

## ISLAMIC STUDIES AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES: EVALUATING THE NUC CCMAS ON ISLAMIC STUDIES DEGREE PROGRAMME IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

By

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### Abstract

Islamic Studies, one of the accredited disciplines by the National Universities Commission (NUC), is being offered and taught in some approved private and public universities in Nigeria. In order to address contemporary issues, the NUC reviews the curriculum of the Islamic Studies from time to time. The newly introduced National Universities Commission's Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) for the Nigerian university education system has attracted attention of the academia and other stakeholders in the university education system. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to evaluate the new curriculum designed for Islamic Studies degree programme. The study examined in retrospect, Islamic Studies degree programme in Nigerian universities, identified challenges the discipline has been facing and examined how the newly introduced NUC CCMAS would make Islamic Studies more attractive to Nigerian students and as well as how the products of the discipline could be more employable in contemporary times. The study concluded that if some courses like Islam and Gender Issues (ISS 207), Fiqh of Contemporary Issues (ISS 401) and Islam and Pluralism (ISS 406), as contained in the NUC CCMAS, were properly taught by experts in conducive learning environment, Islamic Studies as an academic discipline would, no doubt, address holistically contemporary issues that are affecting Islam and Muslims in Nigeria in particular and the world at large.

**Keywords:** NUC CCMAS, Islamic Studies programme evaluation, Nigerian universities.

### Introduction

The teaching and learning of Islamic Studies in Nigerian schools, colleges and universities has come a long way in the history of Islam in Nigeria. In some cases, Islamic Studies is always taught or combined with Arabic language especially in the traditional Islamic schools variously known as *Makaranta aloo* or *tsangaya* in Hausa language and *Ile-kewu* in Yoruba language and *madāris/islamiyyah* (modern Islamic institutes) established by individual Muslims and groups across Nigeria. There were efforts in the past to review Islamic Studies curriculum by the proprietors and managers of these Islamic schools due to the challenges being posed by the western education system. For instance, Arabic Institute of Nigeria established in 1958 in Ibadan included some secular subjects in its curriculum. Such subjects are English Language, Mathematics, Sciences, Geography and Sports. As result of the reviewed curriculum of the Arabic Institute of Nigeria, it was affiliated to the University of Ibadan in 1980 for the award of Diploma in Arabic and Islamic Studies (Oladimeji, 2020).

Islamic Studies was introduced as an academic discipline into the university system of education in 1961 when University of Ibadan established Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies. It was revealed that the Department started with two academic programmes namely Bachelor Degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies and a Certificate Course in Arabic. The degree was a four- year programme while the certificate course was a year programme, designed for the products of *'Ilmiyyah* schools. For two decades (between 1963 and 1983), University of Ibadan was the only University in Southwestern Nigeria that awarded degrees in Arabic and Islamic Studies (Opeloye, 2015).

Meanwhile, in order to make Islamic Studies more relevant to contemporary times, National Universities Commission (NUC) was empowered in 2004 by the Nigerian Constitution to constantly review the curriculum of Islamic Studies programme for all universities in Nigeria. In the past, Islamic Studies curriculum had been reviewed under the Minimum Academic Standard (MAS) in 1989 and Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) in 2007. The National Universities Commission (NUC) reviewed BMAS in 2016 with the aim of making university education in Nigeria more responsive to the 21st Century realities and consequently came up with another curriculum tagged Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) in 2018 (NUC, 2022;9). The CCMAS came into operation in Nigerian universities as from 2023/2024 academic session. It is against this background that this paper examined the CCMAS with a view to evaluating the curriculum on the Islamic Studies courses that address contemporary issues so that the discipline would not only be more attractive to learners but will also provide job opportunities for its products.

### **A Glance at the History of the Islamic Studies Degree Programme in the Nigerian Universities**

The premier university in Nigeria is University of Ibadan, established as College of London in 1948. A year after the Independence, that is, in 1961, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies was created in University of Ibadan. The two disciplines attracted students from different backgrounds across Nigeria. Between 1960s and 1970s, enrolment figure in Arabic and Islamic Studies increased considerably due to the scholarship offered by the Department and as well as due to the curiosity of many students to acquire knowledge in the two disciplines. For about two decades, University of Ibadan was noted as the only reputable university in the Southwestern Nigeria that awarded degrees in Arabic and Islamic Studies (Opeloye, 2015).

