

## **Islamic Studies in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper aims at examining Islamic Studies as a subject in the field of learning and as a moral reformative strategy in Nigeria, focusing Ijebu land. The paper looks into its emergence, growth and problems faced, such as non-lucrative nature of the subject and dwindling population of students offering it at all level of education. Considering the problem stated, a number of research hypothesis were raised to serve as a driving force to investigate students', teachers' and parents' perceptions on the subject matter. Data were collected through questionnaire which were analyzed and discussed. The paper ends up by recommending ways out of the problems.*

### **1.1 Introduction**

Islam as a universal religion appreciates and recommends knowledge acquisition for human development and recognition of Almighty Allah as the creator of the cosmos. This is why the very first revelation to prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was specifically on seeking for knowledge thus:

“Read in the name of your Lord Who creates. He creates man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood.

Read! Your Lord is most bountiful. He who teaches (the use of pen) He teaches man that which he knows not” (*Qur'an 96:1-5*)

The above verses command man to seek for knowledge, not by reading alone but also by making use of pen for record purpose. Since the inception of Islam, education has been given priority over all other things. This could be evidenced with the fact that the messenger of God (S.A.W) was a teacher as he was sent to the whole world to educate them on the essence of life. This is not only on verbal claiming but also manifested in his actions as he was a great teacher that really laid much value on education.

Interestingly, the philosophy of Islamic education is to inculcate moral values that constitute a wide range of virtues such as honesty, integrity, tolerance, truthfulness, self-discipline, humility, patience, industry and others. Hence, morality should be the basis of every education given by a country to her citizen in order to record success. This is exactly what Islamic studies set out to achieve. Furthermore, the acquisition of the knowledge of Islamic moral values transform life of a child to a meaningful one as he would be able to relate politely with his fellow human beings which also make him to achieve Allah's pleasure in the hereafter.

Consequently, Islam makes acquisition of knowledge compulsory for all Muslims irrespective of gender, age, tribe or nation. However, Nigeria being a “secular” nation has not realized importance of religious education. It relegates religious education to the background. It makes Islamic studies an elective subject and provides no adequate teachers in secondary schools.

The fact remains that future of any course of study begins in secondary schools, most especially the number of credit pass of particular subjects at West African Examination Council (WAEC) or National Examination Council (NECO), contribute to the future ambition of Nigerian citizen. This paper therefore, investigates problems facing Islamic studies in Ijebu land, representing a geo political zone in Ogun state of Nigeria.

## **2.0 Islamic Concept of Moral Education**

Morality in Islam centers on the theory of what is allowed and what is forbidden (*al-halal wal-haram*) in accordance with Islamic law (shari'ah), the primary sources of which are Qur'an and Hadith. The above statement is confirmed thus:

Moral laws are absolute, eternal and unchanging. They are given by God and laid down in the scripture, which thereby, become a moral manual. (*Bull 1973*)

In Islam, Qur'an is the moral manual that contains all the dos and don'ts. Its moral instructions are believed to be universal without boundary of time or space. It is believed that religion especially Islam cannot be completely detached from morality. Religion claims to be mother of morality and that is why Islam claims to be a complete way of life.

'Abd al 'Ati (1996) summarizes the basic beliefs and principles of morality in Islam thus:

God is the creator and source of all goodness, truth and beauty. Man is a responsible, dignified and honorable agent of his creator. God has put everything in the heaven and earth in the service of mankind. By his mercy and wisdom, God does not expect the impossible from man or hold him accountable for anything beyond his power. Nor does God forbid man to enjoy the good things of life. In the sight of God, it is the intention behind a certain action or behavior that makes it morally good or bad, and not its outcome. Moderation, practicality, and balance are the guarantees of high integrity and sound morality. All things are permissible in principle except what is singled out as obligatory, which must be observed, and what is singled out as forbidden, which must be avoided. Man's ultimate responsibility is to God and his highest goal is the pleasure of his creator.

From the above quotation, Islamic code of conduct is of two facets, positive and negative. Positive codes of conduct are deeds expected of Muslims. According to Lawal (2003), they include truthfulness, goodness to parents, patience, generosity, forgiveness, loyalty, justice, good relationship with others, equality, cleanliness, orderliness, sincerity, punctuality, responsibility, time consciousness, decency, humility, kindness, obedience, brotherhood etc. While the negative ones forbidden for Muslims are greediness, stubbornness, drinking intoxicants, theft, prostitution, fornication and adultery, rudeness, injustice, arrogance etc.

