

EMPOWERING MUSLIM WOMEN WITH ISLAMIC LITERACY THROUGH ADULT EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF *AL-QONITAT* WOMEN QURANIC CENTRE OSOGBO, OSUN-STATE

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Abstract

In both the ancient and modern worlds, the pursuit of knowledge transcends age, gender, and race. Islam's fundamental law (Q2: 31–33) and the Quran's revelation, which occurred approximately 1437 years ago, focused on knowledge acquisition and education (Q96: 1–5). Meanwhile, it is indisputable that education plays a crucial role in all facets of human activities, including social, political, economic and spiritual. While the roles of women in developing home and the society at large cannot be overlooked, for any Muslim home to survive from moral decadency in contemporary society and to sustain Islamic pristine teachings, Muslim women need to be empowered with Islamic literacy and education. This study adopted desktop methodology and historical approach. This paper observed the activities of *Al-Qonitat* Women Quranic Centre and found that it had contributed immensely to women's empowerment through adult education and Islamic literacy in social transformation through the dissemination of Islamic knowledge within their homes and society at large. Therefore, this paper concludes that adult education with Islamic literacy can contribute to self-development and self-actualization, which can empower Muslim women intellectually and professionally and give Muslim women comprehensive knowledge for the betterment of society.

Keywords: Islamic literacy, Muslim women empowerment, adult education.

Introduction

The most important component of education is undoubtedly literacy, which is the capacity to read and write. Without reading, all other forms of learning are impossible. Overall, literacy instruction is effective for a wide range of social and cognitive tasks. If one lacks the reading abilities, learning more may be prettier difficult. Being literate is essential to learning. In Islamic thought, "*ilm*" is the most important thing, after *īmān* (Faith). Furthermore, the concept of "*ilm*" implies reading, learning, and gaining information. On an individual basis, all believing men and women are required to acquire this information. Because of this, Allah established literacy and the understanding of letters as the primary means of acquiring knowledge.

At the beginning of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, it is discussed how to learn and impart knowledge to others. Reading, writing, and remembering are methods that promote information acquisition and personal development. In addition to improving a person's life, literacy allows one to acquire the skills necessary to sustain oneself and one's family. On knowledge, everything is built. Only in the framework of knowledge can a man discern between what is good and what is horrible or right and wrong. Education plays a vital role in driving the country's economic growth as well as its cultural, political, and social advancement. Should a country be built on a certain concept, its populace must be cultivated through excellent education. Human-centered education needs to be seen as an integrated, holistic approach. It ought to be recognized that in order to liberate humanity from constraints preventing its liberation to the highest degree of dignity, education needs to have a holistic and comprehensive approach to the individual. Spirituality and education have an unbreakable connection. A materialistic education will diminish human dignity (Ahmad, 2022).

Adult learners have the capacity and experience to make decisions on their own; their perception of themselves is no longer reliant on external factors. The ramifications of this self-concept include that learning should be planned to meet the needs and features of the learning community through group cooperation; the learning environment encourages people to move freely and take the lead in their own education. In order to allow adult learners to take part in the learning activities, their role in diagnosing learning needs to be specified while designing the learning objectives. After that, adult learners will assess whether or not their learning achieved the goals by using self-evaluation. Adult orientation learning is life-centered, so learning goes beyond only achieving academic success; rather, adults are driven to make positive changes in their lives (Cross, 1981). Since learning gives adults more and more experience, adult learning is more about enhancing life experiences than it is about obtaining certifications alone. It also involves spiritual development.

Furthermore, according to Howell (2004), it develops as our spiritual intelligence develops the influence of our previous level of identity and attunes us to a new and higher level of self, which describes patterns of behavior and thinking that span the different levels of life, from a very small and enclosed identity life to a life that is ever searching and engaged in the greater meanings of why we do what we do.

For the learner's profound self-development, learning is a personal decision. Compared to the early days, when the majority of religious lessons were offered in mosques and, to a lesser extent, at Muslim voluntary organizations, it was discovered that the trend of demand for adult education has developed progressively over time. As a result of this occurrence, ambitious people have made significant financial investments to establish educational institutions to cater for the growing need for adult education. They have identified a large market for their products. This includes different programmes tailored to meet the needs of adult learners, personnel with the necessary training to support people in making learning decisions, flexible learning schedules, locations for holding the courses, and instructors.

