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THE EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC STUDIES IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN ERIN OSUN, OSUN STATE

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Abstract

Private Islamic schools are schools owned by individuals or cooperate bodies for the teaching of Arabic and Islamic studies. These schools include the traditional Qur'anic schools and the modern schools for Arabic and Islamic studies. The traditional Qur'anic and ilimi schools in every community in Nigerian society are the feeders for modern madaris that award primary and secondary Arabic certificates in Nigeria. The situation is not different in Erin Osun, Osun State. This work, using a historical research method with a combination of observation and interview as tools, studied the growth and development of Islamic literacy in the Erin Osun with a view to identifying the degree of development of the study in the town and factors that determine the growth of the study in the town. Findings of the work revealed that the growth of privately owned Islamic schools in Erin Osun has a slow development consequent upon unfavorable learning environment and circumstance. It is on this basis that the authors suggest government intervention.

Key Words: *Evolution, Development, Islamic Studies, Private Schools, Erin Osun*

Introduction

Islamic Studies is founded under the teaching of Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. These studies which are basically sciences of those two sources, are considered the backbone for the practice of Islam in the world as a whole and in the non-arab environments in particular. In Nigeria, the advent of Islam in any given environment is considered the birth of Islamic literacy in such environment. The recitation of portions of the Qur'an on *salat* incite in the mind of worshippers, the inquisitiveness for the learning of the Qur'an and understanding of its meaning. Before the coming of the colonial masters, Arabic education has prospered in the hands of individuals and organisations initially for the purpose of worship and later for commercial, political and administrative purposes. This form of education which flourished in the northern Nigeria in the early 19th century later spreads to the south. The efforts of private individuals in the establishment of Islamic schools enhanced the spread of the teaching and learning of Islamic studies in Nigeria and particularly in the southern part. These established schools are

challenged by poor funding and coordination of the schools. This work studied the growth and development of Islam in Erin Osun with emphasis on the evolution of Islamic learning in the region with a view to identify challenges faced by the schools of Islamic learning in the town and preferring solutions to the problems faced by the schools. Historical research method was adopted with structured interview and personal observation used as tools for data collection and analysis.

Islam in Erin Osun

Erin-Osun is located 9.6km from Osogbo, the capital of Osun State, and about the same distance from Ede. Erin-Osun was founded in 18th century, in an open grassland by Oba Oyágbòdùn-Àyòkà, a great hunter and a descendant of a renowned hunter and prince of Ile-Ife called Odùmósà-Apááyán.¹ Odùmósà who, in a stronger version of the story, fled from Ile-Ife to an unknown destination on Ifa Oracle's advice along with his supporters, to escape the wrath of Oranmiyan, was hastening the members of his team in the journey to move fast which in Yoruba means "*Erin*", "*Erin*". This command to move fast later

hooame the name for the people who settled at the place he made the command.²

The actual date of the introduction of Islām to Erin-Osun cannot be given with precision. Like many other parts of Yorubaland,³ The first set of the Muslims in the area worshipped privately and secretly for many years before they could practise their faith publicly. The contact of Islam with the people of Erin-Osun can be attributed to three different sources. The first was through a cleric known as Baba-Kau,⁴ the father of Muhammad Nūh; who was the first Imām of Erin-Osun. Baba-Kau migrated with his people from Erin-Ile in Kwara State to Erin-Osun. He embraced Islam during his sojourn at one of the villages of Ilorin before Jalumi war. He came back to Erin-Ile and settled at "ehin igbo" with his son, Muhammad Nuh, preaching Islam and rendering healing services to the people. He was practising his new religion with his son in which they were joined later with other new converts among the indigenes who also accepted Islam during their sojourn in various places where Islam was being practised⁵.

