

ISLAMICS, SCHOLARSHIP AND SERVICE TO SOCIETY:

A FESTSCHRIFT FOR IS-HAQ OLANREWAJU OLOYEDE



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Abstract

Islamic Studies is one of the subjects taught at the junior and senior secondary schools in Nigeria. However, it is not accorded the befitting status in the National Policy on Education (NPE), as reflected in the subject's curriculum at junior and senior secondary schools in the country. Till date, the status of the subject has been changing and retrogressive. For instance, in the 1981 edition of the NPE, it was classified as a core subject. In the 1998 edition, its status was changed to "optional" and in the 2012 edition, it suffered a major setback as it was downsized and subsumed under a subject, namely, Religious and National Values alongside Civic Education and other units. The changing status of Islamic Studies in the listed sources tends to undermine its moral values that ensure an overall development of students offering it and relevance to virtually all human endeavours. By exposing them to different aspects of Islamic Studies, such as the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, Sirah, students are imbued with moral teachings and knowledge needed for them to become responsible human beings, good citizens of the nation and make meaningful contributions to all spheres of life. It is, therefore, imperative to study the dynamics at play regarding the deteriorating status of Islamic Studies in the Nigerian secondary schools and its corresponding negative effects on the moral wellbeing of the students as well as their relevance to events around them. This is done with a view to advocating for the necessity of its re-emergence as a core subject in the Nigerian Secondary schools. This is necessary to produce students with moral and intellectual qualities which the nation needs at the moment to surmount numerous moral deficits in which the youths are enmeshed. Historical and analytical methods are employed to achieve the research objectives, while relevant materials from the libraries are consulted.

Introduction

Islamic Studies is an art discipline which deals with the rituals, laws, values, and morals of Islam as a religion. It is about Islam as a religion and as a living civilization with rich, long and enduring history. It refers to concepts, issues and developments from and related to Islam. In other words, it is a terminology used to describe an aspect of Theological Sciences which seeks to influence natural, human and social sciences in their service to God and humanity from the prism of Islamic credo.¹⁶³ Islamic Studies is of comprehensive scope as it

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¹⁶³ Is-haq Olanrewaju Oloyede, "Islamics: The Conflux of Disciplines", The One Hundred and Sixteenth (116th) Inaugural Lecture, University of Ilorin, 11th October 2012, p.12.

consists of the study of the Qur'an and Hadith, ethics, history, law, philosophy, sociology, economics, banking, politics, etc. Given this, Oloyede has argued that the nomenclature, i.e. Islamic Studies, cannot effectively capture the broad scope of the subject. Hence, he proposed the term *Islamiyyat* (Islamic) as against the widely used "Islamic Studies".¹⁶⁴ Islamic Studies is one of the subjects taught in Nigerian secondary schools at senior and junior levels. It is also a course of study in the university at B.A, M.A., and PhD levels.¹⁶⁵ The history of the subject can be traced to the pre-independence period; the northern part of the country as at that time, being a predominantly Muslim community, promoted both Arabic and Islamic Studies mainly as a religious duty. At that material time, the system of education was informal, yet the twin subjects had huge intellectual, moral and spiritual impacts on the people of that region. In turn, the society was secure, stable and peaceful as the young and old led responsible lives.

However, the status of Islamic Studies in the National Policy on Education has undergone three different changes which have had negative impacts on it. Initially, it was considered as a core subject that students must pass like any other core subjects such as English. Subsequently, it was regarded an optional subject, and students were at the liberty to offer it like any other optional subjects. About a decade ago, it was subsumed under one subject, namely, Religious and National Values, which includes other Civic Education and other units. Recently, its former status has been restored; like before, it is now offered at the junior secondary school as a compulsory subject, while it is an optional subject at the senior secondary level.

This fluctuating status of Islamic studies tends to undermine the pivotal role of the subject as a vehicle for moral education and overall development of the students that offer it. Hence it is apposite to probe into possible factor(s) responsible for this demeaning treatment of Islamic studies in the school curriculum. Also, it is important to argue that such retrogressive policy on Islamic Studies is largely responsible for growing moral decadence among the youths who are now venturing into more sophisticated means of perpetrating crimes and social vices such as cybercrime i.e. yahoo yahoo, etc.