Concept of Literacy

Literacy is the capacity to communicate orally as well as through written language (script, print, or digital); however, it is strongly related to oral communication. Islam is a communication-oriented religion. *Wahy*, or revelation, is a central idea in the Qur'an and is based on

communication. The first and most important rule is that, because numeracy deals with the use of numbers in writing, it is a part of literacy. No talent, whether it is "computer literacy," "legal literacy," "emotional literacy," or anything else, can be metaphorically described by the word "literacy" (Lind, 2008). According to UNESCO, literacy is the capacity to recognize, comprehend, interpret, produce, communicate, and compute with printed and written resources in a variety of circumstances (Montoya, 2018). The UNESCO defined literate as "someone who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement about his/her everyday life." Even yet, this definition might help one reach a higher skill level—functional literacy, for example. One who is "able to do all the things that require literacy for his or her group and community to work well and that allows him or her to keep using literacy skills for his own and the community's growth" (UNESCO, 2004 & 1979) is also considered functionally literate, according to UNESCO's definition.

This concept shows how functional literacy varies based on the surroundings and circumstances in any group or community. It also highlights how difficult, if not impossible, it is to distinguish between those who are literate and those who are not, as literacy is a lifetime work. The foundation for Islamic behavior is established by the Holy Qur'an, which also conveys the core ideas of Islam (Galande, 2002).

A person's basic education is built on their level of literacy. Formal and practical literacy are the two definitions of "literacy" that are commonly used. Developing general literacy abilities and gaining the knowledge or information necessary to enhance one's life and take charge of implementing it in one's personal and family life is known as practical literacy. Life skills acquisition is the main goal of practical literacy. Functional literacy, as defined by Smith (2010), is the capacity to read the kinds of materials required to carry out regular job-related tasks. Formal literacy, on the other hand, is a skill that is learned at a school, college, or university. Formal education, in Sarah's opinion, is organized, controlled, and regimented. Institutions usually provide opportunities for formal education. This kind of learning is frequently guided by a curriculum or another kind of organized programme (Eaton, 2010).

Concept of adulthood

According to Santrock (2011), development is apparently complex in both adults and children, as it arises from a combination of biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional processes. Tennant and Pogson (1995) assert that although adulthood is a period of development and change, its processes are different from those of childhood. As "biological processes produce changes in an individual's physical nature: cognitive processes refer to changes in the individual's thought, intelligence, and language," These processes show how adults communicate, think, and conduct differently from infants. According to Santrock (2011), "socio-emotional processes" include adjustments to a person's personality, emotions, and interpersonal interactions. Adult learners also desire different treatment and instruction than that of youngsters. The time frame for adulthood, according to Feldman (2012), is "in their 20s, they are on the cusp of the concerning 30s, when the body starts to send signals of decline and to exact a price for excess and inattention." Cognitively, the majority have ceased attending formal education, although others wish to resume it in a different setting, such as a college. "Three phases make up the maturation period of adulthood. They are classified as follows: early adulthood, which spans the ages of 21 to 39; middle adulthood, which spans the ages of 40 to 60; and late adulthood, which starts at age 61 and up. Every stage of adulthood has its own set of difficulties and demands. The learning

objective for this group of adult learners must take into account the possibility that their needs will change as they progress through these stages. The tremendous amount of life experience that adult learners have gathered over the years has taught them important lessons. Adults bring all of their past learning experiences with them when they enroll in your course.

These encounters will be a combination of good and bad, possess a diverse spectrum of experiences, ages, ethnicities, and attitudes (Corder, 2002). The various experiences adults had as children while growing up in their parents' care, as well as their exposure to their surroundings, the people in them, and the educational institution they attended, all shaped their personalities as learners.

Education in Islam.

Islam places a strong emphasis on education. The first verse of the Qur'an to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) begins with the word "Iqr'a," which is an Arabic command that means "read," and suggests the ideas of "learning," "exploring," and "seeking enlightenment." This shows that it is through reading (knowledge) that one can approach the Creator of all that exists. Qur'an 96 verses 1-5 emphasize

Read in the Name of your Lord who created; created man from a clinging mass.
Read, and your Lord is the most generous, who taught by the pen, taught man
what he did not know.

It is a religious obligation to learn, which is the first principle covered here while discussing education in Islam, which is vital for enhancing literacy. Islam divides knowledge or education into two categories, or *ahkām*:

- (i) *farḍ 'ayn* - individual obligation
- (ii) *farḍ kifāyah* – collective obligation of knowledge.

The sources of the *sharī'ah* are the Qur'an and Sunnah. *ʿIlm al-ladunniyyah* and *ḥikmah* are also sources of revealed knowledge that is spiritual knowledge and wisdom that may be attained by the long sustained practices of devotion and righteousness (Salleh 2009). *ʿIlm al-ladunniyyah* is the knowledge that is inspired and conferred directly by Allah, The Exalted, to whomever He wishes among His believing slaves and it does not conflict with the Qur'an and Sunnah. Ibn Taymiyyah states, it is true that Allah bestows upon His allies and faithful followers' souls that are free of what He despises and seeks what He approves and it is not apart from the Qur'an (Majmoo'al-Fatawa). Allah says in the Qur'an 18:65

There they found a servant of Ours, to whom We had granted mercy
from Us and enlightened with the knowledge of Our Own.

