**THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN WEST AFRICAN MUSLIM SOCIETIES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE-BUILDING AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF NIGERIA**

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**Introduction:**

For the West and Central African sub-regions thelasttwo and a half decades can be said to have been those of different sorts of trials, tribulations, difficulties and sufferings. The combined effects of tripartite calamities of poverty, violence and disease (epidemics) have turned the area into an axis of misery. In the early 90s several West African countries were going through the agonies of civil wars occasioned by coups and counter coups. Then all through, intermittent civil wars, ethno-religious tensions and conflicts have caused the death of thousands of people, displacement of millions and destruction of multi-million dollar worth of property. The Ebola epidemic was such a devastating phenomenon that almost locked out the region from other parts of the World. Poverty has been an endemic factor, almost a trademark to the various countries in the region. So far, the most intractable and perhaps, most vicious of the three calamities is the emergence of violent extremism and insurgent groups across the SAHELIAN belt. The overall consequence of these is the rolling back of development drive in the entire region.

The most intractable aspect of the insurgency in the Sahelian belt as epitomized by BOKO Haram is not just the length of time it has taken to be subdued, nor its viciousness only associated with its indiscriminate killings and wanton destructions. What actually makes the insurgencies much more intractable and vicious is the fact that because of its blending with religion and its radical appeal it still attracts young people who are usually conscripted (USIS,2014). Certainly the radicalization of the youth and their subsequent militarization based on misguided teachings and misconceptions are the greatest threat to peace and development in the region. Several factors that include poverty and lack of education have been identified as principal causative agents. Essentially therefore, this is the issue that needs to be addressed through education. This is the reason that explains and also underscores the need for exploring the most effective ways and strategies for increasing and broadening access to education and also, utilizing it to foster peace and engender development.

In the light of the background laid down above, this paper first of all attempts to examine the relationship between education, peace and development. This is immediately followed by discussion on the commonness of the situation and challenges of education in the West African Muslim communities. The next section of the paper presents a vivid description of the educational challenges of education in the West African Muslim societies, with particular reference to Nigeria. The last part of the paper attempts to propose different sorts of measures that governments in Muslim regions and communities need to take to address the problems of education for the purpose of peace-building and youth development as an inevitable strategy for curbing militancy.

**Education, Peace and Development**

The role of education in engendering development has indeed been an generel belief. National development plans of developed, developing and less developed countries have always been hinged or rather tied down to education. In essence, education has always been placed at the centre for, as aptly put by Shehu (2011), it is both an agent and subject of change and transformation. While it is used to bring about intellectual, cultural, socio-political and economic transformation and change, it is also conversely affected by those changes (Baikie, 1986; NPE, 2004).

In a very emphatic tone and with particular reference to youth development UNESCO (2010) asserts that education plays a central role in engendering development and in improving the lives of young people globally, and as such it has been identified as a priority area in internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MNGs) and the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). Education, UNESCO (2010) further asserts, is important in eradicating poverty and hunger and in promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development. For these concrete reasons, global development efforts are all geared towards making education accessible, qualitative and affordable.

On the particular role of education in peace-building, Maria Montessori could be described as the one that first brought the issue to the fore when she made , “education for peace” as one of the cardinal goals of her education reform motives. In a pluralist society like Nigeria the role of education in peace-building is much more critical and imperative. Peshkin (1967) asserts that, what usually obtains in pluralist societies is that besides the primary and dominant expectations of schools producing the labour force and the bureaucratic leadership, the expectations and goals of integrating sub-populations fragmented by religious, linguistic and ethnic differences are aslo held in great significance.

This, Shehu (2014) also asserts that this is actually the trend and tradition in all African countries. Since all of them are colonial creations and contraptions and essentially amalgams of divergent ethnic nationalities, they all have had to grapple with the challenge of national integration right from their take off. In the particular Nigerian context, Olaniyi (2011) believes that the search for socio-political values like national unity and integration significantly formed the different purposes and motives behind certain educational policies because, immediately after independence, the need for finding a common platform to promote commitment of citizens against primordial ethnic cleavages arose.

