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Islamic Education in Nigeria Public Schools: Challenges and The Way Forward

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Abstract

Islamic education is a vital component in the moral, spiritual, and intellectual development of Muslim students in Nigeria. While national policies mandate its inclusion in public schools to respect religious diversity, its practical implementation is hindered by significant challenges. This paper investigates the key obstacles confronting the effective delivery of Islamic education in Nigerian public schools. Using a qualitative approach that includes interviews and document analysis, the study identifies several critical issues: a lack of qualified teachers, inadequate instructional materials, curriculum inconsistencies, and the marginalization of Islamic Religious Studies (IRS). Furthermore, the research reveals that poor funding, insufficient motivation from government and society, and negative attitudes among some teachers adversely affect student engagement. A perception of the subject as inferior, held by some parents and authorities, further compounds these problems. To revitalize Islamic education, this paper proffers solutions centered on comprehensive teacher training programs, strategic curriculum reforms, and increased stakeholder engagement to ensure its successful integration and contribution to the national educational goals.

Keywords: *Islamic education, Muslim students, Nigeria Public School*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has long been a cornerstone of the educational landscape for Muslim communities in Nigeria, particularly in the northern regions. Rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, its primary purpose is to provide moral guidance and foster spiritual consciousness (Abdullahi, 2013). Over time, this educational tradition has evolved from traditional Qur'anic schools into formal institutions designed to integrate with the national education system. As a process that develops individuals morally, socially, and intellectually, Islamic education aligns with the national goal of creating functional citizens who can contribute positively to society (Fafunwa, 1974; National Policy on Education, 1981).

Despite its foundational importance and constitutional guarantees for religious freedom, the implementation of Islamic education within Nigerian public schools faces significant setbacks. A considerable gap exists between policy and practice, marked by challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent policy enforcement, a shortage of qualified Islamic Studies teachers, and societal misconceptions about its value (Nduka & Adewale, 2017). These obstacles not only undermine a constitutionally protected right but also limit the potential of Islamic education to serve as what Balogun (2010) calls "the light" for

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individual and societal growth. Consequently, addressing these systemic issues is crucial for ensuring that this vital educational pathway can effectively contribute to Nigeria's broader developmental goals.

This study is driven by the primary objective of diagnosing the critical barriers to the effective delivery of Islamic education in Nigeria's public school system and proposing evidence-based strategies for its enhancement. The research specifically aims to investigate the interconnected challenges identified in preliminary analysis, beginning with the systemic issues of unqualified teachers, insufficient instructional resources, and inconsistent curricula. It will further explore the institutional-level problems of poor funding and the marginalization of Islamic Religious Studies (IRS). A key focus will also be on the socio-cultural factors, including the impact of negative attitudes from educators and the perception of the subject as inferior among parents and authorities, which collectively undermine student engagement. Ultimately, the research seeks to synthesize these findings into a set of actionable recommendations focused on teacher training, curriculum reform, and stakeholder collaboration to elevate the status and effectiveness of Islamic education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Islamic Education

The concept of Islamic education has been defined in various ways by Muslim educationists. Ashrafi (1999) in his view explains that Islamic education entails giving instruction on purely theological matters, such that the trainees would be able to practice five pillars of Islam. Similarly, Muhammad (1995) opined that, Islamic education is a process of self-discipline, which ensures spiritual and intellectual development of the individual. However, neither of the above definitions can stand the test of this time because, it has to be realized that Islamic education is not confined to ensuring the practice of the five pillars of Islam. The pillars constitute only the *Ibadah* (Worship) aspect of the religion of Islam. Kareem (2014) describes Islamic education as the body of knowledge given in accordance with the injunctions of Islam that covers all spheres of human endeavours. He adds that Islamic education does not only cover the study of the Holy Qur'an, *Hadith* and Arabic Language, it covers all fields of study through its thematic method of approach.

The concept of Islamic education is fundamentally holistic, aiming for the comprehensive development of an individual's entire being. A foundational definition, established at the first World Conference on Islamic Education in 1977, describes it as a process that ensures the "balanced growth of the total personality... through the training of his spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses" (Al-Attas, 1979, as cited in Bello, 1997). The ultimate goal of this process is to infuse faith into every aspect of a person's character, enabling them to joyfully embody Islamic values and realize their divine purpose as *Khalifa-tullah* (Allah's vicegerent on Earth). This educational philosophy extends beyond mere spiritual training; as Qutub (1997) elaborates, it is a pragmatic system derived from an ideological framework that encompasses ethics, politics, social order, and economics. Thus, Islamic education is not merely the transmission of religious doctrine but a transformative process designed to harmonize an individual's internal world with their external responsibilities, fostering a creative and balanced personality that understands and works in concert with the universe.

