

ENHANCING ISLAMIC STUDIES SCOPE IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS FOR STUDENTS' ATTRACTIVENESS

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Abstract

For more than four decades now, the religion in general and Islamic Studies in particular in Nigerian tertiary institutions especially in the south-west has been one of the areas with which scholars have pre-occupied themselves, attempting to make Islamic studies in its multifarious and multidimensional manifestation, more attractive and intelligible. Well packaged activities in terms of accumulating knowledge and progressive critical, and dispassionate research in Islamic Studies which are well disseminated through teaching and learning is what is taken to be a manifestation of the reality of academic tradition in Islamic studies in Nigeria. It is however observed that student enrollment for Islamic studies in higher institutions in South West Nigeria is not as competitive as that of the Northern part. This is in spite of the demonstration of vast knowledge of viewpoints espoused by Islamic Studies scholars. This study investigated ways of attracting the interest of students towards learning Islamic Studies through widening its scope and improving its method of teaching and learning. This study adopted the descriptive method of research in explaining the existing scope thereby identifying new combinations to enhance the scope to improve students' enrolment in Southwestern Nigerian higher institutions. The study concluded among others that widening the scope of Islamic studies shall attract more students to the field.

Keywords: Enrolment increase, South West higher institutions, Nigeria.

Introduction

Islamic Studies is one of the subjects learned at every level of learning. It is a subject in which knowledge about the religion of Islam can be obtained. Oloyede (2012) opined that Islamic studies is a terminology used to describe an aspect of theological sciences which seeks to influence natural, human and social science in their service to God and humanity from the prison of Islamic credo. Oyedokun *et al* (2021) describe Islamic studies as the Umbrella for the Islamic Science (Ulūmul Dīn). It includes all the traditional forms of

religious knowledge like Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh), Islamic History (Sīrah), Islamic Theology (Ilmul qalām), Islamic Sciences and Islamic economics among others.

In the opinion of Usman Andi, (n.d.), it is the historical study of Islam which includes Islamic civilization, Islamic history, Islamic theology, Islamic philosophy, Islamic law and Islamic historiography. Considering its wide and comprehensive area of knowledge about Islam, Islamic studies is supposed to be a compulsory course/subject of study most especially for Muslim students in both primary and secondary schools. This, if made compulsory, would allow them to obtain adequate knowledge about their religion which is not only a religion but a complete way of life. Not only this, it will also improve the enrolment of students for Islamic studies in tertiary institutions.

Meanwhile, it must be emphasized here that the enrolment of the students for Islamic Studies compared to other courses has nothing to write home about. It is in the light of this that the current work has set out to assess the enrolment level of the students of the Department of Islamic Studies at Federal College of Education, Osiele, in affiliation with University of Ibadan. The work assessed the population of the students from Degree I to IV, examined the scope regarding the combinations and then dwelled on what combination to add so as to improve the enrolment of the students in the Department.

Islamic Education

The term "education" to start with originated from the Latin word *educere* which means: to teach or to train (Abiri, 2010). As a concept, education means different things to different people because scholars viewed it from different perspectives. Education, to historians, deals with the knowledge, skills and experiences that one acquires from the cradle to the grave. The implication of this assertion is that education is more than just ordinary schooling, and it is possible to obtain an education without going through the conventional educational system. Philosophers see it as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, experiences, norms and values of a society in which one lives (Salako and Oyesanya, 2015).

In the opinion of Ross (2016), education is the highest development of an individual as a member of the society. This means that education aims at influencing and molding people's life, perspectives, attitudes, and way of thinking. Education from the Islamic point of view is categorized into two namely, the material or secular aspect of education and the religious or spiritual aspect (Bidmos, 1981). The spiritual or religious aspect of education deals with four things namely; the relationship between man and his creator, the relationship between man and his fellow men, the relationship man and other creatures and the relationship between man and his innermost self. This will enable man to realize the essence of his creation which is not accidental but to serve Allah (SWT) to be conscious of Him, to obey him and to maintain peaceful coexistence with others in his environment, and finally to be conscious of life after death. Islam encourages man to acquire any form of education be it secular or spiritual. The Qur'ān affirms:

O you who believe! When you are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room. Allah will give you ample room from His mercy. And when you are told to rise up for prayers or Jihad or for any other good deed, rise up. Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe, and those who have been granted knowledge. And Allah is well-Acquainted with what you do. (Q. 58:11)

To emphasize more on Islam's encouragement on knowledge acquisition, the first five verses revealed in the holy Qur'ān is about the search for knowledge. The Qur'ān says:

Read! In the name of your Lord who has created. He has created man from a clot blood, read! And your Lord is the most generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not. (Q. 96: 1-5).

In line with the quotation above, a tradition of the Prophet of Islam emphasizes:

Seeking for knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim male and female (Muhammad, 1985).

Another tradition (Hadīth) also says:

He who leaves home in search of knowledge walks in the path of Allah till he returns" and 'he who has knowledge has everything in life and he who loses knowledge loses everything in life (Muhammad, 1985).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was also reported to have directed his followers to seek for knowledge even if it is as far as China. These explanations are enough as evidence that a Muslim should seek for and acquire knowledge be it spiritual or mundane. However, emphasis is on Islamic studies in this study.