Due to the prominence and patronage which Arabic and Islamic Studies enjoyed in 1960s among the first-generation universities like University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, some second-generation universities did not only introduce Islamic studies as an academic discipline but also created Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Department of Religions or Religious Studies where Islamic Studies is taught along with other religions. For instance, Islamic Studies is offered in the Department of Religions and Department of Religious Studies in University of Ilorin and Olabisi Onabanjo University respectively (Owoyemi and Akanni, 2017).

It is interesting to note that Islamic Studies is being offered in some federal, state and private universities in the North-West zone of the country. Among these universities are Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Al-qalam University, Katsina, Bayero University, Kano, Kaduna State University, Kaduna, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina and Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. The National University Commission (NUC) accredited the Islamic Studies programme of those universities in 2005. Some of these universities offer B.A and B. A. Ed full time programmes in Islamic Studies. There are also research centres for Islamic Studies at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto and Bayero University, Kano (Kaura, 2015).

Unlike what is obtainable in the universities located in the Southwestern and Northwestern Nigeria, where Islamic Studies enjoys good patronage with the creation of Arabic and Islamic Studies and research centres for Islamic Studies, universities in the South-South do not make adequate provision for Islamic Studies degree programme. Islamic Studies is taught with other courses in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, University of Uyo, University of Calabar, Niger Delta University, Amasoma, Bayelsa State and Delta State University. In these universities, non-Islamic scholars were often recruited to teach Islamic Studies courses. The University of Port Harcourt, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, formerly known as Department of Religious Studies, teaches students courses such as Islamic Theology and Philosophy, Islam in West Africa, Modern Development in Islam, Islamic Fundamentals and Islamic Ethical Teaching. Since 2009, University of Port Harcourt is the only University in the South-South, Nigeria that has a professorial chair in Islamic Studies (Kilani, 2015).

One of the great challenges facing the Islamic Studies degree programme in Nigerian universities is the declining in the enrolment figure of students especially in the Southwestern Nigerian universities. During the 2013/2014 academic session, a research was conducted on Islamic Studies degree programme in University of Ibadan (UI), University of Lagos (Unilag), Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU), Lagos State University (LASU), Ekiti State University (EKSU) and Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED). The finding shows that, Islamic Studies as an academic discipline in those universities was in precarious situation. It was feared that if the ugly situation was not addressed, Islamic Studies might face the danger of extinction in those six universities (Opeloye, 2015). While advancing the argument for the declining fortune of Islamic Studies degree programme in the Southwestern Nigerian universities, Opeloye further remarks thus:

There is no gain saying that the curricular of most of Religious Studies Department of our universities are Christian Studies biased, the curriculum content in most cases being more than eighty percent Christian. The Islamic component that is taught is often a caricature of Islamic Studies aimed at disparaging Islamic faith and promoting Christian doctrine...The Religious Studies Department in OAU has commenced the process of restructuring the programme to bring about a balanced Religious Studies Curriculum...(Opeloye, 2015:113).

The dwindling enrollment figures of Islamic Studies students in another research by Salako (2014) confirmed the position of Opeloye who traced the decline number to lack of inadequate enrollment of students in the subject at the senior secondary school level. One may agree with Opeloye's findings to some extent but the situation in some of these universities has changed and improved in respect of attracting more students to the Islamic Studies degree programme as well as restructuring the Islamic Studies curriculum. For instance, in Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, the enrolment figure of Islamic Studies in the last three academic sessions (2020-2023) has improved, while the curriculum of Islamic Studies has been reviewed to meet the challenges of the modern world. Courses like Maqasid-as-Shari'ah (ISS 334), Science of Islamic Jurisprudence (ISS 228) and Basis of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISS 105) were introduced into the Islamic Studies Degree Programme of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye (Department of Religious Studies, OOU, 2020). The National University Commission (NUC) noted that the need to review the curriculum of Islamic Studies was to address contemporary issues in the 21st Century. Hence, in 2018, Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) were designed by National Universities Commission (NUC) for all disciplines including Islamic Studies for the Nigerian universities.

**Table showing the Increment in Students' Enrolment Figure in Islamic Studies Degree Programme, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State (from 2019-2023)**

SESSION	100 Level	200 Level	300 Level	400 Level	Total
2019/2020	13	07	08	11	<b>39</b>
2020/2021	31	14	07	09	<b>61</b>
2021/2022	24	31	14	08	<b>77</b>
2022/2023	34	24	31	14	<b>103</b>
TOTAL	102	76	60	42	280

Source: Department of Religious Studies, OOU, Ago-Iwoye, 2023.