Islamic Studies and National Policy on Education

Education is considered an indispensable catalyst for the progress and development of any nation. Aware of this fact, Nigeria, like any other nations, rolled out a policy on education which would guide the process of proper education of her citizenry at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. As well as material development, the philosophy of education in Nigeria seeks to achieve the following moral goals:

- a. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;

¹⁶⁴ Is-haq Olanrewaju Oloyede, "Islamic: The Conflux of Disciplines", p16.

¹⁶⁵ In agreement with Oloyede, the wide scope of Islamic studies is a fact that can never be denied by reasonable minds. Apart from the traditional scope of the discipline, Islamic studies also encompasses sociology, political science, economics, banking and finance, bioscience, architecture, etc. Due to this awareness, many universities in the Muslim world such as in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, etc. consider Islamic studies (Islamic revealed knowledge) as an independent faculty. At the International Islamic University, Malaysia, for instance, Islamic studies (Islamic Revealed Knowledge together with Human Sciences) is an independent faculty (Kuliyyah) having Qur'an and Sunnah, Usul al-Din, Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, and General Studies as departments. This is different from what is obtainable in most Nigerian universities where Islamic studies is, at best, regarded as a department alongside Arabic or at worst, reduced to a Unit under the Department of Religions or Religious Studies. A few exemptions are Bayero University Kano and Usmanu Dan Fodio University, Sokoto. At the University of Ilorin, Islamic Studies remains a unit in the Department of Religions alongside Christian and Comparative Units. Needless to say, If given an independent status, Islamic Studies will fare better as it will be able to expand its scope to the maximum level, beyond its current restriction to the minimum level.

- b. The inculcation of right types of values and attitudes for the survival of individual and the Nigerian society;¹⁶⁶
- c. Moral and spiritual principle in the interpersonal and human relation; and
- d. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.¹⁶⁷

Going by the above, one would have assumed that the policy makers would designate Islamic Studies as one of the core subjects in the school curriculum at junior and secondary levels not only for students of Arts, but also for those in Commercial and Science classes. This is in view of the fact that Islamic Studies imparts not only moral education to the students but also helps in the overall development of their characters. It inspires them to be God-fearing and dutiful to the parents. In addition, it makes them responsible and progressive members of the society. However, it is appalling to know that Islamic Studies as a subject has not been given the appropriate status that is commensurate with its value and role in the society. For a better understanding of the status of Islamic studies in the school's curriculum, it is important to go down memory lane very briefly.

The maiden National Policy on Education in Nigeria was published in 1977. It was a culmination of a National Conference on Curriculum Development, which was organised in 1969. The report of that conference was published as 'Philosophy for Education in Nigeria' and used as a working document in 1973. Among other things, the policy featured the curriculum of 6-3-3-4 structure which is now defunct. The policy made Islamic Studies, like Christian Religious Studies, a core subject at the junior secondary level, while it made it an optional subject at the senior secondary level.¹⁶⁸

Subsequently, in the revised edition of the policy in 1981, the status of Islamic Studies as a core subject was retained. However, in 1998 it was reduced to an optional subject. This lower status actually informed the lukewarm attitudes of many students toward the subject. Since, it is no longer a core subject at the junior level, the popularity of the subject started to decline.¹⁶⁹ Yet, the subject did not suffer a major setback until 2012 when its status was totally downgraded further. Unlike in the past when it bore the title of a subject, Islamic Studies was then collapsed into one of the units that constitute a subject, namely, Religious and National Value. This elicited reactions from stakeholders who rejected the demeaning treatment meted on Islamic studies. On the long run, the subject of Islamic Studies was removed from the Religious and National Value. It is now an independent subject as it used to be in the past. In other words, it is now a compulsory subject at the junior level, while it remains an optional subject at the senior level.

