TRANSPOSING ISLAMIYYAH SCHOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Change is what is constant, but the failure of Islamiyyah schools to comply with the 21st century imperatives might render their performance obsolete in the nearest future. This may have adverse effects on the preservation and spread of Islam, the goals which they stand to achieve. The purpose of this study is to bring to limelight the extent to which Islamiyyah schools are lagging behind in catching up with the 21st century imperatives. Descriptive research design was adopted because the study intended to describe the situation of *Islamiyyah* schools vis-à-vis the 21st century imperatives. The study gives full descriptions of the structures of *katātib* and *madrasah* arms of Islamiyyah schools, which show that they (the schools) are not in tune with the 21st century imperatives. What constitute the 21st century imperatives are critically analysed. Furthermore, guidelines on how the *madrasah* can meet up with the 21st century imperatives were explained. The study found that the major obstacle to meeting up with the 21st century imperatives is the mentality or mind-set of "This is how our fathers used to do it". It concluded that such attitude must change if the twenty-first century imperatives are to be met by the Islamiyyah schools.

Keywords: *Islamiyyah schools*, 21st Century, *Imperatives*, Effective
        Performance

Introduction

Islamiyyah schools are established primarily to preserve and spread Islam within Muslim communities, globally. The two levels of Islamiyyah schools that can be found are katâtîb (Basic Qur'anic school) and *madrasah* (Arabic and Islamic Studies School). The former is operated mainly in the mosque and any other convenient place, while the

latter at times is operated in a special building, but sometimes operated also inside mosque. The *madrasah* which is operated like conventional schools is the major focus here, because it is equivalent to secondary school, and their successful products do further their education at tertiary levels.

The 21st century has brought a lot of innovations to educational system with positive impact on physical structure, curriculum, students, teachers, and administration of schools. Unfortunately, majority of *madâris* (plural of *madrasah*) are still operated the way they have been operated in the past. Practically, they fail to keep abreast of the changes brought by the twenty-first century. Considering the objectives that the *madrasah* strives to achieve, it will be retrogressive to remain indifferent to the 21st century imperatives. The objective that this study intends to achieve is to expose the inadequacies of the *madâris* as found in Lagos State, as regards the 21st century imperatives. Descriptive research design was adopted to demonstrate the mode of operation of *madâris* with a view to establishing their noncompliance with the 21st century imperatives. One has to emphasize that the goal of descriptive research design is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics; therefore it is concerned with what, rather than how and why.

The study was delimited to Lagos State, which is one of the states in southwest Nigeria, as *katâtîb* and *madâris* abound in various local government areas, including Agege with *Markaz Ta'lim al-'Arabi*, Oshodi/Isolo with *Daru Da'wah* wal-Irshad Arabic School, and Ajeṛọmi/Ifẹlodun with *Darul-Falah* and others. The mode of operation of *katâtîb* and *madâris* in Lagos is typical of what obtains in the other southwest states.

Islamiyyah Schools and the Challenges of 21st Century Imperatives

The mode of operation of *katātib* is different from *madrasah* in terms of structure and learning. *Katātib* takes place either in the mosque or any convenient available space that can accommodate the teachers and students. A typical setting of *Katātib* is aptly captured in the following expression by Fafunwa:

> The Mu'allim (from which the word Mallam is derived) is seated under a tree, or in his parlour, or verandah or in his porch surrounded by volumes of the Qur'an and other Islamic books. A little farther off, but near enough to be within the reach of the teacher's long cane is some 10 to 40 pupils who squat in a semi-

circle form around the teacher…They chant different verses of the Qur'an…[1]

It is necessary to affirm that this description actually depicts the scene of olden day's *katātib*. However, such scenario is no longer common in southwest Nigeria. Basically, in *katātib,* the focus is on teaching students how to read the Qur'an only. In the olden days, the beginners usually started by using wooden slates. The materials used for writing Arabic alphabet and short verses of the Qur'an on the wooden slate were *kalam* (a wooden pen) and *tadawa* (ink produced by boiling a certain leaf). This could be written by the *mallam* or the learners themselves especially if they have acquired the skill of writing. In addition to this was the use of the popular textbook called *Qāidah al-Bagdādiyyah.*[2]The students began to use this when they have advanced in Qur'anic reading. Using of *Qāidah al-Bagdādiyyah* is still relevant in *katātib* today.