### **Islamic Studies Degree Programme and Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS)**

Islamic Studies, otherwise known as Islamics, is defined as an academic discipline that studies, analyzes, utilizes and develops Islam from the improvement of the understanding and application of derivatives of Islam to the advantage of humanity and its complex and dynamic environment (Oloyede, 2012). Islamic Studies is sub-divided into Textual Studies or *Nusu* (Qur'an and Hadith), *Fiqh* (Aqidah and Theology), Islamic History, Sociology of Islam, Islamic Economics and Thought and Arabic (as an essential tool). Islamic Studies is classified into three sub-disciplines as shown in the table below:

<b>Fiqh (Islamic Law)</b>	<b>Islamic Thought</b>	<b>Islamic History</b>
Qur'an	<i>Tasawuf</i>	<i>Sirah</i>
Hadith	Philosophy	General History of Islam
Theology	Islamic Economics	Islamic Historiography

Personal Law	Islamic Banking	
Family Law	Sociology of Islam	
Public Law	<i>Da'wah</i>	
	Ethics	
	Islamic Art & Architecture	
	Translation      Art      &	
	Technology	

Adapted from the 116th Inaugural Lecture of Prof Ishaq Olanrewaju Oloyede, 2012, p.19

The above table shows that Islamic Studies as an academic discipline is very wide in scope as it gives rooms for specialization in different areas of Islamic epistemology. It is an indication that curriculum of Islamic Studies programme at the tertiary level of education should take care of those areas identified in the above table. Going by the Oloyede's categorization of Islamic Studies degree programme, can Islamic Economics, Islamic Banking and Islamic Art and Architecture still be taught as a separate course or as a different degree programme in the Department of Religious Studies or Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Nigerian universities? This question poses challenge to the NUC that is empowered to review Islamic Studies curriculum from time to time.

As stated in the National Universities Commission's Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards, (CCMAS), among the cardinal objectives of Islamic Studies degree programme are to:

- (i) acquaint the learner with broad outlines of Islam as a religion and a way of life;
- (ii) increase the learner's capacity and understanding of Islam as a culture and civilization;
- (iii) present Islam to the learner in its original sources;
- (iv) sustain rigorous academic research in all issues affecting Islam and Muslims in the contemporary period;
- (v) place Islam in the context of other world religious traditions (with emphasis on the traditions practised in Nigeria);
- (vi) provide the requisite human capital for the civil service; government ministries, departments, agencies, the judiciary, foreign service
- (vii) deploy religion (Islam) as an instrument for the promotion of peace, harmony and development in the society (NUC, 2022:352)

It is important to note that in order to achieve the above stated objectives especially those on items iv, vi and vii, it would require a complete review or overhauling of the curriculum of the discipline. It is in line of this fact that NUC produced a new curriculum in 2020 for Islamic Studies degree programme, which had come into operation from 2023/2024 academic session.

The Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) was designed for seventeen disciplines in the Nigerian universities. These are Administration and Management, Agriculture, Allied Health Sciences, Architecture, Arts, Basic Medical Sciences, Computing, Communication and Media Studies, Education, Engineering and Technology, Environmental Sciences, Law,

Medicine and Dentistry, Pharmaceutical Science, Sciences, Social Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (NUC, 2022).

As a humanity-based discipline, Islamic Studies is listed among courses to be offered in the Faculty of Arts or Humanities in the Nigerian universities. The CCMAS is expected to be ICT compliant, “promote Artificial Intelligence, enhance skills acquisition, inculcate and sharpen entrepreneurship mindset of students and capable of steering the deployment of evolving technologies to deliver its content” (NUC, 2022:352). Major unique features of the CCMAS include:

- (i) provision for 70% minimum core courses requirements for graduation, while Nigerian universities will provide the remaining 30%;
- (ii) reduction of the General Studies (GST) course from 36 credit units to 12 credit units of 6 courses namely Communication in English; Nigerian People and Culture; Philosophy, Logic and Human Existence; Entrepreneurship and Innovation; Venture creation; and Peace and Conflict Resolution (NUC, 2022:352).

With respect to the Islamic Studies degree programme, CCMAS emphasizes innovative skills for effective teaching of Islamic Studies in a globalized world. It also emphasizes the essential life skills for peaceful co-existence and inclusivity in a diverse plural environment and acquisition of entrepreneur skills (NUC, 2022). As well spelt in the CCMAS, the products of Islamic Studies are expected to be independent of mind, self-disciplined, self-directed, innovative, creative and digital literates. The products of Islamic Studies degree programme are also expected to be offered jobs in educational establishments, civil service, government ministries, departments, agencies, the judiciary and foreign services (NUC, 2022). This paper thus evaluated the CCMAS on Islamic Studies courses that address contemporary issues in the new designed curriculum of Islamic Studies degree programme in order to find out if those courses could make the discipline more attractive to Nigerian students and possibly provide job opportunities for them in the digital world.