In view of the above, stemming the rising tide of moral decadence as it is today in Nigeria, could be achieved through effective Islamic education that would put in place qualified and modeled teachers who can serve as moral chancellor and motivators. The Prophet (S.A.W) describes the best man as someone who studied the Qur'an and teaches it. Muslims are regarded as the best group of people in life because they teach people to know Allah and do righteousness (*Qur'an 3: 110*).

## **2.1 Islamic Education in Ijebuland**

Although teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic studies could only be dated back to the advent of Islam in Nigeria (Abubakre, 2004). However, it was informal as at that time. Progressively, Ahmed (1996) records that the first attempt to place Arabic and Islamic education under government control, in Nigeria, during the colonial era, was made by Alhaji Abdullah Bayero in the north. Subsequently, some eminent Muslim personalities held a meeting with the then northern region Ministry of Education in 1953 at Kaduna and for the first time in 1968, Islamic Religious Education became an examinable subject under West Africa Examination Council (WAEC). As a result of the above, Islamic studies became one of the registered subjects offered at all levels of education in the Nigerian curriculum. It is designed mostly for Muslim students in Nigerian schools. It helps to inculcate true and balanced values in the young, at an age when his mental and moral development is at the formative stage. Every branch of Islamic studies has specific contributions to make to the emergence of discipline persons and this why moral education cannot be detached from Islamic education.

However, according to the National Policy on Education (1998), Islamic studies is not a core subject at the Senior Secondary Schools, rather, it is an elective subject. This gives the Senior Secondary school students an option to either offer it or drop it. This is a factor that led to the statement of Bidmos (2003) that “Islamic studies is offered by less than one percent of the student population of any institution where it is offered at all”.

Ijebuland is occupied by an ethnic group in the south-west region of Nigeria, specifically, it covers a geo-political zone in Ogun State. It is made up of six local government areas which include; Odogbolu, Ogun Water-side, Ijebu North, Ijebu-East, Ijebu North-East and Ijebu-Ode Local Government areas. The Ijebus comprise mostly Muslims, Christians and Traditional worshippers. In Ijebu land ditto to many part of south western region, the threat (of converting Muslim children to Christians) posed by the western education from the colonial masters led to the establishment of western oriented schools with some Islamic studies content by Muslim communities, organizations and individuals.

The existing local Arabic schools were reformed. In 1923, the first western oriented school in which both Islamic studies and secular subjects were taught was opened, by the Egba Muslim community followed by Ijebu community (*Oladunjoye, 1991*) In 1943, the female pupils of Isoku Muslim School in Ijebu Ode were admitted into the Muslim Girls’ School situated at Imepe Quarters, Ijebu-Ode. This school was the first Muslim Girls’ Primary School in the whole country. (*Oladunjoye 1991*). In 1950, Ijebu Muslim College, Ijebu-Ode was established and indeed, it was the first Muslim Secondary School in the former western region. The establishment of the school was a great relief to young Muslims in the whole of Ijebu land as well as those in other parts of Yoruba land.

Gradually, more primary and secondary schools for Muslim children were established. The Muslim Teacher Training Colleges which served as the training ground for the products of the then modern schools were Ansar-ud-deen Teachers Training College, Otta and Muslim Teacher Training College, Oru-Ijebu were established in 1954 and 1962 respectively. (*Oladunjoye, 1991*). It is observed, however, that the impact which of Islamic studies is not really felt among Muslim students. This is based on the fact that there has always been low turnout of Islamic studies students from senior secondary level to the higher education level. Lawal (2011) calls attention of Muslims to this dwindling population of students of both Arabic and Islamic studies in higher institutions in the South-western Nigeria and present his data as below:

LOCATION/STATE	INSTITUTION	COURSE	NO OF STUDENTS				
			100 L	200 L	300 L	400 L	TOTAL
Ibadan, Oyo	University of Ibadan	Arabic & Islamic studies	16	20	14	27	77
Ilorin, Kwara	Al-Hikmah University	Arabic	02	15	23	34	74
		Islamic studies	NIL	29	80	73	182
Ilorin, Kwara	University of Ilorin	Arabic	NIL	10	36	19	59
		Islamic studies	24	43	45	41	153
Ilesha, Osun	College of Education	Degree Arabic	NIL	NIL	08	05	13
		NCE Arabic	07	09	13	-	29
		ISS/PES	03	-	-	-	03
Ilorin, Kwara	College of Education	Arabic	NIL	63	50	-	113
		Islamic studies	NIL	86	70	-	156
Ago-Iwoye, Ogun	Olabisi Onabanjo University	Islamic studies	06	05	01	06	18
Omu-Ijebu, Ogun	Tai Solarin College of Education	Arabic	NIL	03	14	-	17
		Islamic studies	03	20	35	-	58
Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun	Tai Solarin University of Education	Islamic studies	05	02	20	35	72
Noforija, Epe, Lagos	MOCPED	Arabic	06	07	09	-	22
		Islamic studies	04	15	07	-	26
Oyo, Oyo	Emmanuel Alayande College of Education	Arabic	11	06	12	-	29
		Islamic studies	93	72	58	-	223
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>							<b>1457</b>