Muhammad Nūh demarcated a place for his worship at *Òke-Kàú* and later built it as a Mosque, this was the first Mosque in Erin-Osun. Being the vanguard of Islam in Erin-Osun, Muhammad Nūh, according to a stronger version of the story, was made the first Imām of the Mosque, and later stepped aside for his brother Muhammad Raji, who was more learned than him⁶. During the era of Oba Adewuyi, the central market was established, the Muslims were then led by their Imām, Muhammad Raji and requested from the king to allocate for them a portion of land to build the Central Mosque. The request was granted and the first central Mosque was built. Before then, *Jumu'ah* service was observed in Ilobu under the leadership of Chief Imām of Ilobu who was regarded as the leader of Imāms in Ilobu, Ifon and Erin-Osun. Erin-Osun people got permission of autonomy to observe their *Jumu'ah* service from Imām of Ilobu who gave them (*khutbah*) sermon to show his approval to their request.⁷

Arabic and Islamic literacy in Erin Osun

The history of Islamic education in all the non-Arabic Muslim communities is traceable to the advent of Islam in such places. Being the language of the scripture of Islam, Arabic has always been regarded as an integral part of

Islamic learning⁸. In non-Arabic-speaking Muslim countries, Arabic is studied because it is the language of the Qur'ān and, therefore, has great spiritual value. Indeed, the history of the teaching of Arabic throughout the Islamic world, but particularly in the non-Arab world, has been the history of the spread of Islam.⁹ This is one of the reasons why the elementary Arabic schools in Nigeria were called Qur'ānic schools, and both Arabic and Islamic Studies were taught simultaneously. When a pupil began to read the Arabic alphabet, he did so with an intention to read the Qur'ān.¹⁰

With the advent of Islam in Erin-Osun, Muslim parents had started sending their children to learn the Qur'an and Arabic under the supervision of scholars. It was established that the children used to gather themselves in the house of their Islamic teacher (*Mu'alim*) and learn the Glorious Qur'ān and other rudiments of Islamic and Arabic learning. However, it is difficult to say with precision when Islam and its learning got to Erin-Osun. Arabic and Islamic learning passed through three stages in Erin Osun:

The Formation Period

The beginning of Arabic education was as old as the time Islam was introduced to the people of Erin-Osun. It was reported that some Erin-Osun Muslim children used to go to Ilobu to learn the Qur'ān while others stay behind to learn it in Erin Osun from Imam Muhammad Raji of *Kau* compound.¹¹ The situation remained like that till the arrival of Alufa Muhammadul-Awwal Alufa Okun, a distinguished Islamic and Arabic scholar, who established the first standard Arabic and Islamic school (*Madrasah*) in Erin-Osun. Alufa Muhammad Al-Awwal Alufa Okun of *Asikan* compound who was a popular *sekere* drummer¹²

Shaikh Muhammad-Awwal Alufa-Okun was born to a traditionalist family of Pa Durojaye Ayinde and Madam Ola-Egungun Abegbe in the year 1890, at Asikan compound of Erin-Osun.¹³ He was a popular *sekere* drummer, who travelled to Ghana on commercial basis as a professional *sekere* drummer. While in Ghana, he embraced Islam and became a Muslim there. After his conversion to Islam, he became interested in Qur'ānic and Islamic education. Therefore, he studied Islamic and Arabic knowledge from a great scholar; *Shaikh Al-Hasan*, who was a contemporary of

Shaikh *Tajul-Adab* of Ilorin during his sojourn in Ghana. He later came back home and settled down as an Islamic educator, a teacher and a preacher.¹⁴ He settled at Erin-Osun and established a modernized Arabic and Islamic training centre; where various branches of Islamic and Arabic knowledge were being imparted on students who flooded the school. Alufa Okun's method of teaching Islam and its knowledge attracted the attention of many people due to his great erudition and his outstanding knowledge of *Tafsīr*, Arabic Grammar and Astrology. He became famous within a very short period of his arrival. He named his school *Al Madrasah* (the school).¹⁵ He was alone teaching his students till he got in contact with Alufa Zubair, an Ilorin indigene, and employed him at Muslim community of Oba Ile as a teacher to assist him in teaching his students due to his (Zubair) competence and vast knowledge. Initially, Alufa Okun's house was used as the centre of Qur'anic education before it was later moved to Erin-Osun Central Mosque due to an increase in the number of learners. The enrolments increased day-in day-out within the town of Erin-Osun and neighbouring towns, such as Ilobu, Ifo, Okinni and Iwo. Among the students who came for enrolment during that period was Shaikh Muhammad Jamiu Alurin from Ilobu whose footprint on the affairs of the *madrasah* can never be forgotten.¹⁶ The arrival of Alufa Zubair Aremu to *Al-Madrasah* at Erin-Osun with his vast knowledge in Arabic and Islamic education boosted the image of the *madrasah* and marked the beginning of a new era in Islamic and Arabic scholarship in Erin-Osun. A modern arabic and Islamic school in a serene environment was organised in which the students were allowed to use desks and benches, writing in their exercise books with either pens or pencils. Various branches of Arabic and Islamic education such as *Nahw*, *Sarf*, *Tawhīd*, *Tajwīd*, *Imlā'* etc. were taught. The students who benefited from *Al-Madrasah* can be classified into two:

1. The scholars who sought for additional specialist knowledge from Imam Muhammad Al-Awal Alufa Okun. They were:

-Alhaji' Muhaliy Ahmad Adedimeji Aroworeki from Iwo;
-Alhaji Muhammad Jamiu of Onidun compound;

-Ash-Shaikh *Adam Al-Ilori* received the knowledge of astronomy from him via his student *Aroworeki*.¹⁷

(ii) The second category are those who were brought up by Imam Alufa Okun himself or Alufa Zubair. The list include:

-Alhaji Muhammad Megida of *Asikan* compound, the Olori Omokewu of Erin-Osun;
-Alhaji Kilani Agbejabata former Imam of Agbejabata Mosque;
-Alhaji Jimoh Onidun, late Chief Imam of Alubati, via Ile-Ife, Osun-state;
-Alhaji Muhammad Yusuf Alaka, *Mufasssir* of Alubati, via Ile-Ife, Osun-state;
-Alhaji Abdul Qadir Salahudeen Ojoko, late Imam of Agbede Mosque

Imam Muhammad Al-Awwal Alufa Okun made a prigrimage to Mecca and Modinah in the year 1959 and died in 1972.¹⁸

The Period of Restructuring

The teaching and learning of Arabic was gaining ascendancy until 1955 when it took another dimension with the introduction of free primary education by Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Government in Western Region. Muslim parents started agitating for Islamic Studies to be incorporated into Nigerian Educational curricula. Their request was granted and many Arabic/Islamic teachers were employed and posted to public schools, to teach Islamic Religious Knowledge.¹⁹ Most of the graduates of *Al-Madrasah* who formerly were teaching in the *Madrasah* of Erin-Osun, including Alufa Zubair, were appointed and posted to various schools. Also many students withdrew from *Madrasah* and enrolled in government schools. The *Madrasah* became empty due to lack of teachers coupled with withdrawal of the students.²⁰

Consequently, the well organised Arabic schools where students were taught Arabic and Islamic Studies in the morning hours became extinct and new evening Arabic classes were introduced. These include:

1. *Madrasah* Ansarul Islam
2. *Ile-Keu* Alufa-Ore Gaa Ore
3. *Madrasah* Alufa Hamzat Aniyani
4. *Ile-Kewu* Alufa Raji *Mufasssir* Atambala
5. *Ile-Kewu* Alufa Rasheed Bastami Baale Ila
6. *Ile-Kewu* Alufa Rauf Kau Oke- Kau
7. *Darul-'ulūm* of Alufa Ismail Kolawole Okiki

The Renaissance Period

In the early 21st century, Erin-Osuns was blessed with a modern Arabic school known as *Darul-Hekmat International Arabic school* established in the year 2001 by *Ustadh Abdullateef Abdul-Azeez Aniyah*. Born into Aniyah's family, Abdullateef AbdulAzeez Acquired his primary education in his home town just as he studied his elementary Arabic education under Alfa AbdulRahman. His father achieved his aim when he enrolled Abdullateef to Islamic Institute, Ede where he had a nine years Arabic training before he now proceeded to The Islamic University of Madina in 1995 for a degree in Shariah. He bagged his masters degree at the university of Ibadan in 2004 and another degree at the Ekiti State University in 2018. *Darul-Hekmat International Arabic school* established by this scholar comprises of pure Arabic and Islamic school from the Kindergarten (*Al-Tamhid*), Primary (*Al-Ibtidā'iyah*), Junior Secondary School (*Al-I'dādiyyah*) and Senior

Secondary class (*Al-thanāwīyyah*). The school is an affiliate of *Al Azhar University* of Cairo, Egypt. The school has since been graduating students, and many of such students have gained admissions into tertiary institutions to further their studies in Nigeria and abroad.

