

## **Role of Qur'anic Recitation Competition in Promoting the Study of Qur'anic Sciences in Nigeria: Reflections on Bauchi Metropolis**

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### **Abstract**

*Qur'anic recitation competition is one of the new trends in the field of Qur'anic studies in Nigeria and beyond. It is one of the recent features which dominate the curriculum of Muslim education in most parts of Nigeria today. With about three decades of existence, the competition has impacted so much on the development of Qur'anic studies in particular and Islamic education in general. It also brought to the system some changes in the entire curriculum; the syllabus, the methodology of teaching, the outcome and objectives of the discipline as well as the learning environment itself. One of the apparent areas of changes brought is the student orientation and teacher-student orientation in the learning process. The competition also brought about rapid development in the study of other aspects of Qur'anic sciences which were hitherto neglected or unknown to most of the Qur'anic scholars and students. Aspects of Qur'anic sciences, such as tajwīd, the science of qira'āt, exegesis of the Qur'an etc. received robust attention by many of the scholars and students today. Bauchi metropolis in Bauchi Local Government Area of Bauchi State is one of the areas that witness the popularity and influence of Qur'anic recitation competition in its Qur'anic school system. This paper aimed at studying the phenomenon of Qur'anic Recitation Competition and its impact on the promotion / development of the study of various aspects of Qur'anic sciences in the area, from the inception of the competition in 1986 up to 2015. The methodology adopted in the research was analytical and comparative as data that were collected through observation, interviews and survey from selected Qur'anic centres within the metropolitan city of Bauchi was analysed and compared.*

**Keywords:** musābaqah, Bauchi Metropolis, Qur'anic sciences, Islāmiyyah / Tsangaya schools

Qur'anic education in Nigeria, like many other parts of Africa, is as old as the history of Islam in the land. Ever since the time Islam was first introduced to the people of Kanem Borno, probably in the tenth century C.E., Qur'anic education received high emphasis in the area. By the beginning of the eleventh century C.E., Qur'anic education gained ground in the land as some of the Borno *Mais* were able to memorize the Qur'an either in part or in full. From Borno Empire and other African

routes, Islamic education with special emphasis on Qur'anic education penetrated to other parts of present-day Nigeria.

In most parts of the history of Qur'anic education in Nigeria, emphasis was mostly on the mastery of memorization of the text and its orthography. The dominant *riwāyāt* (mode of Qur'anic recitation) was that of *Warsh* as in most parts of Africa then. Exegesis of the Qur'an was a rare specialization mastered by few scholars who attained higher level of education. The syllabus in Qur'anic schools gave less or no emphasis to most of the other aspects of Qur'anic sciences until the second half of the twentieth century C.E. Other *riwāyāt* (such as *Hafs*, *Qalun*, *Qunbul*, *Susi* and *Al-Bazzi*), apart from *Warsh*, were not common to the vast majority of Qur'anic students and scholars in those days. Theoretical knowledge of *tajwīd* and other sciences of the Qur'an were hardly mentioned in the curriculum.

However, many changes emerged in the Qur'anic education system in Nigeria since early eighties of the twentieth century. These changes covered almost all aspects of the curriculum. Different aspects of Qur'anic sciences, that were hitherto not known, received attention from many of the Qur'anic students and scholars. Other modes of recitation became popular in many of the schools. In fact, there was a mass shift from *Warsh* mode of recitation to *Hafs* in many of the *Islāmiyyah* and *Tahfīz* schools. Attention is now given to theoretical and practical aspects of *tajwīd*, textual study of the meaning of the Qur'an, mastery of more than one mode of recitation, knowledge of abrogated and abrogating verses of the Qur'an, grammar and eloquence of the Qur'an, etc. All these and others are some of the changes in the Qur'anic education curriculum.

There are many factors responsible for these changes. One of the factors is the introduction of Qur'anic Recitation Competition (QRC) in Nigeria in 1986 by the Centre for Islamic Studies of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto. The Competition has impacted so much on this changing process as we shall come to see with regards to Qur'anic education in Bauchi metropolis.