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Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education

The aims of Islamic education are profoundly holistic, centered on the cultivation of a complete individual who lives in submission to God. According to Malik (2000), its purpose is to foster comprehensive growth in all aspects of a person spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, and physical directing these faculties toward goodness and the attainment of perfection. This culminates in the ultimate goal of complete submission to Allah, not only on an individual level but also for the community and humanity at large. This objective is further clarified by Zubair (2010), who states that Islamic education seeks to form individuals who worship Allah correctly and use their acquired knowledge to guide society (*yamur bil ma'ruf*) in accordance with divine law.

The comprehensive nature of this educational philosophy is deeply embedded in the Arabic language itself. As Al-Attas (1979) explains, there are three distinct terms that illuminate the educational process. *Ta'lim* refers to the formal instruction and acquisition of knowledge. *Tarbiyah* implies the spiritual and ethical nurturing and growth of the individual. Finally, *ta'dib* denotes the development of refined, cultured, and sound social behavior. Together, these three concepts instruction, nurturing, and social refinement demonstrate that education in Islam is a multifaceted process designed to engage the rational, spiritual, and social dimensions of a person in unison, guiding them toward becoming a balanced and righteous being.

Among the goals of Islamic education is the training towards achieving independence, self-reliance, and freedom. Islam provides for individual education and recognizes individual differences among children, observes students' aptitudes and learning and takes note of level of intelligence. Education in Islam is twofold: acquiring intellectual knowledge (through the application of reason and logic) and developing spiritual knowledge (derived from divine revelation and spiritual experience). Acquiring knowledge in Islam is not intended as an end but as a means to stimulate a more elevated moral and spiritual consciousness, leading to faith and righteous action.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the challenges confronting Islamic education in Nigerian public schools, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the context and experiences of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were gathered through two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Using purposive sampling, 20 key stakeholder, including Islamic Studies teachers, school administrators, and education officers were selected from three geo-political zones (North-West, South-West, and North-Central) to provide diverse and information-rich perspectives relevant to the study's focus (Patton, 2015). This interview data was triangulated with a thorough analysis of official documents, such as national education policies, curriculum frameworks, and reports from the Ministry of Education and relevant Islamic organizations, to provide corroborating evidence and contextual depth (Bowen, 2009). Finally, all collected data were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns and themes pertinent to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

History of Islamic Education in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the African countries situated on the Southern Coast of West Africa. It is the most populous country in Africa. It shares borders with Niger in the North, Lake Chad in the Northeast, Cameroon in the East, and Republic of Benin in the West (The New Encyclopedia Britannica quoted in Ahamad (2016). It has more than 250 different ethnic groups. Christianity and Islam are the rank high religions in the country.

The history of Islamic education in Nigeria is as old as the history of the religion of Islam itself because, Islamic education surfaced with the introduction of Islam to the Arabs. This started when Prophet Muhammad (SAW) began to receive the revelation of Qur'an from Allah and started preaching the message to his people. He happened to be the first teacher of Islamic Education since the Qur'anic education system is regarded as the foundation of knowledge where every Muslim is expected to start learning the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an before he or she proceeds to other Islamic Sciences such as hadith, *fiqh*, and law. Similarly, Islamic education began in Nigeria with the introduction of Islam by Muslim merchants from North Africa who acted as teachers and Imams (Kareem, 2002 and Sulaiman, 2016, 1(2): 185-198).

