

## **CRITICAL STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF ISLAM TO SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Interplay or relationship between Islam and the societal development must be accorded significant recognition by the present generation. Through its social development, Islam is contextually defined as not only a religion or collection of rituals, but also a complete comprehensive way of life. It was revealed to cater for the relationship between man and God as well as man and the development of his environment. Islam transcends the spiritual sphere and permeates a spectrum of human endeavours. It has made indelible contributions to the educational, cultural, social, welfare and political development of mankind individually and generally.*

**Keywords:** *Islam, societal development, welfare, God*

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is highly important to enlighten the community on the basis and tenet of Islam. Islam contributes significantly to every human aspect personally and socially. The first thing to be conservative with is what the word Islam itself connotes. The religion of Islam is not named after a person as in the case in Buddhism which was named after Gotam Buddha, Confucianism after Confucius and Marxism after Karl Max. It was not named after a tribe like Judaism after the clan of Judah and Hinduism after the Hindus. Hence, Islam is the true religion of God (Almighty Allah) and as such, its name connotes the central principle of God (Bilal.1995).

Allah, through whom Islam was brought to mankind knows the nature of man and his environment. He thus revealed with the religion what will be of benefit to man so that man can contribute to the world. Historical perspective of the early Muslims reflects on their contributions to the world development in all facets of life educationally, economically, socially and politically among others. They displayed their prowess in terms of knowledge in theory and practice. Their contributions to sciences and other fields of studies were appreciated not only by the Arabs but also by the West. The ample understanding of Islam enabled them to achieve fame since then hitherto. That is why Islam obliges every Muslim to search for knowledge of different fields of study along with that of the religion. The concept of knowledge is reiterated in many of the verses of the Holy Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

This study set out specifically to establish the fact that Islam contributes a lot to the development of a society; examine the universality of Islamic Education whether to affirm that Islam is not only a religion or collection of rituals, but also an

embodiment of knowledge; and to enlighten the society on the interplay between Islam, education, politics and economics. Islam is an Arabic word derived from a four-letter verb 'ASLM' (Cowan,1976). It denotes making something peaceful. Hence, Islam, linguistically connotes the religion of peace. It is a religion that expresses a way of life based on the commandments of Allah. It is defined as a system of life. It is a system for practical human life in all aspects.

Its system entails the ideological idea; the convincing concept which expounds the nature of the universe and determines the position of man in this universe as well as his ultimate objectives therein, for instance ethical foundation and its sustaining power, political system, economic doctrine with its ethics, philosophy and the inter-relations. The ramifications of Islam are so conspicuous and profound. It is a belief that promises a paradise in the next life to those who follow its principles (Bilal,1995).The study of Islam in the West has frequently led to many faulty interpretations. For example, orientalist view Islam, as the religion of only prayer, fast, polygamy and slavery.

Religion, generally, is defined to be a specific system of belief, worship and conduct involving a code of ethics and philosophy (Webster,1996). However, Islam, besides being a religion is also a universal order and a complete code of life and not Muhammadanism. It is a divine religion from the days of prophet Adam, Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Moses, Jesus and finally integrated in the message of Muhammad (Abduh, 1978).Islam embraces a strong and unique ideology of moral, cultural, political and economic principles. It also establishes a social order based on the principles of equality, justice, brotherhood and freedom. A British Historian, Arnold (1961) affirms that Islam at the beginning came with the development of society in its ethics as he writes:

*Buddhism did not make a political impact on the world on a grand scale till about two hundred years... Islam made a comparable impact during the founder's own life-time, and its political fortune were made by the founder himself.*

On the development, it means the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger and so on (Sally, 2001). It connotes the gradual impacts brought by Islam to the growth and development of a society than how such an environment was structured prior to the advent of Islam to it. That is why Islam is embraced as the universal religion. Society is a polysemous word used in this work to denote a particular community of people who share the same customs laws and so on (Sally, 2001). The arrival of Islamic religion put an end to the paganism of the Arabs. Among the early converts were Abu Bakr, Ali ibn abi Talib and Khadijah bint Khuwalid (Rahim, 1989). The Islamic era guided the Arabs to the real faith and restructured their barbaric attitudes, oppression, cheating and infanticide. These impacts encouraged them to enter into the fold of Islam en-mass with peace during the conquest of Makkah(Ibn Kathir, Q48:1-2). Thus, the religion was spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula to the whole world.