Many scholars / students have written much about the history and development of Arabic and Islamic education in Bauchi, but most of them are on general issues. Most of these works are researches in various universities and these include:

- “An Analytical Study of the Contribution of Ya'aqub (First) Amir of Bauchi to the Sokoto Jihad of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.” a Ph.D. work (BUK, 1998) by Yahya I. Yero.
- “Al-Thaqāfat al-Arabiyyah fi Wilāyati Bauchi min 1960 ila 1980 (Arabic Education in Bauchi State from 1960 to 1980”, M.A. Dissertation (BUK, 1985) by Rilwan Bala Musa.

- “Al-Harkat al-Islāmiyya wa al-Arabiyya fi Madinah Bauchi (Development of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Bauchi Metropolis)” B.A Project (Uni-Jos, 1989) by Yahay I. Yero.
- “Al-Thaqāfah al-Arabiyyah fi Madinah Bauchi”, B.A Project (BUK, 1992) by Kabir Ali Doya.
- “Al-Madāris al-Islāmiyyah al-Nizāmiyyah wa Dauruha fi Nashr al-Lugha al-Arabiyyah fi Madinah Bauchi (Modern Islamiyyah Schools and their Role in the Spread of Arabic Language in Bauchi Metropolis)”. B.A Project, (BUK, 1999) by Ahmed I. Bauchi.
- “History of Qur’anic Recitation Competition in Bauchi”. B.A Project (University of Maiduguri, 2011) by Murtala Muhammad.
- “The Contributions of Islamiyyah Schools to the Development of Islam in Bauchi Area: A Case Study of *al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-Islami Kobi, Bauchi*”, B.A. Islamic Studies Project, (University of Maiduguri, 1991) by Bajoga, A. B.

All these works and others are relevant to this paper as they provide background information on the subject matter. However, none of them addresses the main question of this paper. Although Murtala centred his work on *musābaqah*, he concentrates on the development of *musābaqah* in Bauchi without much reference to its impacts on Qur’anic education in the State. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper a fieldwork had to be carried out to ascertain the level of impact on the field of Qur’anic education in the city. This was done through interviews with many stakeholders in the field.

### **Qur’anic Scholarship in Bauchi Prior to 1980s**

Bauchi City, the capital of Bauchi Local Government Area, as well as Bauchi State, was founded by Amir Yaquub ibn Dadi, one of the flag bearers of the Sokoto jihad movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Yero, 1998). The name Bauchi, according to one of the traditions, was derived from a hunter’s name called Baushe who was found around the city area at its time of establishment (Bauchi, 1999, p. 12). The ancient city of Bauchi was founded based on Islamic principles as its founder – Amir Yaquub – was one of the Islamic Jihad leaders. As such, Islamic education in general and Qur’anic studies in particular have been part of the features of the new town. One of the primary responsibilities of the Amir was to educate his subjects about Islam (Bauchi, 1999, p. 30).

Qur’anic education was on the top priority among the people of Bauchi as many Qur’anic schools / centres were established in the town right from the early times. Although no accurate records exist on the number of Qur’anic schools in the early history of Bauchi, almost in every quarter of the town there were one or more of such schools. From interviews with Alhaji K. Sani (personal communication, October 23,

2014) and Malam M. Sha'aban (personal communication, October 24, 2014) some of the popular Qur'anic schools in Bauchi by the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Bauchi history were found to include:

1. Makarantar Mal Dan Jajere, Bakin Kura
2. Makarantar Mal Abdulhadi Kangarke, Malam Goje
3. Makarantar Mal Musa Wase, Bakaro
4. Makarantar Gwani Gwanki, Jahun
5. Makarantar Gwani Yusuf, Kofar Gombe
6. Makarantar Mal Jibril (Tsoho) Kan Tudun, Dawaki
7. Makarantar Gidan Baban Karatu, Makwalla
8. Makarantar Mal Hasan Nadajin, Unguwar Makafi
9. Makarantar Mal Jagaba Gidan Galaje, Unguwar Dawaki
10. Tsangayar Tsamiya, Tudun Yarima

These schools played a significant role in the development of Qur'anic education in Bauchi metropolis and beyond. Many scholars were produced from these schools and their contribution is eminent in the field even after the emergence of modern *Islāmiyyah* schools (Malam M. Sha'aban).

