
KORANIC VERSUS CHRISTIAN MISSION EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND UNEVEN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA, 1842-1977: NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION TO THE RESCUE

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the extent to which Koranic and Christian mission education systems have interfaced since 1842 in the provision of education to citizens of Nigeria. It would be recalled that Koranic education predated the Christian missionary education in the Northern part of Nigeria. It was in 1842 precisely, that the Christian Missionary education referred to as "western education" or "formal education", came into existence in the southern part of the country. The acceptability of western-education and its influences were restricted by the powerful Emirs in the North. One of the reasons for the western education blockade was the fear that Muslim children might be converted into Christianity and thus up-turn revered Muslim traditions and cultures. But by 1914, the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated to become a united Nigeria and English language (the language of the colonial masters) was adopted as the medium of communication to transact government business and other official communications. The North thereby reluctantly accepted western education to a severely limited extent in a bid to have a say in the administration of the new Nigeria being midwived by the British. These two religions created an unending educational gulf between the predominantly Muslim North and the predominantly Christian South in Nigeria. Many educational policies, the most far-reaching being the National Policy on Education (1977), were made to bridge this education gulf, with varying degrees of success, as we have established in this paper.

Keywords: *Koranic, Education, Islam and Christianity*

INTRODUCTION

Fafunwa (1972) believes that education is the direct means by which a people seek to shape its own destiny, transforms itself from what it knows to be into what it would hope to become. We also share this view but it is sad to note that for over one hundred and thirty five years (1842-1977), Nigeria had no clearcut educational policy because of the burden of religious imperialism, intolerance, gender chauvinism and parochialism. This paper therefore (a) assesses the effect of the religious division on education and national development; (b) investigates the efforts made by government to bridge the educational gulf created by the Koranic and Christian education systems; (c) establishes the role of unified education system in forging harmony and tolerance among people of diverse ethnic traditions and religious beliefs.

Koranic and Christian Missionary Education in Nigeria

Koranic derives from Koran (Qur'an) which is the name of the "Holy book" of Islam that contains the words of Allah (God). The Koran teaches Muslims the way they must live, and contains all the basic Islamic laws and religious knowledge. Koranic education is

essentially a religious education predominantly in existence in the northern part of Nigeria (especially the Kanuri speaking area), as far back as the 7th century A.D., when Islamic influences penetrated into that territory through the agency of Muslim Arabs from the Middle East and the Maghrib. Islam by its nature requires a child to participate in the life of his family and his village. Thus, when Islam was introduced in Nigeria, Koranic education was equally introduced. Pupils who attended Koranic schools were required to memorize the Koran and to understand the formalities of Islam. There were no formalized Koranic schools established at the initial stage to teach the pupils. Classes were held in the front of the master's house, under the shade of trees, piazza or verandah, in huts and later in the mosques. In some places where schools were built later, the number of pupils was generally very small; about 10 or under. The ages of the pupils ranged from 6-18 years or more and they were not arranged in classes because each pupil was always admitted at a different stage. Classes were usually held in the mornings and evenings. The period of learning might increase at certain season when there was less farm work to do and when the climate was congenial. The technique of learning is rote learning. After a child had fully memorized a chapter in the Koran, he was expected to learn how to read and write and translate the verses (if he was to pray successfully and perform other religious duties well). At a higher level, something like a secondary level, a pupil is introduced to writings, Arabic grammar, theology, and the interpretation of Islamic laws. After the secondary level, a student can begin to think of a specialization. He then proceed to the university to study or to teach the subject under a local scholar.

Koranic education in Nigeria was not extensive in scope like in such areas as the Middle East regions. It was not aimed at proselytizing. One only needed to be literate in Arabic, know how to recite some portions of the Koran. Koranic education in Nigeria was purely religious until it was blended with Western education in later years. Koranic education in Nigeria brought about the following, among others:

- a) Exclusive Islamic cultures and traditions in the North.
- b) The introduction of Arabic literacy in the North.
- c) Adoption of Muslim names.
- d) Replacement of traditional laws by Koranic laws (Sharia).
- e) Introduction of new agricultural crops.
- f) Restrictive education that allowed its adherents no interest in other brands of education.
- g) Intolerance and disaffection towards other people outside the catchment of Islamic religion.

Islam as a religion according to Trimmigham (1965) spread across the Sahara by contacts through trade and by conquest through Jihads. The Jihads were still spreading southwards when the European colonizers of the 19th century took control of West Africa in which Nigeria was a part. It may be safe to state that more than 50 percent of the people were Muslims who willingly embraced Koranic education during the period under reference.