Islam reached the Savannah region of West Africa in the 8th century A.D, the date from which the written history of West Africa began. Scholars, historians, preachers, and merchants then in West Africa were mostly interested Muslim teachers. Whenever they got people who accepted Islam, they considered it their duty to teach them things necessary for the effective practice of the religion. Such Muslim preachers demonstrated, for instance, to their converts how to perform ablution, tayammum, (sand ablution), say *adhan* and *Iqamah* (Call to prayer) and perform *Salat* (prayer). They were also taught how to recite or read the Qur'anic chapters and other aspects of Islam. It became expedient for the preacher spreading the religion of Islam to teach the new converts some portions of the Qur'an in Arabic. This culminated in the establishment of Qur'anic schools in different communities. In this way, Islamic education began in a rudimentary form with adult converts and without being seriously formalized. Thus, Islam goes to any place or community along with its own form of education. It enters into Nigeria around 11th century when the Kanem Ummi Jilmi of old Borno who ruled between 1085-1097 accepted Islam at the hand of an eminent Muslim scholar, Hammed Muhammad Mani. He established the first school of learning in his palace. After his death, Ummi Jilmi's son, Dunama I (1097-1150), also continue his father's interest in learning and practicing Islam and even went on pilgrimage to Makkah. Fafunwa, (1974) and Sulaiman (2018). Around fourteenth century, Islamic education had gained popularity in Nigeria, however, it was not getting any support from the government because it is mostly sponsored by Muslim tycoons and in some places by Muslim communities. (Tijani, 2019; Muhammad, 2016). During this period, the Islamic education is highly controlled and supervised by *Ulamaa'*, who serves as teacher and who is identified with a number of names such as *Mu'alim*, *Mudarris*, *Ustadh*, *Muaddib* and *Alfa*. This is so because, the teacher was normally a man of many parts, a *Mu'alim* in the school, Imam in the Mosque, a preacher in the community, an adviser on legal and civil cases, a minister during social activities and a medical practitioner to some extent (Kareem, 2002; and Yahia, 2018).

According to Fafunwa, (1974) Islam pre-dated Christianity in Nigeria by over three hundred years. The first Missionaries landed in Nigeria around eighteen forties (1840s) and they started their missionary activities in Badagry and Abeokuta before they later move to Lagos in the eighteeth sixties, as a results of political and pressure of inter-tribal wars (Orewa

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Oka, (2001). It was at this time that formal education was introduce to Nigeria. The first set of schools were established by the Christian Missionaries in order to serve as grounds for conversion of Muslims and idol worshippers who were already on ground. When the Southern Baptist convention began work in Abeokuta province in eighteen fifty-two (1952), it spread to other Yoruba towns (Ayandele, 1966) Oladiti and Sulaiman (2015). By this period, it was difficult to send a Muslim child to school for fear of indoctrination. Anyone who dared to proclaim him or herself a Muslim took the risk of losing his job if he was employed and if he was not, remained unemployed. A school age would hardly get admission to an educational institution without first denouncing his religion or ready to adopt a baptismal name like Samuel, Paul, John, Florence, Patricia etc. or disguised under cultural name like Babatunde, Adeleke, Ojelade, Iyabo, Bolanle, Atinuke, Chinyere, Olichi, Inuwar Bawa, Lahadi etc. where his or her religious background was less known (Adigun, 2008).

In the nineteen centuries, when the Nigerian Muslims attempted to revive the process of education and knowledge in their respective societies, Islamic education in both regions suffered a lot of setbacks ranging from organization, adoption, recognition, finance and inferiority complex. The introduction of a secular, western and alien system of education with Christianizing vision impede the growth of Islamic education in Nigeria. The Christian mission education was encouraged, promoted and financed by Governments and Christian missionaries to the detriment of Islamic education. Gradually in Nigeria, educational reform activities started with the Jihad of Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio towards the end of the 18th century when the Shaykh had commenced preaching to correct bad practices in Islam. (Adamu, 1990; Sulaiman 2014)

During the period of Sokoto Jihad (1804 and 1904), social corruptions in all its ramifications were fought by the leaders. Not only that they fought social vices, they also showed practical exemplary conducts and virtues. All these were committed to writing and literature were provided to that effect for people to learn. Also, intermediate literatures were produced for students and laymen. In their efforts to teach Muslims how to lead a happy and successful life, the Sokoto Jihad leaders attached great importance to moral and ethical conducts. Greater portion of their literary contributions centered on ethical and moral trainings of the Muslim *Ummah* and the society in general. Works like, *Ihya' As-Sunnah, Bayanul, Bid'ah, Sablu 'l-Naqat, Tamyzu-mu'min, Siraju al-Ikhwar, Sauqu 'l-Ummar hila'-Ittibah-Sunnah, Nasihatu ahlu-z-Zaman,* etc., all were left by Sheikh Uthman b. Muhammad Fodiyo, the 19th Century Mujadid of Bilad Al-Sudan (Abdullah, 2017). Relatively, the Jihad leaders produced a lot of works not only in book form but in prose and *wa'azi* songs. They wrote in Arabic and translations were later made to Fulfulde or Hausa. This reform culminated into the establishment of an Islamic state which lasted up to the beginning of the twentieth century when the British conquered it and ushered in colonial rule and western education.