Arabs are endowed with knowledge and wisdom. They did memorize anthologies of poetry and they were so good in composing poems. This trend made it possible for them to quickly memorize the Quran because they initially thought that it was a collection of poems until Allah clarifies it that it was not an anthology but a divine message (Q36:69). Social life of the early Arabs was full of illicit acts. They usually waged civil war against one another. A clan may decide to destroy another over an unnecessary deed. The order of the day was full of the survival of the fittest with oppression and this resulted also in their political way of life. The wealthy class did oppress the working one unjustly. These were the situations of the Arabs in their Jahiliyyah period that is the period of ignorance (Hitti, 1974).

### **Islamic Era and Education**

Era of Islam began in 610 (C.E.) Christian Era. This was marked by the early mission of the prophethood of Muhammad. Though, many messengers of God had been sent prior to him, but his mission contains all the messages of those before him. The Arabs accepted Islam through divine guidance. Hence, The Noble Qur'an and the Hadith serve as the primary sources of Islamic ethics. The era continued after the demise of Muhammad in 632C.E.. The successors of the prophet took the mantle of administration. The most famous among them were the four rightly Orthodox Caliphs namely, AbuBakr(632-634),Umar bn Khattab(634-644), Uthman bn Affan(644-656) and Ali bn Abi Talib(656-661). The trend of administration was taken over by the followers hitherto (Adeleke 2006).

Generally, education is a process of teaching, training and learning especially in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and develop skills (Sally.2000). however, the process of teaching, training and learning may take place in both informal and formal settings. Islamic education is not different in education philosophy. However, Islam emphasizes the significance of learning in a society as well as the need to always reflect on the purpose of creation of man by Allah. This is termed by the Islamic educationalists as the 'Islamization of Knowledge' (I.I.T, 2007). Education is highly valued in Islam. The first revelation of the Quran clearly demonstrates this significance. Besides, many verses of Holy Quran emphasize the fact that the literate and illiterate are incomparable (Q.39:3).The prophet's companions as well as early muslims followed the proclamation of acquisition of knowledge. They uncovered the literary and scientific legacy of ancient civilizations.

According to Adejumo (2005), Islamic education is a system which transmits the revealed and acquired knowledge to the younger generation of muslims in order to prepare them for life and enable them to discharge their duties as the vicegerent of Allah. Also, it is the process through which human beings are trained and prepared in a concerted way to do their creator's bidding in this life and be rewarded in the life after death. The primary aim of Islamic education according to the consensus of opinions of Islamic jurists is to facilitate the balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of man's spirit, intellect, rational self, feeling and body

senses. Thus, the aims and objectives of Islamic education include the preparation and training the generation of man to work as agents or viceroys of God on earth; to ensure the promotion of ma'ruf (good); and the prevention of munkar (evil) in a society (Q3:104), and ensure the balanced growth of the total personality of a person as well as promote spiritual, moral, cultural, physical, mental and material development.

Moreover, it aims at preparing people to work towards the economic and material growth as well as development of a society. It develops a sense of social responsibility (Q3:106). It encourages good things to promote excellence and the highest achievements for the greater welfare of people and society. In addition, it ensures that an individual grows up with a strong belief in sharing opportunities, equity, justice, humility, integrity and adversity (Education Summit, 2006).

### **Islam and Development of a Society**

According to Qutub (1977), development from Islamic perspective is the institutional facility whereby muslims may live in a state of Islam. Hence, the state of Islam is of transparency, fear of Allah (Taqwa), consultation (shura), 'adalah (justice), equity, egalitarianism and perfect succeeding political institution (khilafah) caliphate. It should be noted that Islam as a religion embraces moderation and shuns extremes. Indeed, Allah obliges muslims not to be extreme in their dealings. Thus we appointed you a middle nation that may be witnesses Against mankind and the messenger may be a witness against you (Q11:43).

Islamic concept of development is highly holistic and this makes the religion unique in her provision of development politically, economically, socially and culturally. A leading Western scholar (Harris.1979) emphasizes that Islam has shown itself to be a major force in the political as well as the cultural and spiritual life of peoples'. Abduh (1978) analyses that the importance of Islam is variable in the process of development. Thus, Islam plays a strong role within the present structure of social, economic, political and cultural life of the world countries. The companions of the prophet were distinguished by the fact that they were united politically. Their victory ushered in the best period of history with the perfect balance of religion and politics.