By implication, the 'demotion' of Islamic studies in the (NPE) is a compromise of the moral values which the subject seeks to impart into students. More so, it is a systematic way of opening the gate to moral vices for the youths who are supposed to be exposed to moral lessons embedded in Islamic Studies such as fear of God, dutifulness to one's parents, good neighbourliness, sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness.

It should, however, be noted that there is an exception to the national policy towards Islamic Studies; some state governments have made the subject compulsory for students at both junior and secondary schools. This is true of many northern states such as Borno, Kano, Sokoto, etc where Islamic studies is not only made a compulsory subject for Arts students, but also for Commercial and Science students. This is to expose students to moral

¹⁶⁶The National Policy on Education, (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Education, 1977)

¹⁶⁷The National Policy on Education, (Lagos, NERDC, 1998) p.15

¹⁶⁸Muhib O. Opeloye, "The Place of Religion in the Secondary School Curriculum Within the Nigerian Educational System", in Amidu Sanni, An Unfamiliar Guest in a Familiar Household: Arabic and Islamic Studies, pp. 23-24

¹⁶⁹Muhib O. Opeloye, "The Place of Religion in the Secondary School Curriculum Within the Nigerian Educational System", pp. 22-23. Adedeji, L. Lekan, "The Place of Islamic Studies in Nigeria's Policy on Education, NATAIS, vol.6 No.3, September, 2003, p. 16

teachings of Islam which would guide their thoughts and actions especially in future when they become leaders in the society.¹⁷⁰ However, the status of Islamic studies in the southern part of the country is as enshrined in the national policy. It is compulsory at the junior level, while it is optional at the senior level.

Possible Factor (s) Responsible for NPE Indifference towards Islamic Studies

In as much as there can be no smoke without fire, there must be some factors that informed the status accorded any such subject in a given school curriculum. According to Crammer and Brown, certain factors and considerations condition the kind of education system that is adopted as a policy. As such, they identified the following factors:

- a. The sense of national unity;
- b. General economic situation;
- c. Basic belief and traditions, i.e. religious and cultural heritage;
- d. Status of progressive educational thought;
- e. Language problem; and
- f. Political background and attitude towards international co-operation and understanding.¹⁷¹

In the same vein, Koseman classified education and national character into four things, namely, history, politics, economy, and sociology.¹⁷²

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria seems to have reflected some of the factors identified by Cramer and Brown as mentioned above. A cursory study of the school curriculum would reveal that the sense of national unity, general economic situation, political background and attitude toward international co-operation, informed the decision to make English and Mathematics as core subjects across classes. This is especially so, given the fact that English is a lingua franca of the country. Its status as a core subject in the secondary schools would position it as a unifying factor because all students would easily identify with it. However, basic beliefs and traditions as embodied in Religious studies (Islamic Studies) needed to strengthen the national unity, are not given the required attention, despite the intrinsic importance of belief system and traditions among the people of any community. The optional status which is given the subject is derogatory and demeaning. This implicates the educational planners as being insensitive towards the overall development and building of the nation on the foundation of moral values imparted into the young ones to become responsible future leaders.

The justification for relegating Islamic Studies, (along Christian Studies) as given by the educational planners is hard to believe. They gave the following as reasons that prompted their decision to systematically expunge Islamic Studies from the school curriculum:

- i. Dictates and directives from government for inclusion of new content or new version of existing content (e.g. citizenship education, War Against Indiscipline (WAI) tenet, and Mass Mobilisation for social justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) principles;

¹⁷⁰This is based on interviews with Dr. A.T. Surajudeen, a lecturer of Islamic Education at Sokoto State University, Sokoto and Hajiah U. A. Ladan, a teacher of Islamic Studies at Mafoni Secondary School, Maiduguri, Borno State on the 28th March 2024 in Lagos.

¹⁷¹Cramar, J.F and Browne, G.S, *Contemporary Education; Comparative Study of National Systems*, (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1956), p.10. As cited in Muhib O. Opeloye, "The Place of Religion in the Secondary School Curriculum Within the Nigerian Educational System", p.22.