Christian Missionary Education

Education of the Western type came into being in Nigeria when Thomas Birch Freeman, the English Methodist Missionary, landed in Badagry on September 24, 1842. Within a few weeks of his arrival Thomas Freeman assisted by William de Graft, had opened a

primary school, the very first western education primary school in Nigeria. About four year later, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) opened their own schools in Badagry and Abeokuta. In 1855, the Southern Baptist Convention from the United States of America, (USA) came to Nigeria and opened two schools, in Lagos and Ogbomosho. In 1960, the Roman Catholic Mission, (RCM) arrived Nigeria from Brazil and opened a school in Lagos to cater for the educational needs of the emancipated Africans arriving in Nigeria. The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland led by Rev. Hope Waddel had also opened a school in Calabar in 1846 and another one in Bonny in 1847. Secondary education was not left behind as the European missionaries penetrated into the hinterland in the South. The first Grammar school in Nigeria was established by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Lagos in 1859. Methodist Boys' High School was founded in 1878. St Gregory's College was founded in 1891 by the Roman Catholic Mission in Lagos and Baptist Academy was established in 1895 also in Lagos. The colonial government established its own secondary school (King's College) in Lagos in 1909. This college (Kings College) according to Onabamiro (1983) was expected to be a model for any mission which intended to establish secondary schools. The following secondary schools were equally established by the CMS in collaboration with indigenes in the southern part of the country:

- a) Abeokuta Grammar School, Abeokuta (1908)
- b) Ijebu-Ode Grammar School, Ijebu-Ode (1913)
- c) Ibadan Grammar School, Ibadan (1913)
- d) Ondo Boys High School, Ondo (1919)

Ukeje and Aisiku (1982) observed that between 1842 and 1914, while there were 19,073 Koranic "schools" in Northern Protectorate, there were 150 primary schools of western-education type in the Southern Protectorate. And, between 1842 and 1920, there were about 12 secondary schools in the Southern part and none in the Northern protectorate at that time. By and large, Christian mission schools and education system brought about the following immediate transformations into Nigeria:

- 1) Introduction of reading, writing and numeracy in the Roman print in the South
- 2) Exclusive European cultures
- 3) Adoption of Christian names, ways and practices.
- 4) Christian religious type of education devoid of amoral or scientific inquiry.
- 5) Introduction of a new type of political, administrative and education system.
- 6) Introduction of new agricultural products such as cocoa and coffee.
- 7) Educational division and disparity between the Northern and Southern Protectorates.

Koranic and Christian Missionary Influence on Nigeria Education

The two religious persuasions (Islam and Christianity), caused distrust among individuals from the two protectorates as well as religious upheavals, and created deep educational gulf between the two divides. As a matter of fact, the then Governor of the Northern Protectorate, Lord Frederick Lugard prevailed on the European Christian missionaries not to venture into the North. Lugard vehemently resisted the incursion of the Christian missionaries because of the covenant he made with the powerful Emirs in the North that their culture would not be tampered with. Lugard preserved the culture of Koranic education in the North and shielded Islamic religion from wholesale influence of the Christian missionaries from the South. This is not to say that Nigerians did not have some

western education type schools in the North. While there were, by 1914, 19,073 Koranic schools in the North, there were only 41 western education-type schools there. The first general remark on the history of education in Nigeria is that foreign Christian missions with interest in the country pioneered and dominated the educational sector for many decades with the active support of the colonial officials. Koranic education which was firmly planted among the people of the North had no colonial imperialist investment for many centuries. This would have led the Arabs to colonize the North and thereby create two distinct political groups in Nigeria: the Christian Southerners and the Muslim Northerners; inexorably leading to the evolution of two educational systems. Even with the ascendancy of Western education, the core North was still firmly within the grip of Koranic education. This situation did not foster unity and / or oneness, rather it brought about disaffection and rancour as well as uneven educational development. The major landmarks that western and Koranic education left in Nigeria could be summed up as parochial tendencies, ethno-religious dis-affection and uneven educational development. It is important for us to highlight the fact that missionary education (Western education) was only keen to enroll children into a club of religious bigotry and nurturing them to become European interpreters, house helps, church catechists, gardeners and pupil teachers only. There was no recourse to scientific, technical and industrial education by the two missionary education systems in the country. It should be noted that while the Christian missions confined evangelical ministry and educational activities to the coastal and Southern Protectorate of Nigeria, Koranic education with strong Islamic influence was firmly established in the Northern protectorate. Thus, while Western education became the prevalent and dominant type of education in the South, Koranic education remained for centuries, the only kind of formal education in the North. When Christian missionaries began to penetrate into the North, they were to limit their activities to the non-Muslim areas, as observed previously.

Lugard, the first High Commissioner for the Northern Protectorate specifically declared in 1902, an educational policy which according to Ayandele (1966) advised the Christian missions to direct their education and missionary activities to the non-Muslim areas of the North. As Koranic schools flourished in the North, there were pockets of Western education schools specifically opened in provincial capitals by resident officials and the colonial government. For instance, in 1922, Katsina Teacher Training College was established in Katsina. Training centers for elementary school teachers were equally opened in Bauchi and Katsina. By 1931, there were 29 western education schools in the North with a total enrolment of 1,931 students (FRN, 1960). The situation was to improve markedly after the Second World War when the colonies were "compensated" with Development Plans.

