

An Assessment of the Islamization of Knowledge Process in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the Islamization of Knowledge (IoK) process in Nigeria. It evaluates groups and individuals attempt at incorporating Islamic visions into the secular system of education practiced in the country. The study starts off by assessing the various definitions of IoK and how they all reflect a “commonly-shared religious vision”. This study also present the personalities and organizations involved in IoK process in the country. It also explores the extent of their successes, failure as well as challenges. The study concludes that without a proper understanding of Islamization (concept, aims, implementation processes), the secularization of Muslims in the country will remain a problem and would continue to affect the development of Nigerian Muslims.

Key words: Islamization • Education • Nigeria • Muslims • Islamization of Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

One of the current trends in contemporary Islamic thought is the Islamization of knowledge (IOK). Islamization is quickly becoming a common intellectual pursuit and expectation among Muslim intellectuals and academia in the Muslim world. Different Muslim countries have approached and attempted to implement Islamization differently. The implementation of Islamization has achieved varied success and faced a number of challenges. Nigeria is among those countries that have tried to implement an Islamization program, although not as a national policy, but through various groups and individuals within the country. An examination of the various periods of educational development in Nigeria reveals the secular nature of its educational system. Today, Nigerian Muslims are becoming increasingly conscious of Islamization of knowledge. This can be seen in the proliferation of privately owned Muslim schools throughout Nigeria. Despite this, the manner in which some schools and administrators are implementing the concept of Islamization of knowledge is a far cry from its original aims and objectives. This paper examines the IOK project in Nigeria to identify and understand its shortcomings and suggest thereof appropriate potential solutions.

Islamization: Before discussing the process of Islamization in Nigeria there is need to understand the term Islamization and Islamicization. Islamization has been interpreted differently by Muslim scholars. Danjuma A. Maiwada defined it as “the transformation of an entire world view from a crooked or “Jahiliyya” basis to an Islamic one” [1]. Islamization means including Islamic disciplines in the curriculum, providing an Islamic perspective on issues in the syllabi and locating, where possible, secularized disciplines within the Islamic *weltanschauung* [2]. Islamization is the liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic, national-cultural tradition opposed to Islam and then from secular control over his reason and his language [3]. Some scholars prefer to use ‘Islamicisation’; to them it conforms to the idea of rendering human knowledge in-line with Islamic epistemology, ontology and ethics [4].

It is further argued that ‘Islamization’ is generally used in the sense of conversion to Islam, whereas ‘Islamicisation’ denotes being in harmony with the teachings of Islam. Other reasons are derived from the adjective ‘Islamic’ which conveys at least three different levels of meanings, namely something that is connected with Islam or Muslims e.g. Islamic history; something that is in agreement with Islamic values e.g. Islamic medicine

and Islamic food; and something that complies with or fulfils the tenets or teachings of Islam e.g. Islamic law, Islamic theology and Islamic ethics [4]. This argument does not however rule out the fact that “what is important to bear in mind is that both terms are merely two different labels which refer to a commonly-shared religious vision and there is no disagreement that contemporary human knowledge has to be developed in accordance with the world view of Tawhid” [4].

Islamization of Knowledge: According to Al-Attas, one of the early proponents of Islamization of knowledge describes Islamization of knowledge in the sense of rescuing knowledge from secular interpretations and ideologies [3]. Al-Faruqi on the otherhand, described it as a form of “recasting knowledge as Islam relates to it”; “to overcome the dichotomy between modern secular and traditional Islamic systems of education”; “to recast the whole legacy of human knowledge from the point of view of Islam”; and “to redefine and re-order the data, to rethink the reasoning, to re-project the goals and serve the cause of Islam” [5]. According to Alwani.

It is the foundation of the tawhidic-episteme which holds that the universe has a Creator...who has charged humanity with His stewardship and what they knew not, making revelation a principle source of knowledge and likewise the natural world, so that by means of reading the two within a framework of pure tawhid, proper, discerning and purposeful knowledge may result [6].

This is probably the reason Maiwada observed that Islamization of knowledge is the impact or significance of the process of Islamization on the concept and pursuit of knowledge. From the above definitions we can deduce that Islamization addresses the issue of secular ideology and traditional Islamic systems of education, casting and recasting it within the framework of pure *tawhid*.