The *katātib* opens for learning activities both weekdays and at weekends, except Thursdays and Fridays. The time of weekdays varies. It could be between 4pm and 7pm or between 7pm and 10pm. But for weekends, it is usually between 10am and 1pm. *Katātib* is run by individuals or Islamic organizations. *Katātib* is mostly offered free of charge, which means that the teachers don't usually charge or earn salary, except if the *katātib* is managed by Islamic organizations. In a situation where it is managed by individuals, the time for harvest is during the *walimah* ceremony. Conducting examination, promotion from one class to another and classification of term are virtually absent in most *katātib*. Enrolment in the *katātib* is throughout the year without registration but registration has been introduced in some organized ones. The minimum age for enrolment begins from 3, 4 or 5 years old.[3] There is no specific year for graduation because the only determinant factor for graduation is when pupils have gained adequate proficiency in Qur'anic recitation.

The mode of operating *madrasah* is entirely different from *katātib*. The *madrasah* is usually operated like conventional schools with structure such as preparatory (*Tahdîr*) or (*Ibtidāi*) lower secondary *(I'dādi)* and senior secondary (*Thanawi) or (Tawjîh).*[4] In addition to this, there are wearing of uniform, writing of examination, promotion from one class to another, issuance of certificate at the end of each level as part and parcel of *madrasah*. Examples of *madrasah* operated in south-west include Kharâshî Arabic School, Ibadan, established in 1945, *Markaz T'alīm al-'Arabi al-Islâmi* (Center for Learning Arabic) established in 1952 by

Shaykh Adam Abdullah; *Al-Alūri*, *al-Ma'had al-'Arabi*, Ibadan (Institute for Learning Arabic), established in 1957 by Shaykh Muritada Abds-Salam, Madrasah *Dārud-Da'wahwal-Irshad,* Isolo, Lagos (House for Propagation and Guidance School), established in 1970 by Shaykh Mustafa Zuglūl, among others.[5]

Students are expected to spend minimum of 4 years and maximum of 8 years in *madrasah*. During their course of study, they are exposed to subjects such as *Tajwîd* (Principles of Qur'anic Reading), *Tafsîr* (Qur'anic exegesis), *Hadith* (Tradition of the Prophet), *Sîrah* (Biography), *Tarîkh* (Islamic History), *Nawh* (Arabic Grammar), *Sarf* (Morphology), *Tawhîd* (Monotheism), among others.[6]After graduation, successful products of *madrasah* can further their education to tertiary level abroad in countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, among others.

It has been observed that the operation of *madrasah* is not keeping abreast with the 21st century imperatives in various dimensions. Some *madāris* (plural of *madrasah*) still operate within residential areas or mosques which in most cases lack enough space for recreational activities or adequate and proper cross ventilation. Amazingly, the mosque, especially where it is used as school is maximally utilised by carving out as many classes as possible no matter the size of the mosque. In this case, noise interference becomes inevitable which negatively affect the quality of teaching and learning. Studies have shown that poor facilities can hinder the performance of teachers and the behaviour of students[7]. Secondly, without gainsaying, majority of *madāris* cannot boast of a functional library. One of the disadvantages of this is that the students may not understand the relevance of library to study. More importantly, for those that may have opportunity of gaining admission into foreign universities, use of library will be somehow strange to them.

Thirdly, although they have their own peculiar "curriculum", there is no standard document called curriculum in the *madāris*, and as a result, teaching and learning are done haphazardly. Curriculum is supposed to be a document that contains the programme objectives, contents (subject-matter), learning activities and evaluation.[8] This is different from using a textbook or textbooks to teach students. It is the curriculum that should determine the programme and contents of a school discipline. Non-recognition of the significance of curriculum is a factor responsible for teaching some subjects that are not relevant to the immediate environment of the students, such as using textbooks that describe the Saudi Arabian, Cairo, Iraqi, or Moroccan environments. It must be accentuated that the

essentiality of education is to prepare the learner for social integration so as not to become dysfunctional.