Also Arabic learning is being boosted with the emergence of other Islamic Nursery and Primary Schools with Arabic Studies incorporated into their curricula, such schools include *Sodiq Model School* established 1992, *Darul-Hekmat International Nursery and Primary School* established 2001, *Iqra' Nursery and Primary School* established 2003, *Al-Haq Nursery and Primary School* established 2012, by Malam Murtada Ademiluye, just to mention a few.

Notable Private Arabic and Islamic Schools in Erin Osun as at February, 2023

Notable private erin osun as at early 2023 include the following:

S/N	Name Of School	School Proprietor	Category of School	Estimated no of Students
1	Darul hekmat international college	Ustadh Abdullateef Aniyah	Modern school	500
2	Islamic international school	Ustadh Mutahar Sariki	Modern school	200
3	Ummahani school for the study of Arabic	Ustadh Abdulrahman abdukkareem	Quranic school	150
4	Sodeeq memorial school	Ustadh Shafi'u Adeyemo	Quranic school	100
5	Al-Irshadul Islami school	Ustadh Abdulrasheed M. Jamiur	Quranic school	40
6	Madrasatu talimil arabiyyati agbesinga	Ustadh Muhammad Agbesinga	Traditional	30
7	Darul ulumul arabiyyah Mokin	Ustadh Nafiu	Traditional	30

Source: A personal observation by one of the authors between 15th and 17th November, 2022

In the table above, schools identified as modern are schools will organised set-up. These schools have the thanawiy (senior secondary) section, the idadiy (Junior secondary school) section and the ibtida'iy (primary) section. Some of these schools have attached to them, the conventional primary and secondary school running along side with the arabic schools. In the modern arabic schools, students are exposed to more than fifteen subjects among which are *nahw*(arabic grammare), *sarf* (arabic syntax), *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet), *Qur'an* (lerning of recitation of the Qur'an), *imla'* (dictation), *balagha* (rhetorics) and *arud* (prosody).

Products of these schools are trained for proficiency in arabic and upon graduation, the certificate is considered an equivalence of WAEC/SSCE and a requisite for admission into higeher institutions of learning within and outside Nigeria. In an interview with the proprietor of Dar el-hikmah, he disclosed that products of the school have graduated from universities and colleges of education in nigeria and some of them are already teachers in various public and private sescondary schools in the state and outside. He added that products of the school are not left behind in the propagation of the religion of islam and dissemination of kn owledge

The Qur'anic schools are schools concerned with the teaching of the qur'an. Graduates of these schools will have to proceed to any of the modern schools if he is interested in acquiring other subjects on the religion of islam. In the contemporary period, students in these schools are being exposed to the teachings of the prophet but unlike the modern schools, patronage of these schools are children who attend the schools in preparation for further studies in the field. The products are not ripe enough to join the labour market.

The traditional schools are the schools owned by the makondoro groups. This group basically depend on the traditional method of knowledge impartation. Their common feature is the constant use of big turban in and outside religious functions.

Challenges facing the private owned arabic schools in Erin Osun

To study challenges facing private schools of islamic education in Erin Osun, a structured interview was conducted with the proprietors of of the seven popular arabic schools in the town. The following are report of the the interview so conducted.