In spite of the negative attitude of the colonial government to Islamic education most especially Arabic and Islamic teachings, the urge among Muslims to learn and use Arabic primarily for religious worship did not diminish and these continued with the traditional Qur'anic education system. Some schools such as the School of Alkalis (Al-Qadi) were established in Kano by 1934. It was named the Northern provinces law school (Adebayo, 2018 and Yunusa, 2014). In 1947, a number of provincial Qur'anic teachers' training institutions were also established in different parts of the Northern Nigeria. In the South-Western Nigeria, some individual Qur'anic schools were also in existence. One of such Schools that have played a significant role in the spread and improvement of Qur'anic education in the South- West is

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Adam Abdullal al-Ilori's Markaz at *Ta'lim al-Arabi al-Islami*, which opened first at Abeokuta in 1952 before it was re-established at Agege, Lagos in 1955 (Adebayo, 2018 and Kuldip Kaur, 2013, 3 (1): 28-35). Later on, Qur'anic education in Nigeria began to flourish in every nook and crane of the country. Almost every Mosque in the major towns such as Lagos, Oyo, Ibadan, Kano, Katsina, Zamfara, Zaria etc has a Qur'anic school commonly called *ile-kewu or makaranta allo (tsangaya)* with Qur'anic teachers taking Muslim children through the reading of Qur'anic text and supported by the famous *owo-ile kewu or'Kudin-Laraba* (a token given to the Mallam by each child) (Shaykh, 2014, Ibrahim, 2019, Salisu, 2019).

At this juncture, it is noteworthy to mention some of the successes that have been recorded since inception. According to Shittu & Olaofe (2018), they include: sensitization on the problems bedeviling the *Ummah;* establishment of Islamic oriented intellectual institutions; mass production of Islamic based textbooks and journals; availability, accessibility and implementation of Islamized curricula; and production of new crop of Muslim personalities.

Integration of Western Education

It is worth mentioning that the colonial impact and Christianity missionaries' educational reforms in Nigeria were important factors that have greatly influence the educational system in Nigeria. The advent of missionaries in Nigeria for evangelism and education started since 1842. Meanwhile, the opportunities to be educated were not extended to the Muslim children except with the condition of renouncing their religion. In reaction to this, there was a protest in 1895, directed to the Colonial Government by the Lagos state Muslims, agitating for the establishment of Muslim schools (Aliyu & Moyi, 2019). The need for the Muslim children to acquire western education without being converted to Christianity led to the establishment of Ansar-ud-Deen society in Lagos in 1923.

The society derived its name from Arabic word 'Al-Ansar meaning helpers' (Abdul, 1983). This is a name given to the Madinah Muslims who received and accommodated Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and his followers (Al-Muhajirun) during his *Hijrah* from Makkah to Madinah in the year 622 A.D (Rahim, 1981 and Yasin, & Shahjani, 2013). The society uses the word making it a compound word Ansar-Ud-Deen meaning helper of religion (Adigun, 2008 and Ogunbado, 2012). The joining of the society brought every Muslim community in the South-West together as one united body with one voice. The result of the en masse joining of the society was its rapid spread to every nook and cranny of Yorubaland (Agbetola, 1983). In Nigeria, the Ansar-ud-Deen society of Nigeria, a foremost Islamic society and the first Islamic organization in the South, which was established in 1923 followed by the Ansarul-Islam society of Nigeria, the first Islamic organization in the North, which was also established in 1942 and Ahmadiyyah Muslim Jama'ah which was established in 1891 are the first set of societies credited for being the vanguards of Islamic and western education in Nigeria (Susan and Munir 2004; Adigun, 2015). The objectives of these societies are directed to three main areas:

1. Education in order to found, build and maintain educational institutions; to encourage literal and intellectual pursuits among all Muslims; to keep and maintain library for the uses of its members and to undertake general other activities that may tend to promote education
2. Reformation in order to adopt measure to promote the religious, moral and social advancement of all Muslims and to eradicate all forms of evil that have crept or are likely to creep into the religion of Islam