Fourthly, this researcher could not find a single *madrasah* that incorporates teaching of information technology in its programme of education. For instance, computer education has become imperative almost from primary school nowadays, and using video would be of great assistance in teaching some topics, such as Hajj, migration of the Prophet and Muslims from *Makkah* to *Madinah*, *Tajwîd* etc. Apparently, the paucity or lack of teachers to teach information technology in Arabic is the obvious reason for this.

Fifthly, inability to garner sufficient funds is a big impediment for the *madāris* and this shortfall has ripple effects on the schools. The schools are run mostly on deficit, and consequently the teachers are denied good welfare packages. Regular salary increment is not guaranteed not to talk of other fringe benefits. Besides, there is no gratuity of any form for the retired staff who might have served for many years. School fees are charged but grossly inadequate to run the institutions.

Sixthly, qualification for teaching is not emphasized, to the extent that it is possible for somebody with *'idādi* certificate (equivalent to junior secondary school certificate) to become a teacher in the *madāris*. Besides, most of the teachers in the *madāris* who have Bachelor degrees are without formal training in teaching profession. The situation becomes worse because there is no any form of in-service training for upgrading the teachers' skills and expertise.

Finally, there is problem of employment opportunity for the graduates of the *madāris*. This is due to two factors. Firstly, the certificate issued by the *madāris* at *Thanawiyyah* level is equivalent to senior secondary school certificate. Professionally, this does not qualify them for teaching either in primary or secondary school. Besides, deficiency in English, which is the language of communication in the public schools, is another hurdle barring them from being eligible to work in the public service. Consequently, in order to survive economically, graduates of the *madāris* take to establishing mushroom Arabic schools, serving as local Imam or as spiritual consultants when that is not part of the training given to them. Adetona in a research, revealed that some graduates of *madāris* earn their income through serving as Imams in their localities or as spiritual consultants with clienteles.[9]

The plight of the graduates of the *madāris* is worrisome, because hundreds of them are turned out every year leaving them with struggling

for survival means. For instance, the struggle for economic survival has forced some of them to engage in the practice of syncretism, which is frowned at in Islam. Furthermore, occasions such as burial, naming and marriage ceremonies are used as avenues for extorting money from the congregants to the point of repugnance, whereas the graduates of the *madāris* are supposed to be used as agents of propagating the precepts of Islam.

Requirements for Achieving the 21st Century Imperatives
Requirements for Modernizing the *Madāris*

It is an uncontestable fact that dynamism is one of the unique features of human society. The dynamic imperative forces humans to move with time in every sphere of life, which is accountable for various innovations witnessed in society. For instance, the nature of learning institutions has drastically changed in the 21st century compared to the 19th or 20th centuries. However, it has been established that the *madāris* are lagging behind in matching with the 21st century imperatives vis-à-vis learning institutions. The lacking 21st century imperatives are in the following areas:

Physical Facilities

In an ideal situation of this twenty-first century, establishing a school requires a serene and neat environment, distant from residential area. Research has shown that availability and utilization of suitable physical facilities have a great influence on performance of students.[10]Mcgowen holds that suitable physical facilities promote student learning achievements.[11]The dominant factors here are location, architecture, and quality of school building. A noisy environment will affect communication and interrupt teaching and learning. The negative effect of this on teaching is that it makes students to filter out their attention.[12]It is a fact that there are some *madāris* that have decent and befitting physical infrastructure, but majority of them are still operating in the mosques or rented apartments that are noisy.