However it must be pointed out that the idea of Islamization of knowledge may not be seen as a new phenomenon, although in terms of the idea being named ‘Islamization’ it can be seen as contemporary thought. According to Kamal Hassan, the idea of Islamization is not a new phenomenon that only recently appeared in the process of engagement with the modern world, but something dynamic, ongoing and continually manifested whenever Islam and Muslims have confronted situations which challenge their sense of self-identity. Many scholars of the past have been involved in this enterprise of Islamizing but did not give it the name Islamization [7].

In support of this position, Abdur-Razzaq Solagberu noted that Islamization started with the Islam itself because “the religion found people with certain mythologies, knowledge and skills. It accepted and adopted what conformed to its teachings and modified or rejected what contradicted them” [8]. For instance, history has it that the impact of Arabization of foreign manuscripts from Greek and Persian literature led to the Islamization of such subjects. Al-Ghazali wrote the *Tahafut al-Falasafah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)* wherein he criticized some ideas of the philosophers. Solagberu also included Muhammad Iqbal, Mawdudi, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida as scholars also involved in Islamization of knowledge.

The Educational System in Nigeria: The Nigerian education system has undergone several evolutions. It has passed through different periods such as the pre-colonial era, the colonial era and the post-colonial era [9]. Pre-colonial education largely consisted of traditional and Islamic learning. The traditional education included farming, arts and craft, political, religious and cultural participation, in addition to ethics and moral values. Islamic education was introduced to Nigeria as early as the 11th century through the trading activities of the North [9]. Since Islamic education is comprehensive in scope, its aims are the same as those of an Islamic society.

Another trend of pre-colonial education was that introduced by the Christian missionaries in the 15th century. This education focused on conversion. In order to achieve their aims the missionaries introduce the art of reading and writing in English. Missionary activities were well grounded in Southern Nigeria while Islamic education spread in the North. When the colonialist arrived they were able to gain from the activities already started by the missionaries. Educated Nigerians served as useful civil servants of the colonial administration. This colonialist provided greater support to the missionaries thereby giving them an advantage over the Islamic education in the North.

In the early 1950s Nigeria was granted self-government, which led to the introduction of Universal Primary Education. The British government on her part inaugurated a number of commissions to usher in modern education in Nigeria based on a secular system [9]. In 1977, the National Policy on Education was inaugurated and later revised in 1981 and 1998. The content and objectives were as secular as could be. The objectives are:

The inculcation national consciousness and national unity, the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for survival of the individual and the Nigerian society, the training of the mind in understanding the world around and the acquisition of the appropriate skills, abilities and competencies; both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and society [9].

Based on this, the Nigerian educational system sought to produce secular citizens who are completely disinterested in seeking knowledge of their creator. This form of education cultivated a sense of materialism and relegated religion and spiritual needs to the private interests of individuals.

The Islamization Process: According to Rafiu Adebayo, the world conferences on Muslim education played a significant role in drawing the attention of Muslims to problems with their educational system. Adebayo maintained that the conferences “opened the eyes of the entire Muslims to realize the marginalization of their education, colonialization of their tradition, distortion of their culture and erosion of their world view” [10]. He went further to quote the resolution of the First World Conference on Muslim Education held at Makkah in 1977 that:

Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of man’s spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses. Education should therefore cater for the growth of man in all its aspects: spiritual, both individually and collectively and motivate all these aspects towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. The ultimate aim of Muslim education lies in the realization of complete submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large [10].

According to this resolution, education should be designed to serve as a guiding principle for Muslim educators, administrators and professionals to realize Muslim intellectuals and professionals committed to Islam. Every stage of education should reflect the Islamic worldview.

After this conference, educational institutions and organizations began appearing in Nigeria. The branch office of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) was established in the premise of the Bayero University, Kano with zonal branches in different states. IIIT supported the Islamization of knowledge in Nigeria by sponsoring various conferences and publishing various textbooks and journals such as *Al-Ijtihad: The Journal of Islamization of knowledge and Contemporary Issues*.

