THE IMPACT OF AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY ON ARABIC-ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN YORUBALAND, SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of requirement for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic and other Civilizations)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the impact of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt, on Arabic-Islamic schools in the Yorubaland, Nigeria. This is done through investigation of its curriculum, and of Al-Azhar's delegates teaching in Arabic-Islamic schools in Yorubaland, Nigeria. It discusses Islamic religious affairs and the role played by the Nigerian Muslim scholars in general and in the South Western Nigeria in particular. Furthermore, it addresses the arguments on the need to pursue religious education within and outside the country. This study also examines the differences between Al-Azhar and the Nigerian Arabic- Islamic educational systems and investigates the need for continuation or otherwise of Al-Azhar's venture in the Nigerian Arabic- Islamic Schools. This study is both historical and analytical in nature. It used data gathered via primary and secondary sources such as books, interviewing some scholars in Nigeria, and distribution of questionnaire to Nigerian students in Egypt. Findings from this study revealed the suitability of Al-Azhar educational system for Nigeria. It also showed the continuous need to pursue Al-Azhar education by Nigerians. There was also emphasis on introducing some Western courses into Al-Azhar educational curriculum. The study recommends the completion of secondary education in Nigeria by intending Nigerians seeking Al-Azhar education in Egypt in order to facilitate their usefulness in the Nigerian western-oriented educational system upon their return.

ملخّص البحث

تبحث هذه الدراسة أثر جامعة الأزهر في القاهرة، جمهورية مصر العربية، على المدارس العربية – الإسلامية في ديار اليوروبا في نيجيريا. ويتم ذلك من خلال التحقيق في المناهج الدراسية، وإرسال مندوبين للأزهر للتدريس في المدارس العربية – الإسلامية في ديار اليوروبا. وتناقش الدراسة الشؤون الدينية الإسلامية والدور الذي لعبه العلماء المسلمون النيجيريون بصورة عامة، وفي جنوب غرب نيجيريا خاصة. وعلاوة على ذلك، تتناول الدراسة الحجج التي تبين ضرورة متابعة التربية الدينية داخل وخارج البلاد. تبحث هذه الدراسة أيضا الاختلافات بين النظم التعليمية في المدارس العربية – الإسلامية والأزهر، وتدرس وتحقق في الحاجة إلى استمرار دور الأزهر في المدارس العربية–الإسلامية النيجيرية. وطبيعة هذه الدراسة تاريخية وتحليلية حيث يتم فيها استخدام البيانات التي تم جمعها عن طريق المصادر الأولية والثانوية مثل الكتب، وإجراء المقابلات مع بعض العلماء في نيجيريا، وتوزيع استبيان على الطلاب النيجيريين في مصر. وكشفت النتائج المستخلصة من هذه الدراسة مدى ملاءمة النظام التعليمي في الأزهر لنيجيريا، كما أظهرت أهمية استمرار الحاجة إلى متابعة التعليم الأزهري في نيجيريا. وتوصي الدراسة أيضا بإدخال بعض المواد الغربية في المناهج التعايمية في الأزهر. كما توصي االدراسة بإنهاء مرحلة التعليم الثانوي كلها في نيجيريا قبل الانضمام الى الأزهرحتى يتمكن الطلاب من مواصلة التعليمي الغربي المنحى الذي يسير عليه نظام التعليم النيجيري لدى عودتهم.

APPROVAL PAGE

1 certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic and other Civilizations)

……...……..
Idris Sālim El-Hassan
Supervisor

1 certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic and other Civilizations)

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Ssekamanya Siraje Abdallah
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This dissertation was submitted to International Institute of Thought and Civilization and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic and other Civilizations)

……...……..
Mahmoud Zuhdi Hj Abdul Majid
Dean of International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other Institutions.

Yunus Olatoke Abdus Salam

Signature …… Date …….

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Signature Date

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Alhaja Hanifat Kikelomo in appreciation of her sympathetic support given me during this study.

To my Children Zainab, Sekinah, and Fatmah for their agonizing time spent with me throughout the period of this study in Malaysia while they were left behind in Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study is about the impact of education of Al-Azhar curricula and programmes on the Nigerian Yoruba students who are enrolled in Arabic-Islamic schools in Nigeria. However, anytime that Al- Azhar is mentioned in this study, definitely, it refers to Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Otherwise, more explanation will be given.