- 1 **Parents' Attitude.** The disdainful manner of many parents, in which they treat their children attending Islamic schools does more harm than good. An average Irepodun Muslim parents who are spending heavily on western education for their children, considers Arabic and Islamic education as secondary. Some parents send their children to Arabic and Islamic schools, who in their opinion and conclusion, cannot mentally cope with western education or who have one form of disability or the other.
- 2 **The society:** What is happening in the society is a reflection of what happens in the family. The Nigeria society in which Irepodun Local Government Area is part of, does not see anything beneficial in the Arabic/Islamic system of education, other than religious knowledge. There is an impression that anybody undertaking Islamic education can only function either as a full-time Mallam teacher being a profession that is already looked down upon.
- 3 **Inadequacy of Qualified Teachers** Due to the fact that incentives for the teachers of Arabic /Islamic schools are very low,

available ones lack the zeal to do the job properly as a result of lack of adequate incentives. They prefer to engage their students for *Jalabi* (Spiritual healing) with their rich customers instead of engaging them in teaching and imparting knowledge on them. Many graduates of *Madrasah* who rush to establish schools for lack of job opportunities tend to employ unqualified teachers because they cannot afford to pay the salaries of the qualified ones.

- 4 **Acceptability** There is the problem of acceptability. Some people will consider the programme as a way of Islamizing the citizen of the community just as colonialists and the missionaries used Western education to convert Nigerians to Christianity. In this wise, the Christians and some liberal Muslims would frown at it and are likely to frustrate any attempt to make it possible in the same way as they are opposed the full implementation of the *Shari'ah*.
- 5 **Poor Funding** The resources are also very vital for a programme of *Madrasah* system of education to succeed. It requires both human and material resources. Most modern *Madrasah* (Arabic/Islamic schools) are poorly funded, especially, in terms of infrastructure. While some schools don't take school fee from the students, those that take school fee charge meagre amount for fear of losing students
- 6 **Lack of Unified Syllabus** The syllabus in operation varies from one *Madrasah* to another, that is, there is no co-ordination between one school and another. This fosters division among the schools and gives room for criticisms which often lead to unhealthy rivalry among the schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Erin Osun belongs to the south west ancient cities in Nigeria with Yoruba as its inhabitants. The inhabitants were known for traditional religious practices before the advent of Islam. Century before the penetration of the colonial masters, islam had prospered as a formidable religion with its education as a major weapon of propagation. Even with the establishment of western schools in the city, little concern was given to islamic studies under the government but for some individuals whose concern was basically the spread of the religion of islam, the knowledge of islamic studies became

widely spread and products of the sole propriatored schools of islamic studies and arabic education now compete with their conterperets in the labour market. It is no longer a news that the impact of these schools is felt within and outside the town for its capacity in creating job opportunities to citizens alongside enhansing their spirituality. Considering the challenges faced by these schools despite their contributions to the development of the town and its environs, it is suggested that:

-government should come to the aid of these schools in financing the needs of the schools. The fact that these schools are owned by individuals shoud not be a reason why they should not benefit from the government. What should be considered is their contributions to the society and not their ownership status.

-proprietors of schools of learning in the town should work on harmonising their syllabus. The modern arabic schools that produce students for further studies should, as a matter of necessity, work on getting a single and unique syllabus that will lead the products to studying in institutions of higher learning in the country

-the need for parents to have a change of attitude towards the study of Arabic is imperative. Pupils in these schools need to be encouraged and be made to know that education is not all about white collar job. Just like the western education, islamic education has the potentiality to produce individuals that would contribute emencely to the development of the society

-anybody who teaches without being professional qualified to do so is only cheating and not teaching. Proprietors of the arabic schools should work on engaging those that are professionally qualified in the teaching of pupils in the schools. This will enhance teaching and learning processes in the schools

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⁴ *Kau* is a tittle given to an elderly man by Ilorin people, means father

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¹⁰ A.B Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*, NPS Educational Publishers, Ibadan, 1995, p.48.

¹¹ An oral interview conducted with Alhājj Muhammad Jami'u Yusuf Osolo, the Olori *Alalaajiof* Erin-Osun, Aged 93years on 27/10/2016.

¹² *Sekere*: is a musical instrument consisting of a gourd sorrounded by a net of beads. The *sekere* may be twisted, shaken or slapped to produce a suble variety of effect See, en.m.wiktionary.org/wiki/sekere.Retrieved25/10/2016

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¹⁶ An oral interview with Alhaji Mr. Jamiu Osolo...

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