**The Triple Heritage in Muslim Africa and the Similarities in Historical Experience**

West Africa like all other regions within the Sub-Saharan Sub-continent is a product of what Ali Mazrui called the ‘Triple Heritage’. The concept of the Triple Heritage as propounded by the Late Professor Ali Mazrui implies that the prevailing socio-cultural, political and economic dispositions in Africa is a product of three major influences: (a) an indigenous heri tage borne out of time and climate change; (b) the heritage of Eurocentric capitalism forced on Africans by European colonialism; and (c) the spread of Islam by both Jihad and evangelism. By this singular historical token, the socio-cultural conditions of the West African Muslim societies and communities are largely similar. Although the African nation-states were variously colonized by different colonial masters and their patterns and approaches of socio-political control were not the same, their impacts on those societies only differ in forms but certainly not in substance.

Specifically with regards to the history of Islamic learning and education, West Africa has certain peculiarities. These include most importantly the Timbuktu curriculum and tradition of scholarship. As a result of the vast and ostensible dominance and influence of the Muslim empires of Mali and Songhai, plus the later several revivalist ***(tajdid)*** movements within the sub-region, the Islamic educational tradition and legacy have remained prevalent and preponderant to this day. It is, therefore, not surprising that across the entire West African sub-region one would find that the Qur’anic schools are generally the same in form and in substance. The curriculum, the syllabi, and even school sessions, the sitting arrangements, the infrastructure, etc., are all generally similar.

If the historical experiences of the Muslim societies in the West African sub-region are situated within the triple heritage thesis, it can be asserted that theirs is a case of ‘one history, one destiny’. This assertion, nay description, is affirmed by the fact that, throughout the sub-region, since the advent of colonialism up to the present day, a dual education system exists. And it is against the backdrop of this historical context and experience that the state of education in African Muslim Societies is studied in this paper, with particular reference to Nigeria.

**Defining the Focus: The Dimensions of the West African Muslim Educational Crises**

Any attempt at articulating and formulating a comprehensive and meaningful education agenda for the Muslim Ummah in West Africa must make a thorough analysis of the problems that are facing Muslims in the present secular education system and the entire secular dispensation in the Region. It needs to be noted that, when reference is made about Muslim education it means the overall Muslim educational endeavours and all the Islamic religious instructions at all levels, and in all forms, in addition to all the other aspects of the so called modern education (Shehu, 2005). As far as Muslims are concerned, there is no clear distinction between the two. Both aspects if pursued by a Muslim can be an act of worship to his Creator and when it is positively utilized it can be a form of service to humanity for the sake of his Creator and Lord-Allah. The Prophet (S.A.W.) is reported to have said that, “if a person dies all his deeds are cut off except three things”. One of these three things is “knowledge that benefits”. This definition of Muslim education is the background upon which an overview shall be made of Muslim educational crises in the West African Sub-region

A careful review and analysis of the crises of Muslim education in the region reveal three dimensions. These are:

* Fundamental conflicts in worldview and values;
* Backwardness in the acquisition of education within the conventional, secular dispensation;
* Crises and serious setbacks in the operation and management of mainstream Islamic education.

In discussing these three dimensions, the magnitude and manifestations of the crisis shall be highlighted.

**[A] Conflicts in Worldview and Values**

Islam is more than a mere way of life. It is a worldview and a distinct civilization. Education, as it has been said earlier is the only agent that imparts meaning to a worldview of a people and ensures their survival and the flourishing of their civilization. The fundamental education crisis that has continued to bedevil the Muslim Ummah was brought about by the perpetual domination and promotion of a system of education that is diametrically opposed to their worldview and value system. As was explained earlier in this paper, the secular conventional education system is a product of Western socio-historical experience. This is a point that was put very aptly and indeed very succinctly by Waziri Junaidu since 1971 in his acceptance sppech for an Honrary Doctorate Degree in ABU, Zaira.