Functional Library

Educational support services play a vital role in implementing, improving, and achieving educational goals. One of the vital educational support services is library, which is a place that houses various books on different subjects where students turn to either for carrying out assignments or for further reading. According to National Policy on

Education: "States/FCT and Local Governments, as well as proprietors of schools shall establish functional libraries in accordance with the established standards and actively promote reading culture in all their educational institutions."[12]

Relevant and Up-to-date Curriculum

Curriculum is a programme that guides the activities of a school. What to learn, how to learn, and what goals should the school pursue, are determined by the curriculum. Therefore, for any educational system to be regarded as formal, the curriculum must be its heartbeat. The importance of curriculum to educational system is to produce manpower capable of running the affairs of a country and human affairs generally.[13]

The advantage of curriculum cannot be overemphasized, because it gives a direction to the school programme just like compass gives direction to sailor, and radar to a pilot. Furthermore, the evaluation of a school's programme is very essential, whereas without a curriculum there will be no basis for evaluation. Of course, for any educational system to remain relevant to the needs of both learners and society, it must be responsive to the emerging issues of the society. It is therefore apposite to examine, in formulating a curriculum, the dynamism of society, which should be a catalyst for innovations.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Application of ICT in teaching and learning has become a prevailing tradition in both public and private schools from primary to tertiary institutions the world over. ICT "is the way in which technology produces an open door to knowledge or information through telecommunication."[14] Musa and Odeduntan explain that "ICT incorporates any tool, special device or medium which assists in the production, distribution, storage, reception and display of data."[15] The importance accorded application of ICT is so crucial that the standard of an educational institution as well as the quality of the education it imparts are judged by the level of its ICT compliance. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "ICT now permeates the education environments and underpins the very success of 21st century education."[16]

In the past 25 years, dating back to the late 1990s, research findings have manifested positive effects of how ICT aids learning, teaching and researching. It changes the role of teachers from being the sole authority in imparting knowledge by giving the students the license to

play a complementary role in teaching and learning.[17] The application of ICT expands the frontiers of knowledge as it gives both teachers and students the unrestricted access to useful and relevant information. For example, computer gives access to use of a software called *al-Maktabatul-Shamilah,* which contains numerous valuable Islamic literatures on various disciplines. On *Tafsīr* alone, the software has about 35 different literatures, which might cost millions of naira to acquire in hard copies. The students can learn practical performance of *Hajj* through video without traveling to Makkah. Through internet, students access various famous international Qur'an reciters. This encourages self-training by students on the recitation of the Holy Qur'an and similar exercises.

Professionalism and In-service Training

One of the hallmarks of educational system in the 21st century is professionalism and regular upgrading of teachers' competency. According to Nigeria's National Policy on Education, all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained. Therefore, the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession is National Certificate in Education (NCE). Besides, in-service training to aid teacher's upgrading, is mandatory for all school proprietors to provide for their teachers. In order to sustain professionalism in the teaching profession, it has become mandatory for the holders of ordinary B.A. and B.Sc. to back up their degrees with postgraduate diploma in education before they are admitted into teaching profession.[18]

The findings of this research is that most of the aforementioned requirements are not met by most of the *madāris* visited, and so they are lagging behind of the 21st century standards, and the graduates find it difficult to compete favourably with conventional schools. Yet the *madāris* are expected to play crucial roles in the preservation of Islam.

Strategies for Achieving the 21st Century Imperatives

Madāris are invaluable assets to Islam, considering their roles in preservation of Islam. Olurode aptly holds that "*madāris* are part of Islamic civilisation and central to its theory and practice."[19] In view of this, all hands should be on deck to rescue these endangered institutions from irrelevance that they are fast becoming in the 21st century. In order to achieve this, orientation for stakeholders; strategy for generating revenue; and designing an integrated curriculum are suggested.

a. Orientation for Stakeholders

The way the *madāris* are run leaves no informed person in doubt that their proprietors are conservative and the reason for this is not far-fetched. Firstly, Western education is viewed as anti-Islam or opposed to Islam; therefore, its acquisition along with Islamic and Arabic studies is highly discouraged in some quarters because of perceived negative impacts. Apparently, this mentality stemmed from the experience where some Muslims changed their religion and became Christians in the course of acquiring Western education. It is also presumed that combining Western education with Arabic and Islamic education will automatically result into deficiency in one of them. Al-Aluri asserted that such practice had failed in the past because English will have an edge over Arabic because the latter is Nigeria's lingua franca and it is spoken everywhere on the streets, in the market, in offices, and in the schools, whereas Arabic is restricted to mosque and *madāris*. Nevertheless, he (Al-Aluri) advised that Western education can be acquired before going for Arabic and Islamic education or after graduation. He concluded that whoever suggests that Western education should be integrated with Arabic and Islamic education should be fair enough to make the same suggestion for Western education schools too, otherwise such person will be very unfair in his suggestion.[20]