According to Cowan et.al (1976), *Hikmah* refers to literacy as wisdom, philosophy, logic. Al-Attas (1976) asserts that wisdom, or *Hikmah*, is the ability to determine which knowledge

belongs where. Scientific knowledge gained via experience, experimentation, observation, and research makes up the acquired knowledge. Islam encourages the fusion of science and faith in Allah in its educational philosophy (Salleh, 2009). Revealed knowledge and learned knowledge are related, and they might even be complementary. Qur'an 3 verses 190-191 say:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the day and night there are signs for people of reason.

They are those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth and pray, "Our Lord! You have not created all of this without purpose. Glory be to You! Protect us from the torment of the Fire.

These verses show how faith in Allah and His scientific creation are closely related. Science and Islam go hand in hand. It is not adversarial or conflicting in any manner. In order to ensure and promote literacy in both earthly and hereafter education, education is a fundamental Islamic religious duty. Humanity's primary responsibility is to serve Allah with piety, as He reveals in Qur'an 51 verse 56: "And I did not create *jinn* and men but to serve Me.". People are commanded to worship Allah alone. Allah says in 7verse 59: "Worship Allah, there is no god besides Him".

In order to carry out His duties, Allah has given humanity knowledge, and He claims to have taught Adam the names of everything. Then He revealed them to the angels and declared, "Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful." (Q2 verse 31)

Education is an ongoing process. Islam teaches Muslims that even in old age, they have to seek knowledge because even while we can still walk, breathe air, and enjoy life, we still need to learn new things. As a result, parents begin teaching their newborns age-appropriate lessons as soon as they are born. There is a *ḥadīth* from *Abū Hurayrah* in which the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) said: No child is born except on *al-fiṭrah* (Islam) and then his parents make him Jewish, Christian or Magian". (Sahih al-Bukhari 4775.)

Learning is the process of gaining morality, knowledge, and skills. Education, according to Alavi, is the interaction between a teacher and a student that takes place gradually, developmentally, and continuously throughout the student's life in order to cultivate all that God has created in the student harmoniously and conclusively for the student's spiritual benefit and satisfaction (Alavi, 2007). Al-Ghazālī believed that a person will always be a student till the end of his or her life. (Ghazālī, 2005) Hence, Islamic education is essential for improving literacy because it mentors individuals in all spheres of their lives till death.

Learning is compulsory on every Muslim without gender segregation based on the hadith of the Prophet (S.A.W) which is narrated by Anas Ibn Malik; "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim". (Sunan Ibn Mājah 224)

On this note it is obligatory on every Muslim to search for knowledge, in which Muslim women should be involved in order to make Muslim homes to be acquitted with knowledge, morality and to make worship of Allah easier. Aisha (R.A) one of the wives of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was a scholar in her life time and she taught other women who had married.

Report of UNESCO on Female Education

According to the 2008 UNESCO *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, at the end of 1999 less than one-third of the 800 million children under the age of six benefited from early childhood education. Of the 113 million children without access to primary education schooling, 60 percent of these were girls. Furthermore, some 880 million adults, the majority being women, were illiterate. Additionally, excluding the United States and Europe, approximately one in three countries in 2005 did not “constitutionally guarantee” a right for “free and compulsory primary education”. Countries have achieved progress since 2000, but much work remains to meet the goals of “education for all” and the United Nations Millennium.

Development Goals¹ (MDGs) as demonstrated by the following 2005 statistics: The number of children not enrolled in school is 72 million; global gross enrolment in secondary education is at 66%; approximately 774 million adults, the majority women (64%) lack basic literacy and numeracy skills; while gender disparities in education at the primary level were eliminated among 63% percent of the reporting countries from 2000-2005, only 37% had eliminated gender disparity at the secondary level (UNESCO 2008).

Consequently, there remains notable disparities in educational systems and opportunities across the globe. This begs for the question: Why do governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international declarations and conventions emphasize the significance of raising global education standards in the battle against poverty? What part does faith play in closing the educational gap? It is imperative to note that Al –Qonitat is an NGO that is spreading literacy to adult women. The impact of an Individual or NGOs in spreading the literacy is important, so as make learning easy and accessible.

Historical Background of *Al-Qonitat*; Mission, Vision, and Activities

Al-Qonitat is an Islamic organization whose primary goal is to promote Muslim women's education. It also serves as an avenue for encouraging and strengthening Muslim women's moral, social, and religious growth in Osun State and across the country. The goal of Al-Qonitat, an institution that was established in 2001 in Osogbo as a madrasah or college for Islamic teaching only for women, was to address the issue of adult Muslim women in Osogbo and its surrounding areas lacking Islamic knowledge and illiterate in the Qur'an. However, the establishment serves both young and adult Muslims and is centered on women.