Unlike the democratic system which is based on the people's will and authority as the only source of legislation, the Islamic political developmental system is based on the concept of oneness of God (Tawheed) and the legislation of Allah alone (Mawdudu,1967). Islam is a unique religio-political system in its ethics. The principle of equity and justice as proffered by Islam is seen not only for muslims but for every individual. Faruqi (1979) in his expression, clarifies that the Islamic developments not really for a state but a world order. The growth brought by Islam is to keep the peace, run the public services, defend an individual and protect the right and privilege of the people and their community as members of a society as well as the elements of development.

## **Islamic Education and Economic Development**

Economic development is an important goal in every nation of the world. The modern world has emphasized only two anti-podal theories of economic development (capitalism and socialism). This is the case in the contemporary muslim world. Islam considers economic development as an alternative for development of a society. Islam does not specifically teach about capitalism or communism, for its injunctions are not directed to any particular phase in the economic revolution of a society. The Qur'an lays emphasis on justice and piety as the principles of economic progress of a society in her society, business and trade- activities. It also forbids usury, bribery, corruption and unlawful interest (Q2:275). It as well proffers rules that deal justly with price-fixing, legal status of finance companies and the planning and organization of market. This is technically referred to as 'Hisbah' (Abdullah,1986). The first and most important economic principle in Islam is that all wealth belongs to Allah for He is the absolute owner, while man uses it in his capacity as His vicegerent. Other principles are to guarantee a sufficient amount for a decent living, as every member of the society establishes social justice and maintain economic equilibrium among all members of a society. Islam also ensures respect for the private ownership of individuals and groups. It embodies the tenets which comprise the divine directives on economic and business transaction. They range from labour, debt, mortgage, taxation, state expenditure, spending and prices, scales and weights (Muhammad, 1990).All these are well analyzed in both the Qur'an and the traditions of the prophet. For instance Q2:275 expresses the Islamic perspective on forbiddance of usury as an element of corruption and a cause of economic instability or disintegration.

*'Those who eat usury (Riba) will not stand except like the standing of a person beaten by shaytan leading them to insanity. That is so, because they say: 'Trading is only like Riba (usury), whereas Allah permits trading and forbids usury... (Q2:275).*

Moreover, the traditions of the prophet provide many details on the forbiddance of usury in all its forms. One of the most important Ahadith was reported by Abduh (1978) that the prophet says that there will be a time when people will eat (swallow) usury. He says whoever does not swallow it will be affected by its dust (Muhammad,1997). He further narrates that he who takes usury and he who pays it, and he who writes it (document relating to it), and he who bears witness of it (that is interest transaction), all such are caused by God (Muhammad, 1989). But nowadays, usury is pervasive and that is the core reason for incessant global economic meltdown. In forbidding usury, Islam aspires to the creation of an economic system whereby capital itself does not generate investment. By contrast, usurious system allows return on capital without work of any sort and taking the risk of loss (Kareem, 2000). Thus, usury in itself is a form of oppression. It creates unemployed individuals or groups who live on the blood and sweat of others. It widens the gulf between the rich and the poor, creates cleavages in a society and leads to theft and other forms of looting the treasury (Muhammad, 1990).

## **Islamic Educational Development**

According to Malik (2006), Islam promotes the art of reading and writing as well as listening and speaking. It transcends the spiritual sphere and permeates a broad spectrum of human endeavours. Islam first introduced the art of learning from its inception. The first revelation of the Holy Quran examines the importance of knowledge acquisition. Its content centres on searching for knowledge not only of Islam but also the scientific ones:

*Read in the name of your Lord, who has created (all that exists). He created man from a clot. Read; and your Lord is most Generous, who taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he know not" (Q. 96:1-5).*

In furtherance of human development educationally, Islam encourages the ample acquisition of religious and scientific knowledge based on observation, reflection, empirical study as well as scientific research. It enlightens the society in all fields of knowledge such as chemistry, mathematics, biology, physics, history, astrology, curative medicine, philosophy, law and so on. These are well expatiated by numbers of the Qur'anic verses and the other sources of Islamic code of conduct as illustrated thus:

*O mankind! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection which means the time when souls and bodies will be raised up on the Day of Resurrection, then verily, We have created you from dust, then from a Nutfah (mixed drops of male and female sexual discharge), He made the offspring from semen of despised water). Then from a clot (a piece of coagulated blood), then from a little lump of flesh, some formed, some unformed (miscarriage) to show you our power and ability to do what We will. And We caused whom we will to remain in the womb for an appointed time, then We bring you out as infants, then (give you growth) that you may reach your age of full strength. And among you there is he who dies (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the miserable old age, so that he knows nothing after having known (senility). And you see the earth barren, but when We send down rain on it, it is stirred to life, it swells and puts forth every kind of growth (photosynthesis) (Q22:5).*

In addition, Abdullah (An-Nawawi, 1990) narrates the Allah's messenger's explanation on the above verses of the Holy Qur'an and other branches of knowledge. It was within this Islamic outlook that the early muslims made indelible significance to the world civilization and left indelible significant mark in many fields of studies (Critendon, 1979 and Malik, 2006). Among them were: Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd, Ibn Batutah, Ja'far who is prominent in mathematics. Algebra was even carved out of his name (Hitti, 1984).