The Muslim Ummah does not have the same historical experience with the West. It is therefore, inconceivable that in one case (the West) would be compatible with the other (the Muslim world). This is the factor that explains the conceptual and philosophical contradictions and conflicts in education in almost all – Muslim communities throughout the world. The Western worldview it must be noted is materialistic and to a large extent agnostic and atheistic. While knowledge in the Islamic worldview is imbued with divine because it is an attribute of Allah. This is not the case in the modern conventional worldview. With this sharp difference, there must be conflict.

This is the point that was misconceived by Boko Haram, and rather than advocating its review and filtering they myopically preached that it is Haram and that Muslims have nothing to do with it. This obviously is erroneous.

**[B]Backwardness in the Acquisition of Education**

This is certainly a significant dimension in the Muslim educational crises. The most important factor responsible for this setback has been discussed above, that is, suspicion and lack of conviction on the system. In the present days, this factor has substantially diminished, though not completely wiped away, except for the unfortunate emergence of Boko Haram. In about half a decade now, however, this notion has not only been revived but raised to an unfortunate level of violent resistance by this insugent group. With this phenomenon, combined with several other factors, the setback caused by this notion has not only persisted but could be said to have worsened, especially in the Northeast.. In the present circumstances, and especially in the Nigerian context, the factors responsible are nothing but indolence, laziness, insensitivity and party on the part of the masses, and purposelessness, lack of vision, and irresponsibility on the part of our leadership

Statistical tables showing the differences between Muslims’ levels of acquisition of education especially in the predominantly Boko Haram areas are pathetically low. The latest (2015) statistics documented and released by the Afri-Dev.Info demonstrate the fact that there is certainly a direct link between this irrational and ill-guided militancy with lack of access to education.

In the direct words of Afri-Dev.Info:

”Significantly, in almost every North-East and North-West Nigerian State that borders Niger Republic, Chad and part of Cameroon, the percentage of males over 6 years old that have not had access to education are in clear majority – Ranging from Yobe 83% (North-East), Borno 63.6%; Kebbi 59.9%; (North-West) ; Sokoto 57.4% (North-West); Zamfara 55.8% (North-West); Katsina 54.8% (North-West); Jigawa 54.7% (Nort-West); along Bauchi 51.5% (North-East)- a bit further inland. Very significantly, the percentages of uneducated males across these eight states translates into roughly half of a combined male population of 18.7 million- creating a large pool of penury, misery, destitution, vulnerability, and potential sympathisers for Boko Haram”.

In the higher education plane, year in year out JAMB (UME) and (PCE) results have always shown the tremendous gap between Muslims and the others. Such gap is not only in terms of ratio of those who passed the examination successfully, but even in terms of the initial registration. The figures below do confirm these assertions.

**Comparative Distribution of Highest and Lowest JAMB (UTME) Application Figures Across the States (2008-2012)**

**2008**

Total No. of Applicants all over the Country: **Over 1,000,000**

Total No. of Applicants from all the Northern States (without Benue and Kogi) **73,000**

**K**ano State vs Imo State: Kano**(10,000);** Imo **(100,000)**

**2010**

Total No.of Applicant all over the Country: **Over 1,375,652**

States with the Highest No.of Applicants: Imo **(111,613);** Delta **(86,955)**

States with the Lowest No.of Applicants: Zamfara **(3,568)**; FCT **(2,393)**

**2012**

Total No.of Applicants all over the Country: Over **1,503,931**

States with the Highest No.of Applicants : Imo **(123,865);** Anambra **(82,204);** Osun **(73,935)**; Oyo **(71,272)** Ogun **(71,173)**

States with the Lowest No.of Applicants:Jigawa **(11, 592)**, Kebbi **(7,364)** ; Yobe **(6,389);** Zamfara **(5,713);** FCT **(3,380).**

**Source: JAMB.**

A mere visit to the campuses of even the tertiary institutions in Muslim dominated areas, and the various N.Y.S.C. orientation camps across the country can convince one of this fact. Sadly enough, although a lot of concern has been expressed, much of it has remained only a mere lip service.