It is a reality that the human life is dynamic and for any educational system to remain relevant, it must be tailored towards the needs of society. Furthermore, there are many job opportunities for the graduates of *madāris* in the public sector such as teaching profession, as Imam in armed forces, members of Pilgrims' Board etc, but it requires the minimum of first degree that is impossible without English and mathematics at secondary school certificate level. Experience has shown that some graduates of *madāris* lose job opportunities based on lack of qualification. In view of this, there is need to make the proprietors understand why they have to change their mindset on Western education and see it as a partner in progress rather than as an opposition.

b. Strategy for Generating Revenue

There is clamour that Nigerian educational system is underfunded because the UNESCO's recommended 26 percent budgetary allocation is not met.[21] Nevertheless, underfunding has been identified as one of the challenges facing the *madāris* in Lagos and the rest of Nigeria's southwest. In order to solve the problem of underfunding, some higher institutions devise the means of generating additional revenue in addition

to whatever government provides, while the *madāris* have little or no tangible source of revenue than the meager fees paid by students. Yet zakat and endowment funds can be explored as additional sources of income, besides the annual graduation ceremonies. Some of the money realised can be invested for a short-term or long-term dividends.

c. Designing an Integrated Curriculum

There is the need for the *madāris* to have a common and functional curriculum which objective will center on the integration of their products into the Nigerian society. This means that the curriculum will prepare them for further studies in Nigerian tertiary academic institutions. Adedeji in an empirical research advocated a common curriculum for *madāris* as a means of effective performance.[22] In this case, the curriculum to be designed must integrate Western education whereby arts, science and commercial subjects will be taught. Better still, in order not to divert the attention of the students from their main goal, which is becoming Imams, only arts subjects may be introduced.

Advocating for integrated curriculum for *madāris* is not a new thing because *madāris* with integrated curriculum are operated in the northern part of the country, but it is not common in the southwest. There is an examination body that organises and conducts examination for *madāris* that operate integrated curriculum and the body is known as the National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies (NBAIS). The Board was established by the late Ahmadu Sardauna in 1960 and it was accredited by the National Council on Education in February 2011. Reading the vision statement of the Board, it clearly shows that it was established to preserve Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria: "The vision of NBAIS is to be at the frontline in realizing the ambition of Federal Government of Nigeria in its programme for the full integration of Western and Islamic education, the promotion of Qur'anic schools and Madrasah system of education in the country." [23]

The implementation of integrated curriculum has advantage for both the schools and students. Once the programme is brought to limelight, fees will be conveniently charged because the curriculum has responded to the need of the society. Students will have the qualification to further their studies in tertiary institutions once they have obtained five credits in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE).

Conclusion

        In the final analysis, this study found that the mode of operating *madrasah* is more advanced than the *katâtîb* in terms of physical structure and curriculum. However, a critical examination of how *madâris* are operated in states like Lagos shows that they are not in tune with the requirements of 21st century, whereas the conventional schools are moving quite well with the 21st century imperatives and this makes them to be more effective. Thinking about effectiveness, stakeholders in *Islamiyyah* school system need orientation so that they can appreciate the need to comply with the 21st century imperatives. The establishment of National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies (NBAIS) is an indication that some *madâris* in the northern part of the country are already complying with necessities of 21st century. What may be considered as major obstacle or impediment for complying with the 21st century essentials is the mind-set of stakeholders who believe that the objectives of establishing *madrasah* are not the same with the objectives of conventional schools, and so they are satisfied with the ways that the *madâris* are run.

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