### **Evaluating the CCMAS on Islamic Studies Courses and Contemporary Issues**

The comprehensiveness of Islam as a religion and a way of life is attested to in the Glorious Qur'an. It is a monotheist world religion that addresses all issues affecting humankind. Allah says: “...and We have revealed the Book to you (Muhammad) explaining clearly everything and a guidance and mercy and good news for those who submit” (Q16:89). As clearly stated in the NUC CCMAS, through some new courses introduced in Islamic Studies degree programme, it would help the students/researchers in finding practical solutions to problems confronting contemporary societies in particular and the Muslim world in general. Some of these new courses were examined one after the other.

**General Studies (GST):** As contained in CCMAS, Islamic Studies students shall offer general course such as Communication in English (GST 111), Nigerian Peoples and Cultures (GST 113), Philosophy, Logic and Human Existence (GST 212) and Peace and Conflict Resolution (GST 312). Each of these courses is compulsory for every Islamic Studies student to take and pass. Having taken and passed these general compulsory courses, Islamic Studies students are expected to have developed good skills in reading, speaking and writing good English (NUC, 2022).



**Entrepreneurial Courses (ENT):** These are courses that every student, irrespective of his/her discipline must offer in the university. Islamic Studies students, as well spelt in the CCMAS, shall offer entrepreneurial courses such as Entrepreneurship and Innovation (ENT 211) and Venture Creation (ENT 312). The courses will afford Islamic Studies students to understand the concepts and theories of entrepreneurship, elements in innovation, contemporary entrepreneurship issues in Nigeria and basic principles of e-commerce. By taking Venture Creation (ENT 312) as a course, Islamic Studies students shall know how to establish and manage micro and small enterprises. The course contents of Venture Creation (ENT 312) include sources of business opportunities in Nigeria, Principles of Marketing, Customer Acquisition and Retention, Small Business Management/Family Business, Basic Book Keeping and Business Applications of New Technologies-Artificial Intelligence (AI), Cloud Computing and Renewable Energy (NUC, 2022:364-4365). These courses, no doubt, address some contemporary issues in Nigeria particularly and in the world generally.

**Faculty of Art Courses (FAC):** Students whose disciplines are domiciled in the Faculty of Arts/Humanities are expected to offer some courses designed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in the new CCMAS. As contained in the Islamic Studies Degree programme, Islamic Studies students are expected to offer FAC 201 (Digital Humanities: Application of Computer to the Arts), FAC 202 (The Arts and Other Disciplines), FAC 301 (Research Methods in the Arts) and FAC 302 (Theories in the Arts and Humanities). Before students can obtain a degree in Islamic Studies, he/she must offer and pass the Faculty courses as contained in the CCMAS (NUC, 2022: 354-355).

**Islamic Studies Courses:** The new Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) designed for Islamic Studies degree programme contain some courses that address contemporary issues. These courses include Islam and Gender Studies (ISS 207), Entrepreneurial Skills in Islamic Studies (Calligraphy) (ISS 306), Fiqh of Contemporary Issues (ISS 401) and Islam and Pluralism (ISS 406). While examining the course contents of ISS 207 (Islam and Gender Issues), Islamic Studies students will be taught, among others, role of men and women in society, women education, evaluation of gender relationship in the Muslim world. The knowledge to be acquired in ISS 306 (Entrepreneurial Skills-Calligraphy) will enable the Islamic Studies students to recognize the importance of seeking means of livelihood and see calligraphy as a means of getting income and apply different aspects of calligraphy for commercial purposes. Aspects of Calligraphy which include graphic designs, paintings, cut stone inscriptions, wedding invitations, moving images for films and television, corporate logos etc show that the Islamic Studies degree programme will address contemporary issues (NUC, 2020:368-369).

Fiqh of Contemporary Issues (ISS 401) is a new course designed for Islamic Studies degree programme in CCMAS. Students will learn Islamic ethical teachings and *fiqh* of some contemporary issues in Islamic Bio-ethics such as cloning, euthanasia, suicide, capital punishment, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and cryptocurrency. Modern reforms concerning Muslim women, *Ijtihād* and *Mujtahidūn* will also be taught (NUC, 2020:370). At the end of this course, Islamic Studies students would know legal opinions on some of these Bio-ethic issues that affect the contemporary society.