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3. Propagation and defense of Islam by disseminating the true knowledge of the Holy Qur'an among all peoples and to undertake the translation of the Holy Qur'an and other Islamic books into any language possible and circulate these among Muslims as well as non-Muslims

In the mid twentieth century, Muslim intellectuals who were learned in western education initiated a reform of integration of Islamic and western education through a system of Islamiyyah schools especially in the Northern and South-Western Nigeria (Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto, Katsina, Zaria, Lafia, Ilorin, Oyo, Ogun. Lagos, Ondo). These efforts became clearly noticeable during the latest developments, when several Muslim organizations stated the establishment of primary schools in 1960s. The more recent reform had begun in 1970s when Muslim Scholars all over the world organized series of international conferences and seminars on the Islamization of knowledge. The first World Conference on Islamic education was held in the holy city of Makkah in 1977 (Maiwada, 2005). This is followed by an international seminar on the Islamization of knowledge in Pakistan in 1982 and the third one was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1984 (Maiwada, 2005; Al-Attas, 2000).

Consequently, these developments inspired Muslim Scholars in Nigeria and as such, they embarked on similar activities. The outcome of these intellectual reawakening globally and in Nigeria was the establishment of more schools and Islamic organizations along the Islamization of Knowledge agenda. Thereafter, Islamic education continued to grow along with the increasing population of Muslims in the country. The scenario today is of a complete transformation of the system, a whole improvement on the pioneering efforts of the Ansar-ud-deen, Ansarul-Islam, Ahmadiyyah societies and a few Muslim scholars of Nigeria. However, Islamic educational system now competes with its western counterpart in structure and infrastructure (Abdul Raheem, 1993) from *Ibtidai* up to *Jamiah* levels (primary to university).

Challenges of Islamic Education in Nigeria

According to Shittu and Olaofe (2018), the saying goes "every good book has a boring chapter". Islamic education has a lot of challenges militating against it across the country. Some of the hitches have been identified by the champions of the process and other concerned Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike. Enumerating some of these challenges and other emerging ones at this juncture is expected to go a long way in putting the *Ummah* on its toes for the purpose of identifying and proffering effective solution to them since there is always room for improvement in every human endeavor.

Attitude in Some Muslim Homes

Today, many people go contrary to the teachings of Islam. Rather than engaging in good things taught by Islam and let the Islamic education reflect in their lives, people follow their whims. The few who abide by Islamic teachings are over shadowed by either their peer-group or social influence. The parents, teachers, *Ulama'* and those in position of authority show apathy to their duties and responsibilities. At the age of seven years, every Muslim child must have been receiving Islamic knowledge and be enforced at age ten when derailed. His rights must be duly protected. It is very unfortunate that, despite the injunctions of Islam on the treatment of a child regarding education, many Muslim homes are not complying and poses problem to the life of Muslim children and that of the society. Many Muslim children

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are physically, sexually, emotionally maltreated or neglected anytime and anywhere in the course of receiving Islamic education. The study of Kareem (1993) revealed that, many children in Muslim homes in the south-west most especially Ondo and Ekiti are half- baked in Islamic education combined with that of secular form of education. It also revealed that about 81% of the Muslim children are not given proper Islamic orientation from home

Lack of Funding and Inadequate Motivation from Government and the Society

Resulting from the lack of recognition, none of the types of schools that make up the Islamic educational system receive adequate funding from various government. There is no motivation from the Government because, graduate of Islamic education are not given employment compared with other form of education. There is an impression that anybody undertaking Islamic education can only function as a full time *Mallam* (teacher) with teaching being a profession that is already looked down upon (Zubair, 2010). The high rate of unemployment in the country resulting in the fact that most graduates of Islamic education still depend on their parents for livelihood makes many parents doubt the utility value of Islamic education. Lack of performance-linked incentives is also a critical challenge in the current school policy. Neither students nor Islamic personnel in Nigeria are significantly assessed or rewarded for high performance and productivity. This is the reason while most children develop high level of aspirations and expectations towards certain occupations and career as different occupations are rated differently by the society and this affect the choice of Islamic education

Muslim Teachers' Attitude

The findings of this research indicate that the attitudes and professional conduct of teachers significantly impact student learning experiences in Islamic education. A recurring theme from the data is that some teachers demonstrate a lack of engagement, failing to adequately attend to students' academic needs or assist them in solving problems. This pedagogical neglect creates a challenging learning environment. Furthermore, the study revealed that a subset of teachers exhibits a professional inferiority complex regarding their role as instructors of Islamic education. This attitude not only undermines their own morale but also negatively influences the perceived value and seriousness of the subject among students, thereby hindering effective knowledge transmission and character development.