Source: Lawal (2011) field work. (2005/2006 and 2008/2009 Academic Sessions of the above Institutions).

### 3.0 Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Population

The researchers' selected some schools in each of the six local government areas in Ijebu land of Ogun State. The selection was based on the school offering Islamic studies up to Senior Secondary School level. The targeted population of this study therefore, is the teachers and students of Islamic studies, and parents of the students in selected Senior Secondary Schools in Ijebu land.

#### 3.2 Research Hypothesis

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no significant effect of students' perception on their low turnout to studying Islamic studies in higher institution of learning

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** There is no significant effect of Islamic studies teachers' attitude to the subject on students' perception on furthering their studies in the subject at higher institution level.

**H<sub>0</sub>3:** There is no significant effect of parental perception and parental attitudes on students' attitudes toward students furthering their studies in Islamic studies.

**H<sub>0</sub>4:** There is no significant relationship among students, parents and Islamic studies teachers' attitudes towards the low turnout of students into Islamic studies department in higher institution.

**H<sub>0</sub>5:** There is no significant difference between parents and Islamic studies teachers' perceptions on the attitude of government towards teaching and learning and learning of Islamic studies in schools.

#### 3.3 Instrumentation

Instruments used in this study are researcher developed questionnaire entitled 'The Assessment of Islamic Studies as a Subject in Selected Public Senior Secondary Schools in Ijebu land' and interview. The copies of the questionnaire were distributed among the selected respondents' (sample) n the six local governments within one month. Interviews were also conducted alongside where necessary. The researchers were assisted by other three research assistants in administering the instruments designed for the study.

#### 3.4 Sampling Technique

A total of 283 respondents made up the sample for the study. 232 students representing 82%, 17 teachers representing 6% and 34 parents representing 12% were selected for the study. From the six local government areas that make up Ijebu land, sixteen senior secondary schools were selected and in each of the schools, twenty students ranging from SS1 to SS3 were picked at random to respond to the questionnaire. All the Islamic studies teachers in the schools also responded to the questionnaire. Furthermore, some parents, whose children are in Secondary Schools within the area of the study also responded to the questionnaire. Considering gender involvement, out of 283 respondents', female counts 156 representing 55.1% while male counts 127 representing 44.9%

#### 3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected for the study were analyzed quantitatively. Chi-square method was used to analyze H<sub>0</sub>1, t-test for H<sub>0</sub>2 and H<sub>0</sub>5 while Anova is used for H<sub>0</sub>3 and H<sub>0</sub>4.

### 4.0 Summary of Findings

#### 4.1 Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>0</sub>1)

There is no significant effect of students' perception on their low turn out to studying Islamic studies in higher institution of learning. Table 2 shows the effect of students' perception on Islamic Studies as a discipline to further studies on

Observed	Expected	N	X <sup>2</sup> -cal	X <sup>2</sup> -cri	Df	P	Decision
4,154	8,120	232	2130.5	124.3	231	0.05	Significant

**Table 2**

Table 2 above shows that  $\chi^2$ -calculated value is greater than  $\chi^2$ -critical value, hence  $H_01$  is rejected. The first hypothesis of this study stipulates that, there is no significant effect of students' perception on their low turnout to studying Islamic studies in higher institution of learning; this is rejected by the result of this study.

This result buttresses that the way students view or perceive Islamic studies has a great effect on why majority of the students don't want to further their study in the field of study. Many of them see Islamic studies as a difficult subject due to the fact that it requires the knowledge of Arabic language. Moreso, they do not see the reason why they should go to higher institution to study Islamic studies which they think cannot earn them any good job in future. As a result of these and many other perceptions, students want to study other 'fast selling' courses that will suite the capitalist nature of Nigeria as a country.