> Al-Azhar University concerns itself with the religious syllabus, which pays special attention to the Qur'ānic sciences and traditions of the prophet, on the one hand, while on the other, university teaches all the modern scientific fields of science. Thus, the university has not only fulfilled its obligations in these two fields of study but also fulfilled its obligations towards the Arabic language which is the language of the Holy Qur'ān[1]

The quotation above delineates the generosity of Al-Azhar University. Specifically, it reveals that Al-Azhar University in Cairo Egypt deals with religion and modern beneficial studies as well. But sadly in Nigeria, Al-Azhar University has been perceived as only for Arabic and Islamic studies. In Yorùbáland in particular, the education of Al-Azhar University and its impact on Arabic-Islamic schools in the region has become a controversial issue to the extent that the identity and image of old and current students of Al-Azhar University have negatively been perceived.

Furthermore, there is a common belief in Nigeria particularly in Yorùbá land that anyone who studied in Al-Azhar University cannot be considered as a good and useful product for the society due to the lack of Islamic ethics. Nonetheless, there is no conclusive evidence to prove and claim exactly what is wrong in Al-Azhar's

[1] http://www.rohama.org/en/content/23. Al-Azhar University: retrieved on Wednesday 04 December 2013.

education than to say Al-Azhar students habitually are Devils *(Faraohs)* and their knowledge is a waste.

In a bid of finding a clear knowledge for this problem the researcher, who is an old student of a well-known Arabic school in Yorúbά land in Nigeria the so-called Arabic Institute of Nigeria which is situated in Medina Elekuro Ibadan Oyo State and a graduate of Al-Azhar University in Cairo Egypt, who stayed for more than a decade in Cairo and familiars with the environment wishes to make an attempt through this study to investigate the educational role played by Al-Azhar in South Western Arabic-Islamic schools in Yorùbáland Nigeria. It is anticipated that a research must be done on this topic which would expectantly be useful for Nigerians, especially the Yorúbά people who always focus on sending their children to Arabic schools in Nigeria and upon graduation are sent to Al-Azhar University in Cairo Egypt as well in furtherance of their study. Additionally, this study also delved into how Arabic-Islamic schools in this area were initiated and how they were influenced by Al-Azhar's curriculum and the way its system is adopted by Nigerian Arabic-Islamic founding fathers.

In other hand, in order to have a clear knowledge about the problem of Al-Azhar University, this work investigates the reason for the establishment of Madrasas in Nigeria in which it focuses on the role played by Nigerian great Muslim Scholars who devoted their entire lives for propagating Islamic knowledge and completely concerned about preservation of Islam and Muslims.

According to Umar Baffa and his colleagues in the book entitled Muslim educational reform in Nigeria, it became evident that before the arrival of the British into Nigeria, Muslims had a well-established system of education that blends revelation and reason to transform man and his environment and enable him to worship the Creator, the Lord of all creations. But, the modern system of education,

which rest on secularism, was and still is, being influenced by Western conception of Knowledge.[2]

In addition to the forgoing information, the advent of colonialism in Nigeria was a precursor of Christian missionary activities and consequent relegation of Islamic education. Also, little support was given to the Islamic intellectual heritage and Islamic education was left to stagnate with no policy guide, quality control and future prospects. Additionally, modern education was given more prominence, support and official backing and this resulted in envy between the competitive opportunities opened to the two system of knowledge. With the strong support it became more profitable in the modern sense for a person to pursue Western styled scholarship than Islamic education[3].

Consequently, the secularized curricula that have permeated and dominated the National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigeria de-emphasized the religious and moral components of education, which are essential in molding the Islamic personality, which Muslims greatly cherish. For the Muslims who pass through the modern educational system, many are trained and turned into confused and deluded hybrids largely, because the knowledge they have gained is bereft of spirituality that blends revelation and reason[4]. Details about the British effect on Islamic education in Nigeria can be seen in the following paragraph.

1.1.1 The Impact of British Colonialisation on Islamic Education in Nigeria

> When the British arrived in Northern Nigeria they found that Islamic education was widespread and well developed. Arabic was the official language of communication in royal courts, offices and legal courts.

[2] Umar Baffa Aliyu, Shehu Salisu, and Malumfashi, *Muslim Educational Reform Activities in Nigeria*, (Kano Nigeria: Benchmark Publisher Limited, 2005), 3.
[3] Ibid, p3
[4] Ibid, p7

> Hausa and Fulfulde languages were both being written in the Arabic alphabets. But with the imposition of the new modern system of education, the English language, written in the Roman alphabet, replaced Arabic as the official language of the Islamic leadership. Gradually, Western education became the yardstick for determining formal literacy. Islamic education was thus neglected and the new system continued to receive support to the loss of the other for several decades.[5]

The arrival of the British into Nigeria has changed the Islamic education in Nigeria. Details have been given by the above quotation which has clearly shown that it was the arrival of the British into Nigeria that Islamic education lost its power. Not only in Nigeria the same thing happened to the Muslim of Pakistan, many problem faced Indians through the British governments when a new system of education was introduced to them which was completely secular and materialistic in nature. This system was against the existing one in which it was only concerned with how to make a living not how to live and the new environment changed the school from a social and religious institution into an economical one which is totally opposed to Muslim ways of living[6].