¹⁷²Kosemani, J.M, *Comparative Education: Emergent National System*, (Port Harcourt: Abe Publishers, 1995). As cited Muhib O. Opeloye, "The Place of Religion in the Secondary School Curriculum Within the Nigerian Educational System", p.22

- ii. Global world demands (e.g. environmental education, drug abuse education);
- iii. Requests by professional bodies (geology, consumer education, Science Technology and Society (STS) and Statistics;
- iv. Complaints by stake holders, e.g. demand for removal of modern Mathematics and moral education as subjects on their own from school curriculum.¹⁷³

The above justifications are actually the very reasons the status of Islamic Studies should be upgraded and made a core subject at both junior and secondary levels. These flimsy excuses cannot be appealing to a discerning mind. Hence, there is need to wonder and ponder as to speculate on possible factors that precipitated that insensitive decision. This process can be enhanced with proper understanding of socio-political realities of the country as at the time the new edition of National Policy on Education was unveiled.

It has been noted above that, the status of Islamic Studies was reduced to an optional subject in 1998 as against the core subject status which it enjoyed in the 1977 edition and maintained in the 1981 revised edition. It would be recalled that 1998 was the eve of the return of Democracy to Nigeria, thereby ushering in the fourth republic. Democracy as a system of government is based on certain principles and seeks to promote certain values which are characterized with freedom and rights. More so, it thrives in a secular environment where religion is given no or low patronage. Because religion is believed to be an impediment to the realization of the lofty values of democracy such as absolute freedom of thought which is recognized in the religion albeit with limitation. In model democracies, such as United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), Religious education is not a core subject at their high schools and colleges. Therefore, it makes sense to speculate that the major reason the religious education was relegated in the nation's education policy is the fact that it is contrary to the principles of democracy. For, the conducive terrain for democracy is a secular community where religion enjoys no or low patronage. However, the country did not assume a full-scale secular status like those western countries mentioned above due to certain factors such as the religious consciousness of her people.

Yet, the educational planners were unrealistic as they seemed to desire a secular environment for the educational policy to bear the expected fruits through which the nation would develop and prosper with the production of graduates that are professionals in Science and Technology. Though the policy was prepared during the military era, there are grounds to assume that the planners were conscious of the fact that the military regime was an ad-hoc arrangement and that democracy is a permanent form of government which was imminent at that particular time.

Negative Impacts of Lower Status of Islamic Studies on the Youths

Between when the subject of Islamic studies was deprived of an independent status and when it was partially restored, students at the secondary schools were deprived of moral teachings. This is manifest in the new and modern ways of perpetrating crimes and promoting moral vices by many teenagers in the country. Moral decadence among the youths has become a norm, rather than an exception. Secondary schools have since become breeding grounds for cultists and prostitutes among the students with rising scourge of drug abuse. Cases of such immoral activities are reported in national dailies, as well as on radio and television stations across the country. Far from being limited to broken homes or lack of parental care¹⁷⁴, the rising juvenile delinquency in the country is fundamentally due to the deficit in religious teachings in the teenagers. Teachers of Islamic studies who are supposed to play the reforming role in relation to the young minds are rendered inactive because the

¹⁷³ The National Policy on Education, (Lagos, NERDC, 1998)

¹⁷⁴ Adegun, O. A., An Analysis of Offences Committed by Youths in Selected Remand Homes in South West Nigeria, Implication for School Administrators, Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 4(1), 2013.

subject has been relegated. They have been denied the opportunity of inculcating moral values in individuals that will immune them from social vices and atrocities. Using moral teachings in the Qur'an, teachers have the capacity to mould the teenagers and purge their hearts of vices to become responsible members of the society. Concerning this, Allah says:

وَالَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ (الجمعة: 2)

He it is Who has sent to the gentiles a Messenger from among themselves, one who rehearses to them His verses, purifies their lives, and imparts to them the Book and the Wisdom although before that they were in utter error; (Jumu'ah: 2).