#### 4.2 Hypothesis 2 ( $H_02$ )

There is no significant effect of Islamic studies teachers' attitudes to the subject on students' perceptions on furthering their studies in the subject at higher institution. Table 3 shows comparism of teachers' attitudes to Islamic studies and students perceptions on continuing their education in Islamic studies.

Variables	N	X	SD	t-calculated	t-critical	Df	P	Decision
Teachers' attitude	17	3.53	1.01	35.93	1.96	247	0.05	Significant
Students' perception	23	24.1	24.12					

**Table 3**

From the analysis,  $H_02$  is rejected. This is because t-calculated value is greater than t-critical value. The second hypothesis which postulates that, there is no significant effect of Islamic studies teachers' attitude to the subject on students' perceptions on furthering their studies in the subject at the higher institution, according to this study, is rejected. This explains that the attitudes of the Islamic studies teachers have a significant effect on the view of learners on continuing their studies in the discipline.

This result is consistent with the opinion of Lawal (2003) that inferiority complex is the problem of many religious teachers. They feel that teachers are not given equal status. They hold in high esteem teachers of Mathematics, English language, Science subjects etc. They do not see themselves as being important as other subject teachers. These attitudes affect not only their morale but also the morale of their students.

In addition to the above, some Islamic studies teachers show non-challant attitudes to the subject, they do not teach with teaching aids, they do not make use of the right methodology in its various forms etc. On this, Lawal (2003) posited that this makes teaching and learning process to be boring, hence it becomes less effective.

#### 4.3 Hypothesis 3 ( $H_03$ )

There is no significant effect of parental perceptions and attitudes on students' attitudes towards studying Islamic studies in higher institution. Table 4 shows Comparism of parental perceptions, parental attitudes and students' attitudes towards students furthering their studies in this field of study.

Source variation	SS	Df	Ms	F
Between	5787.2	2	2893.6	3.00/156.2
Within	-5504.8	297	18.5	
Total	282.4			

**Table 4**

Table 4 above shows that f critical value is less than f calculated value, therefore  $H_03$  is rejected. The third hypothesis states that "there is no significant effect of parental perceptions and attitudes on students' attitudes towards studying Islamic studies in higher institutions" This hypothesis is also rejected. This buttresses the fact that many parent show nonchalant attitudes towards giving moral and religious instruction.

The result from H<sub>03</sub> above confirms the assertion of Lawal (2003) that many parents want their children to go to school and become medical doctors, lawyers, engineers etc and not moralists. As a result, many parents whose children offer Islamic studies in higher institutions try every means to have a change of course for such children. In cases where this is not possible (probably because of the child’s result or other factors), they allow the child to offer the discipline reluctantly or according to Lawal (2003) allow the child to go and learn trade or follow them to their places of work instead of studying religion.

**4.4 Hypothesis 4 (H<sub>04</sub>)**

There is no significant relationship among students, parents and Islamic studies teachers’ attitudes towards the low turnout of students’ into Islamic studies department in higher institution. Table 5 illustrates comparism of parents, students and teachers attitudes towards Islamic studies as a subject.

Source variation	SS	Df	Ms	F
Between	64,049.07	2	32,024.5	3.00/1571.4
Within	5706.93	280	20.38	
Total	69756			

**Table 5**

The analysis above shows that f critical value is less than f calculated value, hence H<sub>04</sub> is rejected. The fourth hypothesis states that “There is no significant relationship among students, parents and Islamic studies teachers’ attitudes towards the low turnout of students into Islamic studies department at higher institutions levels” This hypothesis is also rejected. This explains that the attitudes put on by the parents, students and Islamic studies teachers are the cause of low turnout of students into higher institutions to study Islamic studies.

**4.5 Hypothesis 5 (H<sub>05</sub>)**

There is no significant difference between parents and Islamic studies teachers’ perceptions on the attitude of government towards teaching and learning of Islamic studies in senior secondary schools. Table 6 shows comparism of parents’ perceptions and Islamic studies teachers’ perceptions on governmental attitudes towards Islamic studies.

Variables	N	X	SD	t-calculated	t-critical	Df	P	Decision
Parents’ perception	34	3.74	1.21	1.73				Not significant
					2.021	49	0.05	
Teachers’ perception	17	4.12	0.81					

**Table 6**

The analysis above reveals that t-calculated value is less than t-critical value, therefore, H<sub>05</sub> is accepted. The fifth hypothesis stipulates that “There is no significant difference between parents and Islamic studies teachers’ perception on the attitude of government toward teaching and learning of Islamic studies in senior secondary schools” this hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is no difference between the way parents perceive government attitudes and the way Islamic studies teachers also perceive the attitudes of government to Islamic studies in senior secondary schools.