Poverty

Poverty affects Islamic education as most of the knowledgeable and experience Muslims who supposed to establish schools could not afford the money. Some of the existing ones are funded by the community and individual efforts that are still struggle to survive. That is why dishonest proprietors go to some Arab countries, governments or philanthropist cap-in-hand, seeking financial assistance to run Islamic schools only to come back home and divert such assistance to their personal use (Zubair, 2010). The study further revealed the following major challenges facing Islamic education in Nigerian public schools:

1. Inadequate Qualified Teachers: Most public schools lack trained and certified Islamic Studies teachers, especially in rural areas.
2. Lack of Instructional Materials: Textbooks, teaching aids, and religious literature are either outdated or unavailable.
3. Marginalization in Curriculum: Islamic Religious Studies is often treated as a non-essential subject, with reduced teaching hours.

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4. Poor Funding: There is minimal budgetary allocation for religious education compared to other academic subjects.
5. Sociopolitical and Religious Bias: In multi-religious regions, the fear of religious domination sometimes leads to resistance against fully integrating Islamic education.

The findings align with earlier studies by Yahya (2016) and Mustapha (2018), which identified systemic neglect and inadequate teacher training as core issues. Interviewed teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of career development opportunities and lack of incentives. Many schools operate without IRS teachers, and students are left without access to formal Islamic education. Furthermore, document analysis revealed that while the National Policy on Education recognizes religious education, implementation remains inconsistent across states due to regional autonomy in education policy execution. Cultural tensions and political undercurrents further hinder the equitable provision of Islamic education, particularly in southern states where Muslims are a minority. These challenges have implications not only for academic achievement but also for national cohesion and religious tolerance. If Muslim students are deprived of structured Islamic education, it could lead to alienation and increased susceptibility to extremist ideologies.

The history of Islamic education in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with the introduction and spread of Islam itself, predating the arrival of Christianity and Western education by several centuries (Fafunwa, 1974). Originating with the simple instruction of new converts, it evolved through various stages of reform, conflict, and integration to become a complex system that operates alongside the secular state-sponsored framework. This review traces the historical trajectory of Islamic education in Nigeria, from its rudimentary beginnings to its modern-day challenges and transformations.

Islamic education in Nigeria began concurrently with the arrival of Islam, brought by Muslim merchants and scholars from North Africa around the 8th century A.D. These early preachers considered it their duty to instruct new converts in the foundational practices of the religion, such as ablution, prayer, and recitation of the Qur'an (Kareem, 2002; Sulaiman, 2016). This rudimentary form of instruction culminated in the establishment of Qur'anic schools, which became the bedrock of Islamic learning. The process was formalized in the 11th century when the ruler of Kanem-Borno, Ummi Jilmi (1085-1097), embraced Islam and established a school in his palace, a tradition continued by his son, Dunama I (Fafunwa, 1974; Sulaiman, 2018). By the 14th century, Islamic education had gained significant popularity, sustained not by government support but through the sponsorship of wealthy Muslims and community efforts, and supervised by respected scholars known as Ulamaa' (Tijani, 2019; Muhammad, 2016).

A pivotal moment in the history of Islamic education was the Jihad led by Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This movement was not merely a military conquest but a profound social and educational reform aimed at purifying Islamic practice and combating social corruption (Adamu, 1990; Sulaiman, 2014). The Jihad leaders produced a vast body of literature on moral and ethical conduct, such as Ihya' As-Sunnah and Nasihatu ahlu-z-Zaman, which served as educational materials for both scholars and the laity (Abdullah, 2017). This period saw the establishment of an Islamic state with a strong emphasis on knowledge and moral training, which flourished until the British conquest in the early 20th century.