Islamic Education in Nigeria

Islamic education came to Nigeria concurrently with Islam. It is as old as Islam in Nigeria. As posited by Fafunwa (1987), the basic of Islamic Education is Islam and it is education in Islamic context and culture. Islam came to Nigeria through Tran-Sahara trade route. It was brought by the traders whose major intention was to come and trade. However, other groups of people who helped in the introduction and spread of Islam were the scholars, the preachers, the *Murabitūn* and the *Mujahidūn* (those who were committed to striving and teaching in the course of Allah).

The Northern part of Nigeria was the first point of contact from North Africa. It got to Kanem Borno in 986 C.E and from where it spread to Katsina, Bauchi, Kano, Sokoto among others places. Islam also spread from Northern part to southern part of the country through trade. Towns like Oyo Ile, Oshogbo, Ilorin, Iseyin, Ibadan and Abeokuta enjoyed early contact of Islam to the south western part of the country (Oyedokun et al., 2024). The traders took it as a point of duty to preach and teach Islam to their host anywhere they reached. Hence rudimentary knowledge of the Qur'ān, Sunnah, Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) Shari'ah (Islamic law), Sīrah (Islamic history) and other fields of Islam were taught to its followers everywhere they found themselves. The propagators of Islam embarked on the above act because of the emphasis the Prophet laid on seeking and teaching knowledge. This was as a result of one of the traditions of the Prophet which says:

The best man among you is the one who learns Qur'ān and then cares to teach others' (Muhammad, 1985).

The main objective of Islamic education is to bring man to submit to his Lord. At the beginning of Islamic Education in the country, there was no clear cut distinction and division into primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Islamic education at the early stage was also different from western oriented system of education because there was no age limit, no classes, no rigid time table and no clear cut curriculum. In 1934, a school was set up by Alhaj Abdullah Bayero; the school was named Northern Provinces law school. The school was later

changed to school for Arabic and Islamic Studies by the government who took up the maintenance of it since then (Fafunwa, 1987). The school was charged with the responsibility of training teachers for Arabic and Islamic studies. Islam was reported to have gotten to Yorubaland in the 8th century (Abubakar, 2015). This means that Islam had been in Yorubaland before Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804.

The foundation of Islamic education in the Yorubaland was attributed to Shaykh Abu bin al-Qasim, an eminent and learned scholar. He was able to train many students which included Shaykh Salih bin Abdul Qadir (Balogun, 1980). Alhaji Shaykh Harun Rashid aided the progression of Islamic knowledge in Yorubaland. Arab preachers acted as traders, preachers and teachers also made great contributions to the spread of Islamic education in the area. They were able to train so many Yoruba scholars who in return were the pioneering founders of *Madāris* (Arabic Schools) across the region. These schools were responsible for training of more teachers of Arabic and Islamic studies in the region (Clarke, 1972).

Objectives of Islamic Studies

Islam is a total way of life. The name Islamic Studies was officially adopted as the name for teaching Islamic Education in Nigeria in 1983 at the first workshop of Islam under the auspices of the Nigeria Education Research Council (NER) presently referred to as NERC (Salako & Oyesanya, 2017). In line with this fact, the aims and objectives of Islamic Studies vary from primary level to tertiary levels. At the same time, there are some basic and general objectives which include:

- i. To enable a Muslim have basic information in order to live and honourable life.
- ii. To develop in a Muslim the spirit of brotherhood and tolerance so as to live harmonious life in the society.
- iii. To enable a Muslim develop sound mentally, physically and spiritually so as to live a healthy life.
- iv. To imbibe in a Muslim and the society a simple life style.
- v. To plant in a Muslim a firm religious belief and good moral by way of religion which comes to purify soul, improve moral and propagate it.
- vi. To fully inform a Muslim about the socio-political and economic affairs of his contemporary world of the society (Saheed, 2017).

As this paper addresses widening of the scope of Islamic Studies in higher institutions of learning, it is incumbent to state the objectives of Islamic Studies in tertiary Institutions. According to the Nigeria University Commission (NUC) Benchmark for Islamic Studies (2014), the following are the specific objectives of Islamic studies:

- a. To acquaint the students with the broad outline of Islam as a religion and as way of life.
- b. To prepare the students to understand Islam as culture and civilization.
- c. To present Islam to the student as it is in its original sources of the prophets particularly the Qur'ān and Sunnah.
- d. To sustain rigorous academic research into all issues affecting contemporary Muslim communities with focus on Nigeria.
- e. To place Islam in the context of other world religious traditions especially those relevant to Nigeria.
- f. To prepare the student who will progress to post graduate level with intellectual capabilities and imaginative thoughts.

- g. To produce graduates that would adequately fit into establishments of administration, Islamic legal departments, teaching at various levels and the foreign services.