From these findings it was found out that both teachers and parents are of the opinion that government should raise the banner of Islamic studies in senior secondary schools to a core subject and that they should make it compulsory on every students regardless of whether they are in Arts, Commercial or Science class. They are also of the view that government has not been posting enough qualified Islamic studies teachers to many schools.

On the policy of government that Islamic studies is an elective subject at the senior secondary school level, postulates that many of the students drop Islamic studies when they get to senior secondary classes and as a result they lost the virtues which they would have imbibed in the process of leaving the school. In his opinion, this culminated into atrocities, immoralities, corruptions and all sorts of evils perpetrated in our society today.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

No nation can develop when moral decadence overthrows good virtues, because morality is a vehicle to success. Furthermore, culture and traditional ways of life can be preserved only when a society handles its virtues to succeeding generations. Religious studies in its character therefore more relevant in passing good moral instructions from generations to generation.

This paper has therefore juxtaposed the relevance of Islamic studies as a moral reformative subject that needs to be made compulsory at all level of education in Nigeria.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

1. The perceptions and attitudes of parents on a discipline go a long way in determining the choices of children as regard such a discipline. Parents should be aware that the value of having moralist as sons and daughters cannot be under estimated. Moreso, opportunities abound for students studying Islamic studies. Hence, they should provide their children with adequate text books and materials needed to complement teachers' effort. They should nurture their children well in moral and religious upbringing. They should encourage and convince their children to attend Arabic classes' right from childhood. Moreso, they should not discourage children from studying whatever they want to study (in as much it does not go against Allah's law), rather they should encourage but not enforce children to study Islamic studies through which they will benefit in both worlds.
2. Teachers of Arabic and/or Islamic studies (including the local Alfas and Mallams) should serve as role models to their students by putting on a good and exemplary character so that students would want to study the course. They should make the subject real and interesting through the use of various educational devices. They should vary their methodologies of teaching. More so, they should be up and doing in other school activities. This will go a long way in cleaning off the feeling of being inferior to other colleagues.

In addition, Islamic Studies teachers that are yet to be qualified professionally should go for in service course in education in order to become qualified professionally. Also the professionally qualified ones should go for workshops and seminars to upgrade their knowledge from time to time. When teachers of Islamic studies are up and doing, even if government fails to raise the status of the subject from elective to core subject, student will still have interest in the subject and may be motivated to continue their studies in it at higher level.

3. Islamic studies department in every higher institution should be seen as a living department on campuses. Staff and students of this department should buckle up and be fit academically. They should dress neatly and corporately. They should also be at the fore front of every positive struggle on campuses. Moreover through their sound moral, academic excellence and smartness they would be seen as role models. This will encourage the students of the department to be able to raise up their heads on and beyond campuses. In addition, it will portray everyone in the department as an enviable entity by people from other departments.
4. Nigerian populace should be educated that among the important functions of religion in the society are teaching and encouraging morality. It should be noted also that nothing but confusion and decay can be expected when men lose their hold on religion. Practically, the theory of giving moral instructions without religious bias cannot withstand test of the time.
5. The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) that comprises leaders of all religions adherents in Nigeria and the public should find a way of lobbying the Federal Government to actualize the reversal of the status of religious education from being elective to compulsory subject in the public secondary schools. This would remove inferiority complex from both students and teachers of religious studies.
6. In the same vein, professional bodies like the National Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic studies (NATAIS), National Association for the study of Religious and Education (NASRED) and others that share the same ideology on religious education should jointly organize conference, where cross fertilization of ideas on how to reform Nigeria society through making religious education compulsory at all level of education would be discussed.

7. It is observed in the recent time that almost all standard Muslim Organizations and some individual Muslims have their own private schools where Arabic and Islamic studies are being taught. However, others should be encouraged to do so. At the same time, it should be noted that Muslim students in the public secondary schools are in majority. Therefore, frantic efforts should be made to rescue Islamic education from being perished.
8. Experience shows that among the effective methods to revive any dying course of study is scholarship. This could serve as a motivation and driving force that can change orientation of Muslim students that studying Islam is not an invitation to poverty. Muslim philanthropists, organizations, international Muslim communities should therefore channel their alms giving (zakat) and donations towards improving Arabic and Islamic studies at all level of education in Nigeria. Community mosques under the league of Imams and Alfas should also see the present state of Islamic education in Nigeria as a challenge that needs financial backing and find a way of making tangible contributions.

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