, the idea of establishing and running Muslim private schools seized to be a mere theoretical construct but a practical experience with high potentials for its replication within the immediate locale and the wider Nigerian environment. The initiatives soon opened a floodgate of the establishment of Muslim schools by several Muslim organisations, Muslim Communities and individual Muslims. The approach used in running the schools became a tested model. The preference for recruitment of Muslim graduates as teachers is explained by the need to facilitate the Islamic orientation of students. As a convention, Muslims were appointed as head-teachers or principals. Although, the schools provided opportunities for Muslim children to access basic knowledge about the tenets of Islam and its practice, non-Muslims were neither excluded nor forced to practice Islam.

Recent statistics reveal that 5,417 Muslim nursery and primary schools exist in the country [12]. The Ansarul Islam Society of Nigeria, followed the footsteps of the Ahmadiyya when in 1927, it established its pioneer school. A manifestation of the success of Islamic organisations founding and running schools is typified by the Zumratul-Adabiyat group of schools which presently manages some two hundred (200) primary schools across Nigeria. The Ansar Ud Deen Society of Nigeria, the Nawairudddeen Society and emerging organisations such as the Nasrullahi al-Fathi Society (*NASFAT*), Al-Usrah Incorporation and similar groups with a special focus on education now collectively have over 2,421 Muslim secondary schools.

Contemporary Relevance of Interventions: In a pluralistic context where government is unable to meet the demands for education, privately owned educational institutions

come handy to fill the vacuum. Muslims in Nigeria are yet to measure up in this regard when compared with the strides of other faith-based groups. The large population of out-of-school children is a clarion call to act in unison. Therefore, the challenge Muslims faced during the colonial era is more or less the same encumbrances they currently face. Contributions to educational development from private concerns within the *Ummah* take different dimensions. The most common model is the single-scholar approach in which an individual establishes a school which largely thrive on the intellectual resources and goodwill of the proprietor. This popular approach has survived up to the moment among traditional Islamic scholars.

The resources of the past ought to spur new ideas and development. History is essentially studied for the purposes of designing the future. George Santayana's postulation that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"[13] is relevant here. The challenge today, is how to provide Muslims with an Islamic education that insulates the recipients from un-Islamic influences. This objective is far from being realised. Muslims avoided Western education in the past because of its heavy Christian content. The typology of education provided by Muslims, today, lack both the professional touch and the appropriate spiritual ingredient. Efforts at addressing the deficit in Muslim education can only be initiated and nurtured by Muslims themselves. Muslims need to formulate strategies that would make education affordable, qualitative and Islamic in orientation. According to al-Ghazzali, education without focusing on the core values of human development process will produce individuals who will be imprisoned within the material world will not achieve true happiness. The insistence on recruitment of Muslim staff and sponsorship of the training of potential school administrators was geared towards achieving a synergy between the spiritual orientation of the teacher and the learner.

The Jibril Martin strategy which reduced inequality of educational opportunities among Nigerian children is worthy of attention. The segregated arrangement of providing the children of the influential and powerful members of society with the services of Model Schools while the children of the downtrodden attend ill-equipped and understaffed public institutions can be checkmated through Martin's policy of charging affordable fees and instituting scholarship schemes for indigent

students. The encouragement of sponsorship of educational projects opened up new prospects of funding and a way of making the rich pay for the education of the poor.

This system of indirect subsidisation through private financial support through the cultivation of the spirit of philanthropy and selflessness is, today, replicable considering that Muslim teachers and professionals are still scanty. These measures will also minimise the current drop-out rate

CONCLUSION

Although this study focused on early antecedents of Muslim education in Nigeria, it is argued that the same strategies are useful in present Muslim locales across the globe. The importance Islam attaches to education should be practically demonstrated through regular reviews of the state of Muslim education. Such critical reviews should logically result in re-strategisation for greater access to quality and balanced education. The daunting challenges of increasing population of out-of-school children, the paucity of qualified Muslim teachers, the imbalance in present curricula and unbridled commercialisation of education require immediate attention. The resources of the history of modern Muslim education provide credible roadmap for charting the course of Muslim education. The durable legacies of Jibril Martin deserve many more critical appraisals. The 19th and early 20th Centuries intense power game within the Lagos royalty largely shaped by the trio of Benin hegemony, British colonialism and the local customs of the indigenous people did not prevent the germination and flourishing of unique education for Muslims of the period. Muslims were determined to, in their own way, address the anomalies that characterised the educational opportunities available to Muslims. A replication or re-enactment of the Jibril Martin legacies in education is imbued with potentials that are valid for contemporary application.

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