

# The Rise and Proliferation of Modern Islamic Schools in Northern Nigeria with Particular Reference to Jos

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**Abstract---** This paper examined the recent trend of burgeoning explosion of Modern Islamic Schools in Northern Nigeria with special focus on Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. In an attempt to discover the underlying factors that shaped Muslims' attitude toward modern education, the paper took a journey in time to the early Muslims' encounter with modern education during colonial times. The paper then zooms in on factors such as near collapse of government education; liberalization of educational sectors; Muslims' attempt to preserve their religious identity etc as underlying factors behind the appearance of Modern Islamic Schools. Attempt is also made in the paper to explore the character and nature of the Modern Islamic Schools in Jos North, particularly their strengths and weaknesses, and also their contributions to the Muslim society as a whole. Qualitative methodology has been used in the research with writer's observations and semi-structured interview as instrument of data collection.

**Keywords---** Islamic Schools, Jos, Nigeria, Proliferation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

NIGERIA is the most populous country in Africa with a population of more than 150 million people. Muslims form more than half of the population and majority of them live in the northern part of the country which was once part of the former Sokoto Caliphate that was conquered by the British in the early 1900s. Modern education was first introduced into Nigeria by Christian missionaries and subsequently by the British colonial Government in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [1].

When Christian missionaries and the colonial Government introduced modern education in the north in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Muslims reaction to the system was very negative. This negative attitude has rendered Muslims backward educationally in Nigeria.

Amidst the above mentioned state of affairs, northern Nigeria has been experiencing a rapid proliferation of Modern Islamic Schools since the early 1990s. These schools combine secular curricula with Islamic subjects and they are run within pure Islamic environment. In recent times there has been a large increase in the number of such schools and they appear in every nook and cranny of northern Nigerian cities. The city of Jos is not an exception in this regard.

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## *Muslims' Reaction to Modern Education in Northern Nigeria*

Muslims' reaction to modern education in the north in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was underpinned by fear, suspicious and outright rejection. There are many factors that contributed to this development. Some of these factors are explained below:

### *Modern Schools were Perceived as Threat to Islamic Schools*

Before the coming of Europeans, Muslims already had their system of education, which was based on Islamic religion. Lord Lugard had estimated that there were about 200,000 pupils in elementary level of Muslims schools *Makarantun Allo* in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century [2].

When missionaries and colonial government introduced modern education Muslims perceived it as a threat to their Islamic system of education. So, as a result they never deemed it necessary to combine the two. They felt that modern education was too materialistic and dangerous to their spiritual life. [3].

### *Perceived Low Moral Standard of Public Schools*

Some Muslims parents were afraid to send their children to European schools because the students were accused of becoming disrespectful to their parents and the elders in general and also disdaining their culture and sometimes religion. The students were also blamed of pride and detesting any form of manual labour most especially agriculture which was the main stay of the economy at that time.

Muslim society in those days did not try to solve the problem as Yoruba Muslims did in the south-west in the 1920s by establishing their own schools. Instead many denied their children access to modern education which later transformed into the problem of education gap between the north and the south.

### *Fear of Conversion to Christianity*

Secondly, Muslims were afraid of their children converting to Christianity. This fear was based on the fact that Christian missionaries used schools as platform for proselytization. The fear was also exacerbated by Muslims experience in Yoruba land in the south-west. Many Muslims' children in that region were converted to Christianity in mission schools and some were denied admission unless they adopt a Christian name [4].

### *Opposition from the Traditional Islamic Scholars*

Islamic Scholars (*Ulama'*) were firmly established in the Caliphate system before the establishment of colonialism. They served as judges, scribes, teachers, and leading many social and ritual activities such as marriage, naming ceremony, and burial so, they were highly respected by the society. The *Ulama'* perceived rightly that entrenchment of this new system of education will undermine their elevated position in the society. They also foresaw that holders of this new education will soon take up their position. So, they strongly opposed the system [5].

### *Muslim Resentment of European Conquest*

Muslims strongly resented foreign colonial rule, to them the acceptance of non-Muslim rule is an evil necessity. For majority the European occupation was a great disaster, Muslims were subjected to the rule of alien non-Muslims. Some felt that the best option was flight (*hijrah*), they felt that they would never co-exist with Europeans. Some factions believed that there was no need to emigrate because there was no place to go on earth since Europeans already occupied virtually everywhere in the Sudan, the only option was to keep on struggling against all odds or adopt the *Taqiyyah* (i.e. disguising the true feeling) [6].