However, there are quite a number of differences between the old school system and what is obtainable now in modern Qur'anic schools. The former system was highly influenced by the settings of *Tsangaya* system in the defunct Kanem Borno Empire. Umaru acknowledges this influence as he writes "The Borno influence is manifest with many (Qur'anic) schools established in cities like Bauchi, Kano and Katsina" (Dahiru, 2010, p. 78). The system is therefore a replica of what was prevalent in Kanem-Borno Empire in the area of syllabus and its details, methodology of learning and teaching, enrolment of students and their maintenance, student graduation, etc. For details on the Tsangaya system of Qur'anic education in Kanem-Borno Empire and Hausaland, which is out of the scope of this paper, refer to Umaru Dahiru's work, *Qur'anic Studies in Borno*.

The ultimate goal of a student in Qur'anic school then was to memorize the whole text and write it offhead. It is important here to note that Qur'anic orthography and calligraphy were highly emphasized as an advanced level of the study of the Qur'an just as it was in most parts of West African Qur'anic schools. Not only were they able to memorize and write the text of the Qur'an, the students and scholars of the Qur'an in those schools were excellent in observing the nature and movement of alphabets and their vocalization. Although the curriculum gave significant priority to the mastery of division and classification of the Qur'an in theory, the students were not much conversant with the features and differences between different parts of the Qur'an, for example the Makkan and Madinan revelations.

A survey of some of the schools in Bauchi which still maintain the old system shows that not much is taught to the students about the exegesis of the Qur'an, theoretical knowledge of *tajwīd*, differences between the popular *riwāyat Warsh* and other *riwāyāt* such as *Hafs*, *Qalun*, *Qunbul*, and *Susi*. This confirms the assertion of the people consulted by this writer who passed through *Makarantar Allo* pl. *Makarantun Allo* (elementary Islamic education originally associated with using slates) that the concentration of teaching and learning throughout this period centred on learning and mastery of recitation, memorization and writing of the text of the Qur'an (Alhaji K. Sani personal communication, October 23, 2014; Malam M. Sha'aban, personal communication, October 24, 2014).

In recent times, there are some few of such *Makarantun Allo* that introduced some changes in the system. For example, *Markaz Tahfīz al-Qur'an al-Karīm* (Centre for Qur'an Memorisation) – a popular Qur'anic school in Kobi Street, Bauchi which was established by Sheikh Tahir Usman Bauchi – and *Makarantar* Malam Abdulqadir Musa Jahun of the late Malam Abdulkadir Jahun, have introduced school uniform and other innovations such as new subjects and new teaching methodologies to their institutions. Malam K. S. Aliyu (personal communication, October 19, 2014) of *Markaz* also confirmed to this researcher that in the recent years there have been other changes in the syllabus such as teaching of *tajwīd* which was introduced by one of the school's teachers Malam Ahmad Hamza in addition to brief explanations of the meanings of some verses to all the students.

### **Qur'anic Recitation Competition in Bauchi State**

Bauchi, as a town (now city) and as a state, has been one of the active participants in the National QRC organized by the Centre for Islamic Studies of the Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, right from inception in 1986. Records have it that Bauchi has been consistently participating and has been making significant performance in the national annual event. At several occasions reciters from Bauchi emerged the overall winner(s) (*Gwarzon Shekara*) or winners of different categories of the competition. Malam Sani Ahmad (personal communication, October 24, 2014), the State Coordinator of QRC, recalls that in not fewer than seven occasions, the indigenes of Bauchi town / State emerged the overall best winners in either of the male or female categories as the case may be in the national competition. These include;

1. Zainab Abdullahi in 2000,
2. Ahmad Dahiru Usman Bauchi in 2001,
3. Badi'atu Abdullahi in 2005,
4. Zainab Abdullahi Adam in 2006,
5. Zahratu Musa Muhammad in 2007,

6. Badi'atu Abubakar Usman in 2012, and
7. Aishatu Muhammad Adam in 2013.

It is noteworthy to mention that Bauchi State maintained the position of female overall winners (*Gwarzon Shekara*) for three consecutive years (2005, 2006 and 2007). This has probably not been achieved by any state of the federation throughout the history of the competition. These overall winners and others have represented Nigeria at international competitions in different countries of the world. One further demonstration of the significant role of Bauchi State is that *Hāfīz* Dr. Mansur Isa Yelwa, a one-time national and international winner of the competition served as a member of judicial panel at the national level, in Kaduna 2008, Edo 2009 and Sokoto 2010, and his impacts are still felt in the competition at the state and national levels. The ancient city of Bauchi and indeed, Bauchi State hosted the competition at national level twice in 1990 and 2006.