Most of these materials are distributed freely or sold at subsidized rates. The sale is not only limited to individuals but also academic institutions and corporate organizations [10]. Other organizations also involved in the propagation of a standard Islamized education system are the Islamic Trust of Nigeria (ITN), the Nigerian Association of Model Islamic Schools (NAMIS) and Islamic Education Trust (IET) [16].

The establishment of schools and universities also helped in the implementation of the Islamization of knowledge process in Nigeria. Many Muslim schools were established as private institutions. Another factor is that Muslims who registered their wards in Christian oriented or Western oriented schools later realized that education is a product of a particular worldview and is tailored towards some particular socio-historical and civilization contexts. There are instances where Muslim parents complained that their children would pray in Jesus’ name while closing their eyes and instead of saying *Ameen* would say *Halleluyah* [17].

This has led to the call for Islamizing the curriculum starting from nursery schools. It should be noted that the call is limited to the private schools established by Muslims. According to Adebayo, this agenda becomes incontestable in view of the dual roles expected of any Islamic school, namely functioning effectively as a centre of Islamic culture and producing graduates who will contribute positively to contemporary Nigeria while being fluent in western education. Failure to Islamize the curriculum carries the risk of failing to nurture students in the Islamic worldview and risks producing ‘unIslamic’ Muslims [22]. Muhammad Qutb remarks:

If we are serious about religion its true place in educational curricula, we have to do two things almost simultaneously. First, we must not restrict religious guidance to the formal traditional lesson. Second, we must reconsider the syllabuses devised for this particular lesson and re-evaluate them in most parts of the Muslim world. The objective of religious education is to produce a Muslim man or woman. This end cannot be achieved through a few disintegrated pieces of religious information to be learnt by heart and tested at the end of the school year, especially if one’s concepts, attitudes, morals and modes of behaviour are all non-or anti-Islamic [18].

The call to Islamize the curriculum led to the founding of the Islamic Education Trust led by Hajiya Aisha Lemu who attended the Fifth World Conference on Muslim Education 1987 in Cairo. The Islamic Education Trust established a Model Islamic Senior Primary School at

Minna in September, 1984 with a view of teaching school subjects from the Islamic point of view. To start the Islamization process in this school, subjects such as health and general science, agricultural science and social studies were critically examined and subjected to rigorous Islamic revision [10]. The revised syllabi have since been adopted by the school while many other private Islamic schools have benefitted from their efforts. The IET did not stop there but went on to compile a list of private Islamic schools in the country and invited them to a national seminar on Islamization of knowledge in 1994 [10].

More Muslim schools were established by Muslims in the early 1990s but most are yet to grasp the major intent of the programme of Islamization despite being aware of it. They believe that the mere inclusion of Islamic studies and Arabic in the school curricula is sufficient for Islamization of knowledge. A similar approach is employed by Christian schools to give the false impression that Islamic tenets are imparted to their student. Islamic Studies is included as a subject to lure unconscious Muslim parents to enrol their children in their schools [17]. Salaudeen Yusuf described this approach quite aptly when he stated:

The inclusion of Islamic Studies in most of the nursery schools is simply to make them attractive to Muslim parents who will assume that the aspect of Islamic education is being taken care of. In fact, it is merely window-dressing [10].

In regards to universities, a number of Muslim universities have been established including al-Hikmah University, Katsina University, Fountain University and Crescent University. Unfortunately, the only thing 'Islamic' about these institutions is that they are owned by Muslims. No attempt as yet been made to design appropriate Islamization programmes as well as creating an Islamic environment conducive to learning.

However, certain government schools in the North such as Usmanu Dan Fodiyo University and the Bayero University are taking appropriate steps by introducing Islam-based courses and including Islamic topics within the syllabi of conventional courses [10]. Examples of such courses include, Introduction to Islamic Economics, Economics of Production and Consumption in Islam, Economics of Zakat, Fiqh for Economics and Islamic Finance and Banking. In the Department of Management Studies, they have courses such as Sociology of Islamic Society, Islamic Business Ethics, Islamic Economic Analysis and Economic Development under Islamic Framework. In the Department of Sociology we have Sociology of Islamic Society, Islamic Order and

Institutions, Islamic Social Thought, Islam and Social Change and Economy and Society in the Sokoto Caliphate. In Political Science, we have: Islamic Political Thought, Islamic Political Institutions and The Concept of State and Society in Islam [10].