### *Colonial Educational Policy in Northern Nigeria and Educational Stagnation in the North*

British educational policy in northern Nigeria was highly influenced by outside factors. Colonial authority had experienced great opposition from the Western educated elites in India, Egypt and southern Nigeria. They perceived that the high literary education given to Indians had created intellectuals who failed to come to terms with the colonial government. In Egypt, the intellectual elites became a thorn in the flesh of colonial government [7].

By the time British conquered northern Nigeria already mission education had produced a pocket of educated elites in southern Nigeria and some new ones were on the making. These Western educated elites were the first nationalists who started agitating for various forms of harsh colonial policies and injustice. When the new governor of the northern Region Sir, Percy Girouard assumed office he decided to devise educational policy that would avoid producing political agitators. He appointed Sir, Hans Vischer as director on education in the north. Vischer devised a system of education that created elementary, primary and technical schools. The elementary school was to teach Hausa language, some traditional arts and crafts, History of the British Empire, and local Geography. The primary school was to give some training that would enable the student to work in the Native Authority Council and the technical school was designed to train students in various crafts and agriculture. [8].

This educational policy by Vischer was approved by the Girouard successor Sir, Hasketh Bell in May, 1907 and finally by colonial Secretary in August, 1910. There is no doubt this system of education was barren and devoid of any intellectual and professional skill development of the Muslim children in the north. While this unproductive system of education was going on in the north a better education was giving to the Christian children in the south by missionaries [9].

Harding who was one of the people that turned down Lugard's proposal had this to say about Governor Clifford new educational scheme:

It was not our desire to make Hausas, Fulanis, Kanuris barristers to entrap their countrymen into litigation and ruin, nor newspaper editors to preach sedition, discontent and abuse of all constituent authorities, nor even primarily to produce clerks for employment by government or European merchants, therefore, should no change be effected in northern education system [10].

### *Changing Attitude of Muslims toward Modern Education*

Resistance to modern education, Sterile educational policy and Lugard's segregationist and parochial ideology of separate education for the Muslims and the so-called "pagans" created educational imbalance between north and south that lasted to contemporary period. According to Erim (1996), by 1935, the effect of the disparity was quite obvious. Indeed in that year, the north with an estimated population of about 11 million had 134 Native Authority elementary schools and 253 Christian Mission schools with 6,060 and 12,037 pupils, respectively. The south on the other hand with an estimated population of about 8 million had 174,915 pupils in its elementary schools or nearly ten times the elementary school population in the north. [11].

The critical nature of the disparity was made open by Lugard's successor, Sir, Hugh Clifford, who, while addressing the Nigerian Council noted that "after two decades of British occupation, the northern provinces have not yet produced a single native of these provinces who was sufficiently educated to enable him fill the most minor clerical post in the office of any government Department [12].

This apparent disparity and fear of southern domination made many Muslim leaders to start taken step to correct the dire educational condition of the northern Muslims. The step was spearheaded by Sir, Ahmadu Bello, leader of NPC the leading political party in the north. After independence Sardauna continued to encourage education most especially in Muslim part of the north, he established many schools including the most prestigious Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria. But despite his effort many Muslim northerners were still suspicious of modern education. Unfortunately, Sardauna did not live long to achieve significance success in his mission; he was killed in a coup in 1966.

One of the major factors that played a vital role in changing the attitude of Muslims toward modern education was transformation of Nigerian economy in the 70s during the oil boom period. The oil boom enabled the flow of billions of Naira into federal government coffer. General Yakubu Gowon's military administration engaged in building infrastructures, institutions and industrialization, as a result there was increasing manpower demand to meet the growing economy [13].

### *Modern Islamic Schools in Jos North*

"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves" [14]. There is no doubt that Modern Islamic Schools are rising and spreading everywhere in the city of Jos. In the nook and cranny of the city many residential houses are being transformed into

schools. It was estimated that there are about 300 Islamic primary schools and kindergarten in Jos. There is no statistic of the annual rate of growth of these schools, but it is apparent that the rate of growth is very high. It is clear that Islamic schools have surpassed public schools in number and gradually overtaken the entire non Islamic private schools.

#### *General Character of Islamic Modern Schools in Jos*

One of the striking features of Modern Islamic Schools is their non-conventional appearance, since most of them were originally residential houses converted into schools. Since the buildings were not originally designed for school purposes, very few among them possessed standard school building. The environment is creating difficulties and constrain for congenial learning and management atmosphere. Moreover, there is scarcely, any room for expansion, most especially as number of new applicants is increasing every year.