**Islam and Pluralism (ISS 406):** This is another new course in the CCMAS for Islamic Studies degree programme. The course addresses contemporary issues concerning wrong notion and assumption against Islam and Muslims in some western countries. The course is also designed to promote values of inclusivity and peaceful co-existence with people of other faiths. The course

addresses contemporary problems between the world of Islam and the West. The students will be taught Islamic values of sanctity of life, good relation with all human beings, eradication of injustice, cooperation and universal brotherhood (NUC,2020).

### **Implementing the CCMAS Islamic Studies Degree Programme in the Nigerian Universities**

A critical evaluation of the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) shows that courses that address contemporary issues have been included in the Islamic Studies degree programme. In order to achieve the stated objectives of the Islamic Studies degree programme as contained in the CCMAS, the curriculum needs to be properly implemented. The stakeholders of the university education system particularly the government, academic staff and parents should ensure that the new CCMAS is implemented to logical conclusion.

It is important to state that the CCMAS only provides for 70% minimum core courses requirements for graduation, Nigerian universities are expected to provide the remaining 30% (CCMAS, 9). In other words, each university in Nigeria where Islamic Studies is being offered as a degree programme is allowed to provide 30% of the curriculum that will address the peculiarities of every university. For example, the Islamic Studies Unit of the Department of Religious Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU) Ago-Iwoye has developed its remaining 30% of CCMAS. Parts of the 30% of the curriculum designed for Islamic Studies degree programme in OOU include OOU-ISS 212 (Islam and Tourism), OOU-ISS 214 (Islam and Sports), OOU-ISS 312 (Mosque Administration and Management), OOU-ISS 315 (Islam and Information and Communication Technology), ISS 411 (Islam and Entrepreneurship) and OOU-ISS 412 (Islam and Health Care). No doubt, some of these courses address contemporary issues that affect Muslims.

The Government and University Management should provide enabling learning environment in order to ensure that general studies courses (GST), entrepreneurial courses (ENT) and courses in the Arts Discipline (FAC) are properly taught by experts so that graduates of Islamic Studies will be more relevant to the contemporary society. To implement this curriculum, it is recommended that smart boards, computers, laptops, projectors and well-equipped library are provided for effective teaching and learning of Islamic Studies (NUC, 2020:370)

Furthermore, Islamic Studies courses that address contemporary matters such as ISS 207 (Islam and Gender Studies), ISS 306 (Entrepreneurial Skills in Islamic Studies (Calligraphy), ISS 401 (Fiqh of Contemporary Issues) and ISS 406 (Islam and Pluralism) should be properly handled by competent Islamic Studies lecturers that are well groomed in those courses. The new CCMAS, is no doubt, a challenge to academic staff who are expected to update their knowledge and skills in order to implement the new curriculum. It is hoped that if students of Islamic Studies degree programme are well exposed to courses that address contemporary issues and trends, they will not only be more relevant but also employable in the labour market.

The implementation of the CCMAS on Islamic Studies degree programme can also bring about new nomenclature for Islamic Studies as an academic discipline in the Nigerian universities. Presently, Islamic Studies is being offered as a degree programme in the Department of Religions (University of Ilorin), in the Department of Religious Studies (Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye), in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies (University of Ibadan) and in the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies (University of Port Harcourt). Considering the course contents of Islamic Studies degree programme in the CCMAS, it will be



proper if Islamic Studies is given a separate department in the Nigerian universities with a new nomenclature such as:

- (i) Department of Islamic Civilization and Contemporary Issues
- (ii) Department of Islamic Thought and Human Development
- (iii) Department of Islamic Epistemology and Human Values

Giving a new name to the department where Islamic Studies is being offered may attract more Nigerian students to the course and will probably change the narratives of Islamic Studies as an academic discipline that addresses contemporary issues on the development of society.

## Conclusion

This paper has been able to evaluate the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) on Islamic Studies degree programme. The paper concisely examined the historical development of Islamic Studies as an academic discipline in the Nigerian universities with a view to addressing challenges the discipline is facing. It also discussed in details new courses added to the Islamic Studies curriculum which bother on contemporary issues in the modern world. The paper posited that new nomenclature should be given to department where Islamic Studies is being offered as a degree programme because of the comprehensiveness of the course contents of the new Islamic Studies curriculum provided by the National University Commission (NUC). It is hoped that if the CCMAS, which came into operation in 2023/2024 academic session, is properly implemented through the provision of conducive environment with good human and material resources, Islamic Studies as an academic discipline would be more attractive to Nigerian students and possibly create more employment opportunities for its products in the contemporary society.

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