In addition to the role of teachers of Islamic studies in inculcating moral values in the youths through teaching, they are also role models to the youths. Due to their deficit in knowledge and experience that guide one in making wise decisions in life, youths are expected to look up to their teachers as role models. However, with the relegation of Islamic Studies, teenagers missed the great opportunity and could not have access to teachers of Islamic studies as role models to be emulated. With the vacuum created, many teenagers have since taken artistes like musicians and actors as role models and emulate their lifestyles as celebrities. There is no doubt that a large number of these artists glorify materialism, promote hedonism, and spread alcoholism which many teenagers now crave passionately.

The Need for Re-Introduction of Islamic Studies as a Core Subject at the Secondary School

The overall character of an educated community is largely determined by the kind of education members of that community receive at various levels of education. Where moral values are not inculcated into students at the formative stages of their lives, the community in which they live will suffer the consequences. As such, the current moral decadence among the old and the young in the country can be traced to our education system which gives absolute priority to Science and Technology at the detriment of Moral Education. This kind of education system inevitably encourages unquenchable desires for materialism, as symbolised by reckless predilection for wealth accumulation. The logical consequence of this materialistic tendency is corruption and moral decadence which is the bane of our society. One vivid and undeniable negative consequence of our educational policy is rampant indiscipline among the teenagers in our learning institutions at all levels of education. In addition to this, the culture of corrupt practices by public office holders and politicians is a manifestation of corrupt system of education we are operating in this country. With the level of corruption in the country keeping increasing day by day with impunity, one cannot but be puzzled at the kind of education the corrupt public officers who embezzled public fund received. Based on this negative effect of western education in Nigeria, an extremist group has declared that western education is evil, hence prohibited (Boko Haram). While this conclusion is extremely outrageous, the fact remains that the current education system that is devoid of moral cum religious education is counterproductive.

Therefore, there is need for the current National Policy on Education to be revised with a view to incorporating moral education in it in order for it to produce morally and academically responsible citizens. It is high time priority was given Islamic Studies which is the most required subject to help restore and maintain sanity in our society. Among the justifications for relegating Islamic Studies in the 1998 edition NPE, as mentioned earlier, was the need to ensure War Against Indiscipline and curb drug abuse. One is forced to ask if the so-called core subjects like English can help in achieving the above objectives. The

educational planners have only employed the subjective method in denying the fact that Religious Education (Islamic Studies) is the only potent weapon by which to effect the War Against Indiscipline and stem the tide of drug abuse head long. For, it furnishes adequate moral teachings which mould the young ones to be responsible and patriotic members of the community.

If Islamic studies is taught as an independent subject in our secondary schools, teenagers would be exposed to moral teachings that will guide their relationship with their Creator, their parents, and members of the society. Essentially, their exposure to Islamic teachings will make them conscious of five-daily prayers which will keep them away from evil thoughts and bad acts as guaranteed in the Qur'an thus:

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ..

For sure, prayer takes one away from vices and evils... [Ankabut:45]

Conclusion

In the preceding paragraphs, attempt has been made to probe into factor(s) responsible for the current inferior status of Islamic Studies in our school curriculum. This is borne out of the strategic place of the subject as a veritable vehicle for moral rejuvenation which is dearly required in our society. It is an established fact that, for an even development to take place in a given society, the education policy must be balanced as to produce a morally and academically sound literate. While attention must be given to science-based subjects to enhance technological advancement and stimulate economy, art subjects like Islamic Studies, which inculcates moral education in teenagers, should not be neglected. Otherwise, the end-result would be a set of literate people with moral bankruptcy, which is the case now in the country. Despite academic qualifications, many literate people are poor illiterate, as far as moral credentials are concerned. The negative impact of the neglect of moral education, as taught in Islamic studies, is also manifest in a generation of youths who have propensity for laxity and moral vices. To ensure a balanced development, there is need for the review of the current National Policy on Education in order to give Islamic Studies its place of pride, by making it a core subject in the school curriculum for students in Arts, Commercial and Science classes at both junior and senior levels. This will go a long way in imparting right attitude in the people to become responsible and patriotic members of the society.