Despite the unquantifiable objectives listed above, the population of Muslims youth opting for Islamic studies at all levels of education compared to other courses in higher institution particularly in south-west Nigeria continues to decline. An investigation into student enrolment in Federal College of Education Abeokuta reveals that one over three of students (if not less) who register for courses like Social Studies, Political Science and Economics choose Islamic Studies as a course. Furthermore, it is discovered that student who choose Christian Religious Studies (CRS) always doubles and at some years triple the population of students in Islamic Studies.

In the 2022/2023 academic session the Centre for Degree Programme of Federal College of Education Abeokuta in affiliation with the University of Ibadan, the population of students from 100-400 levels as founded by the researchers is as follows:

100 level	-	6 Students
200 level	-	2 students
300 level	-	12 students
400 level	-	14 students

This population is very small if compared to other departments on campus. For instance Christian Religious Studies has about 45 students in 100 levels only and the least in other three levels. Similar experience with the department is having the Lagos State University degree programme that is in affiliation with the College with low enrolment in Islamic Studies.

Scope of Islamic Studies

Islamic studies, as a course, is all-encompassing and it aims at addressing all aspects of human life. In the summation of Yusuf (2015), Islamic Studies comprises six major divisions, which are Qur'ān, Hadīth, *At-tawhīd* or *Usul al-Dīn* (principles of faith), *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) *Sīrah* (biography) and *At-Tahdhīb* (moral teachings). The division includes:

- i. **Qur'ān:** This entails the textual study of the Qur'ān, its exegesis as well as the rules and regulations guiding its studies and recitations.
- ii. **Hadīth:** This can be defined as the traditions relating to the words and deeds of the Prophet (S). It consists of a record of the sayings and practices of the holy Prophet and those of his companions to which he did not object.
- iii. **At-Tawhīd:** This is translated to mean theology. This division deals with Islamic monotheism and the attributes of Allah. It also entails believe in Angels, Prophets, Books, *Qadar* (predestination) and the Day of Judgment.
- iv. **Fiqh:** This means Islamic Jurisprudence. This aspect deals with act of worship. It explains how Allah is to be worshipped. It explains the five pillars of Islam as well as *Halāl* (lawful) and *Harām* (unlawful) things
- v. **Sīrah:** This has to do with the life history of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his way of life. It also deals with Islamic history.

- vi. **Tahdhīb:** This is an aspect of Islamic Studies which deals with Moral and Social Teaching as contained in the Qur'ān and traditions of the Holy Prophet. It contains the rules and regulations governing the conducts of man.

Scope of Islamic Studies Regarding Course Combinations

Apart from the major categories explained above, there is subject combination in Tertiary Institutions. This determines to a large extent, the student enrolment for a particular course. In colleges of education, the following course combinations are available;

- i. Islamic Studies/Arabic Language (ISS/ARAB)
- ii. Islamic Studies/Economics (ISS/ECO)
- iii. Islamic Studies/English Language (ISS/ENG)
- iv. Islamic Studies/Political Science (ISS/POL)
- v. Islamic Studies/Social Studies (ISS/SOS)
- vi. Islamic Studies/Theatre Arts (ISS/THA)
- vii. Islamic Studies/Yoruba (ISS/YOR)

As comprehensive as the above course combinations are, many Muslim studies do not show interest in studying Islamic studies. Some believe that one can only end up in teaching as a result, the number of student's enrolment for ISS dwindles, hence there is the need to widen the course combination scope to allow for more students to register for the course. The following course combinations are therefore suggested by this paper to enhance the scope of Islamic Studies in order to attract the interest of students with a view to engendering more participation for improvement in student's enrolment.

- i. Islamic Studies/Computer Studies (ISS/CSC)
- ii. Islamic Studies/Business Studies (ISS/BUS)
- iii. Islamic Studies/Civic Education (ISS/CIE)
- iv. Islamic Studies/Insurance (ISS/INS)

Conclusion

Islamic Studies is an all encompassing course which is supposed to be taken by all the Muslim students in both Primary and Secondary schools. It is also expected to be included as one of the General courses for Muslim students in the tertiary institutions of higher learning. This is because the course covers all spheres of human life for this world and the hereafter. Therefore, efforts should be geared towards shifting the attraction of students to the course so as to preserve the knowledge of Islamic culture and at the same time seek a balance between this world and the hereafter.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made towards boosting the enrolment of Muslim students at all levels of education in the Country:

- i) Government should employ more teachers of Islamic Studies in all levels of education to address the shortage of Islamic Studies teachers in the Country.
- ii) Muslim parents should encourage their wards to offer Islamic Studies as part of their courses in primary and secondary schools and also study it at the higher institutions.

- iii) Islamic studies teachers at all levels of education should see themselves as teachers or lecturers like other subject teachers or lecturers and shun inferiority complex.
- iv) More course combinations should be approved for Islamic studies by curriculum planners to boost students' enrolment of Islamic Studies in the tertiary institutions of higher learning.
- v) English Language should be made compulsory for students in the *Madāris* (Arabic Schools) so as to lubricate the enrolment of their grandaunts into the tertiary institutions of learning.

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