The statistics of universities in the country today indicate that the gap of educational imbalance between the North and South in Nigeria would only keep widening.

Total No.of Universities 147

Federal Universities 40

State Universities 46

Private Universities 61

Islamic Universities 05

Christian Universities 39

**Source: National Universities Commission.**

It is important to note that more than ¾ of the private Universities are located in the South, while more than 90% of them are owned by Christians

 **[C]Crises and Deterioration in the Condition, Operation and Management of Mainstream Islamic Education**

Human societies have always been prone to change. It is indeed a ubiquitous phenomenon in human history. It can either be disastrous and or for good. By its very nature however, whether positive or negative, it is usually irresistible. Societies that are sensitive, responsive and conscious about change tailor and exploit it for positive development. Those that do not care are usually swept away by its forces.

Education by its very role in society stands at the centre of change. Playing a double-edged role, it is an agent of both social conservation and change. Any education system that fails to play this role and is not responsive to the currents of change, and thus not being dynamic will certainly be thrown into irrelevance and oblivion. This is exactly what our mainstream Islamic education system is moving into.

Suppressed and marginalized by secular education in particular and the secular political and economic regimes in general, coupled with our typical apathy and unfounded, unwarranted conservatism as a community, our mainstream Islamic education system has remained incapacitated in the face of the challenges of our modern times. There is the need for transforming it in all perspectives – structure, content, operation administration, and management.

The mainstream Islamic education system in Nigeria is essentially represented by the traditional Qur;anic (Tsangaya) schools, as well as its Makarantar Allo variant, and the Islamiyyah (Madrasah) schools. In the case of the former deterioration manifests in broadly three areas namely, curriculum and pedagogy, welfare and living condition of the teahcers ( ***Mallamai)*** and the pupils (the ***almajirai)*** and total absence of any befitting infrastructure. As for the Islamiyya schools are just a little bit fairer than the Tsangaya schools. The curriculum in Islamiyya schools is usually broader, and the students have better welfare than those in the Tsangaya because they all stay in their respective homes. But the curriculum in the Islamiyyah school is not uniform across the country is not uniform. Every school does what it wishes and there is no coordination at all.

Due to lack of patronage from the government, and absence of adequate community support from the Muslim populace, the system has become an orphan in a world of increasing manpower and human resource crisis, and socio-cultural, poitical, economic and developmental challenges. Having almost collapsed, the Muslim children who enrolled in it neither acquire learning nor moral training. A substantial number of Muslim children in this way are subjected to street begging and later induced to all sorts of social vices. This has projected a bad image about the system and has rendered it disdainful.

The challenge here is how do we ensure preservation of the spirit and purpose of this system, how do we safeguard its values, ideals an conceptual and ideological basis, while at the same time transforming it in terms of contents, practice and structures. An effective response to this challenge must involve defining a vision and mapping – out an agenda for the Ummah.

**The Imperatives of Comprehensive Intervention Strategies and Actions**

The challenges of addressing the issue of Muslim youth development through education for the purpose of dealing with violent extremism and insurency ordains a holistic appraoch that should leave no gaps. In this regard this paper suggests what this writer considers, necessary in tackiling those challenges in the light of the three broad areas of the crises as earlier identified.