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Education Mission

The principal mission of the centre is to promote the integrities of Muslim women and impact on them basic Islamic teaching to be more upright and religious and to have more understanding of their primary assignment as Muslim wives in accordance to the Quran and Sunnah. In the year 2002, the Centre set up an adult class with just four students at a rented home of the founder at Kola Balogun area Osogbo, before the year ran out, the population of the students has grown to twenty five which includes both Yoruba and Hausa Muslim women and as a result of increased in the population of the students just in a single year, the single room could not accommodate the learners, so the learning center relocated to one of the classes of a Muslim government school A.U.D primary school Sabo Osogbo, with an approval letter from government through a Muslim brother in charge of the government school in Olorunda local government Mr. Nurudeen Siyanbola.

The *madrasah* has produced up to 300 upright and diligent *Muslimah* from different tribes and ethnics across the country. The madrasah got the support of their husbands based on the fact that it is a female based school that teaches women the Islamic ways. Many notable women have graduated from this citadel of knowledge. The first grandaunt was from Hausa tribe, her name is Rashidha Yahya a daughter of former Seriki Hausa in Sabo, Osogbo. Among the gradaunts were:

Alhaja Fausiyat Oladipo (Yeye Oluomo of Osogbo land);

Alhaja Aishat Abosede Salami, wife of late Senator Bayo Salami;
Olori Adeola Oyetunji (The Olori Ataoja of Osogbo);

Alhaja Musliat Adefunke Akinbade (The wife of former S.S.G. in Osun State;
Alhaja Serifat Amolegbe) (The wife of late Col. Shakiru Amolegbe);

Late Alhaja Kudirat labo-Popoola (The wife of former Vice Chancellor of University of Osun.
In 2022 the Madrasah celebrated 21st year anniversary with 17th Walimotul Qur'an graduation.

Activities of Al-Qonitat Women Quranic center

Educational contribution: The organization's principal mission is to promote the intellectual pursuit of women and young ladies. The organization stands as a school that lays emphasis on teaching of western subjects and Arabic language with prominent Islamic scholars and western teachers.

Religious activities: In order to make women of the contemporary society more religiously upright and spiritually enlightened and uplifted, the centre organises a weekly, monthly (Asalatu) for women every Sunday at the madrasah to build their morality and piety along with education and social-economic empowerment of its members.

Economic empowerment: the Al-Qonitat school provides employment for unemployed Muslims in their establishment. It also establishes them with set up contributions among themselves.

Fiqh session: the centre also has regular *fiqh* sessions where basic tenets of the Islamic faith are usually extensively discussed especially the roles that concern females only.

Public lecture: Al-Qonitat organises public lectures at regular intervals which are mostly handled by female scholars. It also invites guest lecturers from institution of higher learning.

Qur'anic tutorial classes and memorization: This is organised in the madrasah with the task that all women must learn the recitation of the holy Quran. It is on record that as at 2024 (1445AH), more than 300 women had successfully learnt through these class, the correct recitation of the Quran with *tajweed* (science of correct recitation of the Quran) at the centre.

Al-Qonitat Youth Class

In 2021, the Madrasah started a new phase of learning both Arabic and western classes for female youths in order to promote learning with Islamic identity and value citizenship. The Arabic classes for the youths include *tahfizil Qur'an* , *uluumul Hadith* and *uzuulifiqh*.

Media dawn: -Al - Qonitat usually engages in missionary programme on media both on the radio and television in Osun State Broadcasting Corporation, Osun state.

Conclusion

This paper observed the activities of Al-Qonitat Women Quranic Centre and found that the centre had contributed immensely to women's empowerment through adult education and Islamic literacy in social transformation through the dissemination of Islamic knowledge within their homes and society at large. Therefore, this paper concludes that adult education with Islamic literacy can contribute to self-development and self-actualization, which can empower Muslim women intellectually and professionally and give Muslim women comprehensive knowledge for the betterment of society.

The Qur'an and *ahadith* indicate that knowledge and education is important for all Muslims in order for them to fulfil their duties and obligations to Allah and humanity. As such, it is clear that obtaining knowledge and providing equal access to education for all sections of society is of central importance in Islam. While focusing on economic and social development is fundamental for international development organisations, Muslim Faith Based organisations focus mostly on relief work rather than on long-term development projects, which would include education. As illustrated above, both the acquisition and the provision of knowledge are obligatory in Islam. Therefore, Muslim women should consider focusing on education as obligatory while setting their priorities. Furthermore, education for marginalised groups such as girls and members of disadvantaged sections of the society should be given priority in project planning.

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