Ten-Year Development Plan in Nigeria

In 1946, soon after the end of the 2nd World War, the colonial administration in Nigeria introduced a Ten-Year Development Plan whose educational aims were to provide among others:

- 1) A type of education more suitable for the need of the country.
- 2) Financial assistance to native administrations to expand education in their area.

As a result of this Development Plan, there was rapid expansion of education in both the North and South. In the South, especially in places like Onitsha, Ibadan, Lagos, Abeokuta

and Ijebu-Ode, Taiwo (1980) indicated that private primary and secondary schools were founded such that by 1947, primary schools population in the South stood at 600,000 while that of the North was 70,000.

Regionalization and Expansion of Education Vistas

In 1951, the country formalized its division into three regions – East, North and West with each of the regions having a Department of Education and enacting its own education laws. There was a remarkable expansion of education in the Western Region as from the mid-1950s as a result of the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme. This scheme which made primary education free and compulsory for school age children attracted high enrolment of pupils in the primary schools. Specifically enrolment rose from 240,000 in 1947 to 457,000 in 1954 and to 811,000 in 1955 and 982,755 in 1957 – Ukeje and Aisiku (1982). The Eastern region, launched its own scheme in 1957 with an enrolment which rose from 320,000 in 1947 to 1,207,167 in 1957. Northern region which did not embark on free education, however, had a remarkable increase in the primary school enrolment; its primary school enrolment rose from 66,000 in 1947 to 205,767 in 1957 (Ukeje and Aisiku, 1982). The comparative enrolment analysis done here is just to show the pace of educational development in the North and South. It should be noted that we have combined Koranic and western-styled education together in the North in the 1957 enrolment statistics. The North had realized the relevance of western education to their personal development and growth in the progressively westernized Nigeria. So they no longer denied themselves the opportunities of access to western form of education, but the South had had a good headstart and so was manifestly in the ascendancy up to independence and even beyond.

The Post Independence Education Expansion

Nigeria got its independence in 1960 from the British colonial imperialist. Shortly after, the military took-over power from the civilians in 1966 and the country was plunged into a three year civil war between 1967-1970. At the end of the civil war, a Five Year National Development Plan (1975-1980) was put in place. The Plan affected the development of education in the country profoundly. The Federal Military Government introduced at the national level a Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme – near replica of the Western Region scheme of 1955, and Fafunwa (1991) stated the between 1975 and 1977, enrolment of the primary school children rose from about 8,386,400 to 10,104,670. Without doubt, this Universal Primary Education Scheme embarked upon by the Federal Military Government was intended to bridge the educational gap between the North and the South. Also, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, that came up in 1977 was to facilitate equitable access to higher institutions, for all and sundry. All these were designed to ensure the bridging of the educational gaps between the North and the South. But the most significant step taken by Government to achieve this objective was the codification of a National Policy on Education in 1977.

The National Policy on Education 1977

The National Policy on Education derived from the National Curriculum Conference on education organized by the Nigeria Educational Research Council, Lagos in 1969. The National Policy on Education (1977), highlights the general trend of educational development in the area of philosophy, pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary,

technical, adult and non-formal, special and teacher education for the entire country. It emphasized on equality, curriculum and accessibility of all Nigerians to education no matter where they might be. This was the first attempt to have a uniform national policy for education in a well laid out and codified form. This was a direct response to the divisive trend in the education sector between 1842 and 1977. During that period, Nigerian never had any educational system that was acceptable to all the people. The system of education can only evolve when we become quite sure of what we want education to do for us. And by 1977, Nigeria was fairly sure of the direction which it wanted education to go. About 135 years after the introduction of western education, most Nigerians, because of the limitations of the system of education, were still wallowing in the sea of illiteracy, ignorance, ethno-religious and political intolerance. There were several million children and adults who never saw the four walls of the classroom at the primary school stage in the North, but who received Koranic education which was not regarded as formal "education" by the European colonial masters. Yet these high number of "illiterates" were part of the workforce producing goods and services for the colonial government. It is expected that our education should promote the unity of the country, prepare the individual for the consequent task that would confront him as a member of a truly independent, united and developing country, by equipping him intellectually for a life of literacy; morally for a life of social uprightness and integrity; culturally for a life of emotional balance; technologically and vocationally for a life of dedicated service and love for the country of which he owes total allegiance. This became compelling given the bitter experience of a 30-month fratricidal civil war that nearly tore the country apart.

Concluding Remarks

We have been able to establish that between 1914 and 1977 Nigeria was grappling with divisive tendencies in the education sector brought to life by the religious preferences of the peoples of the two major political units in the country. Koranic and Western education which were "foster children" of Islam and Christianity respectively unwittingly promoted parochial tendencies and uneven development. The 1977 initiative in the form of the National Policy on Education was a bold attempt at arresting this unsavoury development and we must say that it was fairly successful. Ever since education has remained in the front burner of national priorities. In fact over the years education has become a very potent political campaign subject and the manifold benefits derivable from it, both at individual and national levels, makes it continually attractive, expedient and compelling.

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