**i. Reasserting the Islamic Educational Philosophy: The Fundamental Challenge**

On the basis of the Islamic worldview, our education system must be built on the Tawhid episteme. In this episteme, Allah is the central reference point and the measure of all virtue. He is the Absolute and Ultimate Source of knowledge. Knowledge must be sought for His purpose primarily. This means knowledge in Islam has a divine and transcendental value, over and above the materialist values attached to it which reduces its virtue and essence. An education system that has this as its foundation would not aim at mere imparting of knowledge and skills but would prepare an individual to be a God-fearing person and a man of virtue, uprightness and righteousness.This is necessary if our goal is to prevent the reemergence of misguided and perverted groups like Boko Haram.

**Islamic Philosophy of Education: The Purpose and Essence ofducation**

An alternative Islamic education system must have aims and objectives that are in conformity to the Islamic Tawhid episteme. This aim of Islamic education has been defined in the first World Conference on Muslim (see al Attas, 1979). Emphasizing the need for distinctive aims and objectives, al-Attas [1979] asserts that, a lot of confusion in this regard, suggesting that we should reformulate and restate the aims and objectives of our education in the context of modern life. We should in this respect reassert the essential concept of man as the supreme creation-Khalifatullah.

**ii. An Educational Agenda for West African Muslims with Particular Reference to Nigeria**

Going back to the analysis made on the educational crises of the Muslim Ummah in WEST AFRICA, three dimensions were identified. The suggestions made for an alternative educational theory were meant to take care of the crises at the conceptual and philosophical levels. Here what is intended is to put forward or rather profound an agenda for the Ummah. This agenda inter-alia is supposed to take care of the other two dimensions of our educational crises, setback in acquisition of education, and deterioration of Islamic education, particularly the traditional Qur.anic Education system (Tsangaya/Almajiri schools).

This is especially necessary in the face of the new EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) programme, unless we do something significant in this regard. In Nigeria in particular, the UBE may be much more benefited by our counterparts just as was the case in previous schemes. In this regard, a five-point agenda is here by suggested.

1.**Revitalizing the Mainstream Islamic Education System**

This should be done to eliminate its disdainful condition. In order to do this, educational awqaf (endowments) should be established and dedicated to this institution. Muslims must be mobilized to do this as its custodians to be self sufficient and much more rehabilitated.

**2. Task-Force on Educational Enrolment, Retention and Completion of Schooling by Muslim Children**

This should be a taskforce that would be charged with the responsibility of mobilizing and sensitizing the Ummah towards education. It should harness, manage and utilize resources for this purpose. Endowments can also be set-aside for it. In all communities respectful persons be appointed to the membership of this force. It should ensure an all-round enrolment and acquisition of education at all levels of the educational ladder.

**3. Special Education Programme for the Physically Challenged Children**

This should be a special programme for the handicapped and the disabled in the Ummah. Rather than leaving them to waste a way in begging, they should be educated so as to be useful to themselves and the society. Community Councils for Special Education should be formed in Muslim localities. This should be tasked with gathering resources for the programme. If special endowments were founded for this purpose it would be the best.

**4. A Policy and Project for Female Education**

The Ummah needs to formulate a policy on women education. This shall entail spelling out the goals, aspirations, priorities and imperatives of female education. The essence of this is to tailor this aspect of education in accordance with the needs of the Muslim community. This means prioritizing female education as per their roles in society as defined by Islam. Typically, a policy like this may emphasize medical and teacher trainin education for the females, for example.

**5. A Special Remidiation Programme and Human Resource Development Policy**

This programme shall be especially concerned with identifying disciplines and professions in which Muslims are grossly deficient. It is supposed to map out plans for remidiating those deficiencies.professions that would help the Ummah to be fully independent and self-sufficient must be acquired as a matter of obligation. Special resources should be set-aside for this purpose.

* **CONCLUSION**

At the beginning of this paper it was acknowledgedthat the subject of Muslim educational crises and the need for reform is already belaboured. Efforts cannot be estimated in this respect. With this piece, one is neither discrediting the previous efforts, nor does expound and propound earlier perspectives and approaches and make postulations thereupon. It is hoped that the Ummah shall have the will, discipline, organization and determination to face the challenge.

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