It is worthy to mention that during the period of the British rule in Nigeria students were thought Bible at schools without been concerned whether they are Muslims or not. They were under control to study Christianity through the school's curriculum. Friday was the only Muslims' day to propagate their religion, in most schools it is difficult to find Islamic teachers; may be only one teacher can be found or two who teach Islamic Religion Knowledge (IRK).

There was the suppressed fear of continuous doubt, lack of concern and psychological defeat. There was an obvious crisis in cultural identity and disposition

[5]Ibid, p11.
[6] Sultan Talat, *Muslim Education and Community Development: An Analytical Case Study of Pakistan.* (Makkah Al-Mukarramah: Umm Al-Qura University, 1991), 15.

as Muslims were made to downgrade their educational system and embrace secular education, which negates God as the creator of knowledge. This sparked off the desire for educational reform within the purview of Islam[7].

Finally, after all these sufferings Muslims then, realized that there is no other way to protect themselves from the West than to promote their modern schools where Muslims will get the useful and relevant knowledge. That is how the idea of establishment of *madrasah* came into being.

1.1.2 The Reformation of Muslim Education in Nigeria

After the fall of Muslim educational identity in Nigeria through the new superseding of British curriculum the Muslim Scholars of then realized that Islamic education needs to be reawaked in order to be relevant in Nigerian society again like it used to be before the British arrived. Also, because change is a constant phenomenon in human society, for education to be relevant reform is necessary and they started the reformation.

In a book entitled *"Muslim Educational Reform Activities in Nigeria"*, details were given on the reformation of Muslim education. The establishment of an Islamic state, which lasted up to the beginning of the twentieth century when the British conquered it and ushered in colonial rule and 'Western' education, is the outcome of the reform[8]. It therefore implies that, the seriousness of the Yorúbá Muslims in the pursuance of Muslim Education was demonstrated by their strong adherence to the programme, without fear of the sophisticated manner and cunning approaches used by

[7] Ibid.
[8] Umar Baffa Aliyu, Shehu Salisu, and Malumfashi, p17

the missionaries to attract them into embracing Christianity and attending Christian schools.[9]

Consequent on what happened in India after the British conquered them. Historically, Shah Waliullah had impacted on the thought of huge Muslim scholars and the different movements of Muslims of the sub-continent. But unfortunately for the *Ulamas* instead of them to stand on their faith they were compelled and locked the doors of their schools to the new ideas brought by Western culture, while other section of Muslims submitted themselves at the doorsteps of the British schools. Thus, the spirit of creativity and dynamism for Islamic renaissance was again reduced to a flicking point[10].

Moreover, in another quotation, an explication was given saying that in the nation's educational set-up, Arabic and Islamic Studies have undergone some reforms consequent upon the coming of the Christian missionaries with the western system of education. The systems of education brought by the missionaries exposed the Muslims to absolutely opposed system of education, as they could not afford to give up this new system, most especially with the hint given by the Prophet (S.A.W) that knowledge was a stray camel of the believers which they should hold wherever it was found[11].

Since it is known by Muslims that conscious of the fact that the acquisition of knowledge is crucial, and that enrolment in the conventional schools could make them lose their Islam, which was more valuable to them; so, two prominent methods were therefore adopted by the them with a view to integrating the Islamic and the western systems of education to suit their consumption. The first method is the introduction of

[9] Ibid. 131
[10] Sultan, Talat. 1991. p 17
[11] Ibid. 15

some non-religious subjects into the existing Arabic-Islamic institutions, while the second is the introduction of Arabic and Islamic Studies into the curriculum of western education[12].

By this, knowledge had been classified into two broad areas; which are termed -conventional and religious. The outcome of these intellectual reawakening globally and in Nigeria was the establishment of more schools and Islamic organizations along the Islamization of Knowledge agenda.

1.1.3. The brief historical background of Yorúbά́land

Nigeria, the giant of Africa consists of thirty-six states. It was divided into three major regions by the British namely: Northern, Southern and Eastern regions. Later it was grouped into eight regions: North, (N) North East (NE), East (E), South East (SE), South (S), South West (SW), West (W) and North West (NW). However, the Yorúbά people who are the focus of this study occupy the South Western region of Nigeria which includes Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Kwara, Ondo and Ekiti states. This people are an ethnic group of Southern Nigeria and Southern Benin in West Africa. The Yorúbά constitute over 35 million people in total; the majority of this population in Nigeria makes up 21% of its population.[13] The below map depicts the Yorúbά states

Figure 1.1: the map of the Yorúbά states in Nigeria

[12] Ibid.
[13] Retrieved from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: the history of Yoruba people

The Yorúbά people initially practiced the traditional religion in Yorúbά language *(Esin Abalaye*). Later Islam was introduced to them and it was practiced by most of this people, but the traces of the traditional religion still remained, some people are still propagating it until some of the Yorúbά then Islamic fathers started spreading Islam through many ways especially through public lectures and teaching in homes and Madrasas until today.