Most of these schools contained large number of students on the average of 300 each. For instance, Nasidi Secondary School has 300 students, Ibrahim Memorial Secondary School has about 400, and Al-Hilal Secondary School has 600 students, an estimated average of about 23,400 students in the 77 Islamic Schools that have registered with their association in Jos. One interesting phenomenon is that in almost all of these schools female students outnumbered male students by about 60 to 50 percent ratio.

Some of the Modern Islamic Schools are established by religious organizations in order to make sure that their children are raised with good Islamic orientation according to their own *Aqidah* (belief system). For instance, according to the leader of *Jama'atul Izalatil Bid'ah Wa iqamatu al Sunnah*, Sheikh Muhammad Sani Yahaya Jingir, his organization has 4, 451 primary schools with 3.3 million pupils in Nigeria and abroad. Other organizations such as Nuruddeen, Ansaruddeen, Tijjaniyya and Qadiriyya Sufi orders all have their schools for teaching their children basic Islamic knowledge and morals together with government required curricula. Apart from the schools established by Islamic organizations majority have been initiated by individuals either for business purposes or for desire to improve education among Muslims community. The Managements of these Islamic schools are trying as much as possible to create Islamic atmosphere that encourage Islamic ethical values among their students. All female students are required to wear *hijab* or head covering that covers their bodies. Good morals and ethical values are encouraged. Boys and girls are not allowed to mix freely as in the public schools which encourage mixing and social interaction between male and female students.

The quality of staff is increasing every day. In the last few years most of the staff of the Modern Islamic Schools possessed only secondary school certificates, but now majority are university graduates or National Certificate for Education (NCE) holders.

The most pressing problem of teachers in Modern Islamic Schools is lack of adequate salary and other working incentives. As a results of that many of them have other part time jobs to complement their insufficient salary usually around N10,000 to N20, 000 per month.

From what was gathered, many parents are not much co-operating with the Islamic Schools most especially in paying school fees and buying learning materials for their children. Even though the school fees of the majority of the Islamic schools is a peanut compare to government and other private schools, most parents find it difficult to pay in time. The fees usually range from N2, 000 to N3, 000 Naira per term. But parents use familiarity between them and the managements to keep on postponing the payment of the fees.

It is obvious that there is mark of improvement in the general Muslims students' dedication and devotion to learning than in the past decades. Understanding the importance and relevance of science in the contemporary Nigerian situation make these schools to introduce science subjects. They are trying as much as possible to have relatively equipped laboratory for science subjects. But still most of the laboratories are not up to standard due to lack of fund.

#### *Factors that Lead to the Spread of Islamic Schools in Jos*

Muslim population of Jos experienced rapid growth in recent times, the need for education increased and government cannot provide education for the vast number of children that are coming of age. So, Islamic schools and other private schools appear to fill the gap which government cannot. The traditional Qur'anic schools are gradually diminishing in number and because people are increasingly becoming disenchanting with their quality and ability to provide effective religious education due to their limitation to Qur'anic teaching. In the past students had to miss either morning or evening class of Qur'anic schools in order to attend conventional modern schools. The creation of Modern Islamic Schools is embraced because they can provide more effective Qur'anic lesson and modern subjects in the same environment. Parents embraced Islamic schools since they conform to Islamic dress code. Furthermore, the Modern Islamic Schools accept married young ladies; this gives them opportunity to continue with their education after marriage. The wave of Islamic awakening and the expansion of religious organizations also encouraged the proliferation of Islamic schools, because most of the organizations try to establish schools in order to inculcate their ideologies to the younger generations.

Another important way of interpreting Modern Islamic Schools phenomenon is that Muslims are trying to mould and shape modern secular education to fit their social and religious ideals so that they can acquire modern education without losing their salient religious identity. This is probably an innovation that will make the system of modern education more acceptable to the Muslim masses and therefore, remedy their educational backwardness [16].

## II. CONCLUSION

We have seen how the current educational backwardness of the Muslims was rooted in the past through resistance to the new educational system and unproductive colonial educational policy and the near collapse of government educational system. It can rightly be assumed that the evolution of Modern Islamic Schools is an attempt to provide education to Muslims children within Islamic environment.

This development is also a step of correcting educational imbalance between Muslims and non-Muslims in Jos and the entire northern region of Nigeria. The realization of Muslims educational aspiration lies on the success of these schools that are mushrooming everywhere in the north. But the quality of some of these schools, coupled with many challenges facing them can render their full success at stake.

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