## **Contributions of Islam Education to African Development**

Islam contributes significantly to development of Africa in many areas. One of such significant contributions is Arabic literacy. Fafunwa (1976) makes it obvious that Islam reached savannah region of West Africa in 8th century (C.E.), the date from

which written history of West Africa began. The Quranic schools were the first and earlier schools that were established since the middle of 14th century, when Islam was introduced into Nigeria. These schools and their roles promoted both muslims and Islamic culture in Nigeria (Zubair, 2010). Thus, Arabic has made outstanding literary development to the indigenous African civilization by bringing the first form of literacy to West and East African countries prior to the advent of the colonial masters to the area. Many West African languages such as Wolof, Hausa, Fulfude, Mandiga and Yoruba were commonly written in Arabic script before the introduction of the latin scripts. They were commonly written in local languages using the Arabic scripts. This is known as Ajami' (Boyd and Mack, 1999 and Malik, 2006).

The encouragement and patronage of the ruling elites enhanced Arabic and Islamic learning in major towns of Yoruba land in the 19th century to the extent that they (elites) were motivated by the tremendous roles of those schools. The Islamic literacy was a prominent phenomenon in the Yoruba Muslim communities by the early 19th century when colonialism was being imposed and the Christianity was being introduced. Johnson (1984) clarifies that the Christian missionaries in their attempt to develop a standard Yoruba orthography for scholastic and evangelical work considered, among other options, adapting the Arabic script. An important aspect of literary contribution of Arabic to African development is in the area of travel literature in the Moroccan (Muhammad ibn Battuta, 1990). His works in the field of research are still of interest not only to historians, geographers and anthropologists but also to students and tutors of literature and stylistics. From historical perspective, Africa, like some other continents is greatly indebted to Arabic for serving as the vehicle for a vast literature and keeping African records (Malik, 2006).

### **Educational Development and Sources of Information**

Islam moves with its concept of education to anywhere it goes. It brought educational achievement as well as its rich literature to the West African society. It is worth mentioning that for about three hundred years between 7th and 19th centuries, Arabic document remained the only sources of information for European writers who were professionals in the history of the Western and Central Sudan. These works contain convincing and sufficient evidence to prove that Africa had never been a 'dark continent' as claimed by European writers on Africa (Hunwick, 2008).

In peroration, there will be no history if there are no events; and events can only be prevented from falling into oblivion if they are recorded through instrumentality of language. Therefore, it is important to note that prior to the European penetration, Arabic language serves as the only language through which the events of the Africans in the past were recorded for the present generation and posterity. Islamic culture, civilization and literacy have made tremendous contributions to the growth and development, not only to Africa but the entire world.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is quite obvious that Islam and societal advancement are inseparable. The religion moves with knowledge and obliges all its adherents to contribute immensely to the global development in all aspects of promoting their societies, so as to make them more developed politically, spiritually, socially, educationally and religiously. If these are done, there would be peace and tranquility in every community in lieu of backwardness and communal degeneration in some societies. It is highly essential to note the impact of Islam on all aspects of human life. Man is endowed to contribute meaningful quotas towards the growth, advancement and development of himself as well as his environment. In this concern, the following recommendations are put forward for the present generation and the prosperity. Learning is a treasure which everyone must acquire. This is so because education is an eye opener that a society needs for its survival, development as well as transmission of its culture to the coming generations.

Present Muslims should learn from the history of their predecessors and their developmental roles to knowledge of different fields as analyzed. The significance of history is to inform the present generation about the impacts of the people before them and serve as impetus for them to guide their life. Thus, the present generation should learn from the indelible land-mark of their predecessors to societal advancement and contribute their own quotas accordingly. Justice and equity should be maintained in the society as these are two important factors for rapid growth and development of a nation. The loss of the two is the reasons for incessant global conflict and economic meltdown. The two are also the watch words to build an egalitarian society. Islamic schools across the country should include western education into their curriculum so as to enable their products balance the Islamic education with the western one. The combination of the dichotomous education is the essential need of the survival of the society.

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