The Bayero University also introduced in the Faculties of Arts, Islamic Studies, Law, Education, Social and Management Sciences and some Islam-based courses. Examples of such courses are Sociology of Islamic Societies, Islamic Political Institution, Islamic Education, Introduction to Islamic Psychology, Islamic Political Experience, Islamic Law and Contemporary Issues, Islamic Law of Transaction and Islamic Law of Evidence and Procedure among others [10].

The importance of these Northern universities' approach to Islamization of knowledge in the country can be further understood from the writings of Saeid Golkar [11], Mohammad Nejatullah Siddiqui [12], Arshad M. Abbasi [13], Sarfaroze Niyozov and Nadeem Memon [14], Hasan Dzilo [15] among others.

Workshop, Seminar and Enlightenment Programme:

Different international activities on Islamization of knowledge have taken place in Nigeria. This is to bring to the consciousness of the populace the benefits and advantages of such programmes. Usmanu Dan Fodiyo sponsored the International Seminar on Islamic Economics, held at the University from 11-16 February 1985 [19]. This was followed by a workshop on Islamization of knowledge organized in conjunction with the University's Centre for Islamic Studies, IET, the Muslim World League and the IITN in March 27-29, 1989 [19]. The Bayero University in conjunction with IITN organized a One-Day Seminar on Islamization of knowledge in 1996. Other workshops were organized in 2000, 2001 and 2003. The conclusion of such conferences and workshops was the formation of discussion groups to develop ideas related to Islamization [20]. Of these, there is the Muslim Forum Islamization of Knowledge Group Discussion at Bayero University. At the University of Maiduguri, Usmanu Dan Fodiyo University and the University of Ilorin all have such discussion groups (the author attended three sessions of such discussion circle at the University of Ilorin from January to June 2009).

The Nigerian Association of Model Islamic Schools NAMIS also organized workshops and seminars on various aspects of school administration, innovative teaching methods for various subject areas and developing an Islamic culture and environment in the

school. For instance, a seminar on “The Administration of Model Islamic Schools” and a workshop on “Developing and Sustaining a Muslim School” were organized in 1997 and 2000 respectively [20].

Challenges Facing Islamization in Nigeria: There are many challenges facing Islamization of knowledge in Nigeria. Some of these problems have been highlighted by Aminu Mikailu, who identified that the degree of acceptance, the participation of women, lack of support from the traditional ulama, secularism and a general lack of impact from the Islamization of social sciences on the society have all contributed to the little progress of Islamization in Nigeria [20]. Adebayo went further to add that the multi-religious nature of the society, government policy on curriculum development, implementation and evaluation and language barriers are important factors against the implementation of Islamization of knowledge [21].

Another problem is lack of training and revision of curriculum in Muslim schools. By revising the curriculum the Islamization process would be fast tracked and more people would become aware of its benefits. Ashraf and Hussein suggested that:

In order to realize the aims and objectives of Islamic education, it is necessary for schools, colleges and universities to have an Islamic curriculum. But a curriculum and even textbooks prepared according to that curriculum cannot make education truly Islamic either in spirit or in practice if the teachers are not faithful Muslims and if they do not know the proper methods of teaching according to that curriculum [22].

This area is often neglected when discussing the issue of Islamization of knowledge. The people who are going to implement it must also be religiously and morally conscious in order to impact the correct teaching on their student. They must lead by example and not just talk about the ideal principles.

CONCLUSION

This paper is a simple effort to examine the progress of Islamization of knowledge in Nigeria. Our main concern is to show the level of awareness and benefits that have been derived from Islamization in the country. There is a need for more people to become involved in the promotion of the Islamization of knowledge accompanied by an urgent need to see the impact of Islamization on the society. The researcher is of the opinion that without

proper understanding of Islamization, the secularization of Muslims in the country will remain a problem and would continue to affect the development of Nigerian Muslims.

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