1.1.4 The Relationship between Arabic and Yorúbά Languages

Muhammad Jamba[14] in an article *"the importance of Arabic language in Yorúbά society, shifting of Yorúbά culture into Arabic language; Challenges and Prospects*" explained the influences of Arabic language on Yorúbά culture and categorized them into many sections. (A).The historical and non-historical information in African continent generally and in Nigeria in particular, was written in Arabic language before the British. (B). Most of Yorúbά words are originated from Arabic language. For examples:

Table 1.1: Description of relationship between Arabic and Yorúbά languages

S/N	Yorúbά Words	Arabic Words	Meaning
1.	Alēbu	العيب	Defect
2.	Aniyan	النية	Intention
3.	Sinā	زنا	Fornication
4.	Seria	الشريعة	Islamic Law

[14]Muhammad Jamba, Moshood Mahmuud Arabic lecturer in the faculty of Arabic language and its literature Kogi State University Nigeria. This article was not published in any publication it is just a paper written for the benefit of the students of the faculty. That is why the year and place of publication are not mentioned

5.	Iwaju	الوجه	Fore-head
6.	Ale	الليل	Night
7.	Ara	العورة	Nudity/Nakedness
8.	Omi	الماء	Water
9.	Ajalu	اجل	Damage
11.	Bale	البعل	Husband
12.	Lakaye	العقل	Intelligence
13.	Kadara	القدر	Destiny
14.	Alamori	الأمر	Fate
15.	Tunfulu	الطفل	Baby
16.	Alāfia	العافية	Well-being
17.	Alubosa	البصل	Onion
18	*Alubarika*	البركة	Blessing
19	Arisiki	الرزق	Wealth
20	Ina	النار	Fire

(C). Arabic writing and learning were first known by Africans including Yorúbά people before the arrival of British into Nigeria and he finalized that Arabic language and learning were accepted by the Nigerian youths without any hesitation. For example, most of Nigerians are Muslims including *Yorúbás* so, Arabic and Islam are inseparable.

1.1.5 The Inception of Arabic-Islamic Schools in Yorùbáland, Nigeria

Aisha Lemu, in an article entitled "*Religious Education in Nigeria – A Case Study of Islamic Educational Trust, Nigeria"* explained that the notion behind the establishment of Arabic-Islamic schools in Nigeria is a response to the British administration that superseded Islamic education in Nigeria. She furthered explained that the Southern Muslims were threatened and persuaded to embrace Christianity through their studies because the school curriculum was designed by the British.

> Christian missionaries were allowed by the British colonial power to set up mission schools in the south from the early days, and Government schools also were generally Christian-oriented. Any Muslim student in these schools would be forced to study Bible Knowledge and in most cases attend church. Conversion was frequently a condition for admission. No teachers were provided for Islamic Studies. Muslim parents had a difficult choice – to allow their children to get a modern education at the risk of losing their faith, or to keep their faith and to lose the opportunity to be raised high in Government or the modern administrative system. This gave rise to the establishment of private Islamic schools for Muslims in the southwest. However, their medium of instruction was usually Arabic, so their products were equally unable to join the mainstream of higher education unless they went to Arab countries for further studies. For these reasons the Christian missionaries and their students in the southwest went far ahead of the Muslims in western education, and tended to look down on the Muslims as backward. There was, and in some cases, still is, serious abuse of their educational and religious rights and marginalization of Muslims in national development[15].

In addition, Sheikh Abdul Wahab Adebayo Ahmad[16] in an interview conducted with him, said that, the so called *Ansaru-dīn, Nawaru-dīn* Muslims society of Nigeria, and other societies like them established Islamic schools after the arrival of the British into Nigeria. Muslims were learning Islam by studying Qur'ān, Hadiths and other religious books with the aim to protect their children from being westernized.

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[15]Aisha Lemu, *Religious Education in Nigeria: A Case Study of Islamic Educational Trust, Nigeria (Oslo Coalition on freedom of Religion, 2002),* 65

[16] Sheikh Abdul Wahab Adebayo Ahmad, the former principal of Arabic Institute of Nigeria and one of the great Muslim scholars in Ibadan Oyo State Nigeria