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The arrival of Christian missionaries in the 1840s and the subsequent British colonial rule introduced a Western, secular education system that posed a direct challenge to Islamic education. The missionary schools were often viewed as instruments of conversion, creating significant apprehension among Muslims who feared their children would be indoctrinated (Adigun, 2008). This led to a period where Muslim children were often denied access to formal education unless they adopted Christian names or renounced their faith. The colonial government actively promoted and financed Christian mission schools, leading to the marginalization and neglect of the existing Islamic educational system (Oladiti & Sulaiman, 2015).

In response to the threat of cultural and religious assimilation, Nigerian Muslims began to organize. A landmark protest by Lagos Muslims in 1895 demanding government schools for their children marked the beginning of a new era (Aliyu & Moyi, 2019). This movement led to the establishment of influential Islamic societies such as the Ansar-ud-Deen Society in 1923, which championed the cause of integrating Western education with Islamic teachings (Adigun, 2008; Ogunbado, 2012). These organizations founded schools that offered both secular and religious subjects, allowing Muslim children to acquire modern knowledge without compromising their faith. Influenced by global movements like the World Conference on Islamic Education in 1977, Nigerian Muslim scholars further advanced the "Islamization of Knowledge" agenda, leading to the establishment of a comprehensive Islamic education system from the primary (Ibtidai) to the university (Jamiah) level, competing in structure and quality with its Western counterpart (Abdul Raheem, 1993; Maiwada, 2005).

Despite its rich history and significant progress, Islamic education in Nigeria today faces numerous challenges. These include a persistent lack of adequate funding, a shortage of qualified teachers, and insufficient instructional materials (Shittu & Olaofe, 2018). Furthermore, Islamic Religious Studies (IRS) is often marginalized within the public school curriculum. Societal attitudes, including a perception of the subject as inferior and a lack of motivation from both government and the community, compound these issues, affecting student engagement and teacher morale (Zubair, 2010). These systemic problems hinder the ability of Islamic education to fully realize its potential as a vital component of the nation's educational landscape.

The Way Forward

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the challenges confronting Islamic education in Nigerian public schools, this study has identified critical deficiencies in policy implementation, resource allocation, teacher development, and societal perception. Merely diagnosing these systemic problems is insufficient; a proactive and multi-pronged approach is required to enact meaningful and sustainable change. Therefore, in light of the findings, the following recommendations are proffered to address the root causes of the identified issues. These evidence-based suggestions are directed at key stakeholders including government agencies, educational administrators, curriculum developers, and community leaders, and are designed to foster a more inclusive, effective, and respected system for Islamic education in Nigeria. Accordingly, the following recommendations are presented for action by the relevant stakeholders:

1. Government should provide and create employment opportunities and adequate resources for the entire education sector and avoid discrimination of Islamic education programmes

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2. Muslim homes should be geared towards commitment to the injunctions of Islam most especially on education and responsibilities.
3. There is need for general improvement of Government in the remuneration and conditions of service for teachers of Islamic education. Government and conscious Muslims should assist the students of Islamic education in getting scholarship up to tertiary institution
4. Parents should support their wards to see them succeed in the course of receiving Islamic education. Muslims should be well educated through open air preaching, radio and television, conferences, seminars, workshops to have interest in the education of their children
5. Teachers of Islamic education should develop himself by acquiring higher certificate in order to update his knowledge. He should be dedicated to his teachings by building good relationship with their students to know their area of challenge.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that despite its deep historical roots and its formal inclusion in the national curriculum, Islamic education in Nigerian public schools is in a precarious state. The research traced its development from a foundational system of learning to its current marginalized position, identifying a critical disconnect between policy and practice. The investigation revealed that the primary obstacles are not isolated incidents but a complex web of systemic issues, including a pervasive lack of funding, negative attitudes from both educators and the wider community, and insufficient government motivation. These factors collectively foster an environment where Islamic education is perceived as inferior, directly impacting student morale and engagement.

The implications of this systemic neglect are profound, extending beyond the classroom to affect issues of religious identity, social equity, and national cohesion. To address this, a concerted and collaborative effort is essential. As this paper has argued, revitalizing Islamic education requires more than minor adjustments; it demands fundamental changes, including the provision of adequate resources, the creation of viable employment pathways for graduates, and an end to the discriminatory treatment of Islamic studies programs. By implementing such strategies, stakeholders can work to restore the subject to its rightful place, ensuring that it can effectively contribute to the moral and intellectual development of students and fulfill Nigeria's commitment to a truly inclusive educational system.

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