In addition to its active participation at the national level of the competition, Bauchi State has engaged its students in in-depth study of the Qur'an by introducing *Musābaqah* at various levels from wards to districts (in some cases) at local government and state levels. The history of the state level competition in Bauchi is described by Murtala (2012) in the following trajectory: The competition started in 1989 under the Ministry of Education, rotating it among the local government (areas) in the State. It started from Bauchi in 1989, Gombe 1990, Jama'are 1991, Dass 1992, Katagum 1993, Bajoga 1994, Ningi 1995, Shira 1996, Darazo 1997, Misau 1998, Toro 1999, Itas Gadau 2000, Alkaleri 2001, Gamawa 2002, and Ganjuwa 2003.

The main aims and objectives of the competition in the State are in line with its national goals. These include; encouraging Muslim youths in the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an, forging unity among the *Ummah*, enhancing quality of learning of *tajwīd* and other sciences of the Qur'an in schools throughout the State. These objectives go in line with the general teaching of the Qur'an for Muslims to perfect themselves in the art of recitation of the Qur'an "... And recite the Qur'an in a slow, (pleasant tone and) style" (Qur'an 73:4).

### **Trends in the Development of the Study of Qur'anic Sciences in Bauchi Metropolis**

As it has been highlighted above, Bauchi city was established based on Islamic principles at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Qur'anic study was one of the priorities of the founder of the town, Amir Yaqub ibn Dadi (Belo, 2013; Yero, 1998). Ever since then there has been significant and steady improvements in Qur'anic scholarship to date. This can be seen through the increasing number of Qur'anic schools and scholars that have emerged and proliferated in the city. At the moment,

there are not fewer than 500 *Tahfīz* and *Islāmiyyah* schools within the metropolitan city of Bauchi.

However, throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the education system of Qur'anic schools was purely *Karantun Allo / Tsangaya* as it was in other parts of Nigeria. This system concentrated on mastery of memorization and orthography of the text of the Glorious Qur'an. But in the second half of the twentieth century there were significant changes in Qur'anic learning system with the emergence of modern *Islāmiyyah* and *Tahfīz* schools. Some scholars, particularly those who underwent formal training at Arabic Teachers Colleges, introduced new learning centres within the metropolis.

Some of the schools / learning centres as highlighted by Bauchi (1999) are;

1. *Madrasat Miftāh al-Khyar* (est. 1968)
2. *Madrasat Miftāh al-Islām*, Unguwan Jaki (est. 1970)
3. *Madrasat Misbāh al-Islām*, Yakubu Wanka (est.1970)
4. *Madrasat Hayāt al- Islām*, Kobi (est.1971)
5. *Madrasat Targīb al- Islām*, Ilelah (est.1971)
6. *Al-Madrasat al-Bakariyyah Lita'lim al-Qur'an wa al-Ulūm al-Dīniyyah* (est.1972)
7. *Madrasat Nūr al-Islām*, Jahun (est.1972)
8. *Madrasat Iqāmat al-Sunnah*, Gwallaga (est.1979).

In some of these schools, topics / subjects related to the science of the Qur'an were introduced. There was also an improvement in the teaching of the recitation of the Qur'an. The standard ways of recitation as well as proper articulation of alphabets was emphatically taught in some of the schools. During this era, *riwāyat Hafṣ* was introduced by some of these scholars, exegesis and literal translation of the meaning of the Qur'an to Hausa Language became more popular than ever among the Qur'anic scholars and students.

In addition to the new subjects introduced, there were many changes introduced in the teaching and learning system of the Qur'an. The learning environment, the teaching methodology and learning instruments were all modified. Schools were constructed in modern styles with modern equipment to accommodate the students and teachers during the learning sessions. The teachers used modern facilities, such as audio-visual tools as teaching aids which improved their methods of delivery. Within a short time, these new schools succeeded in producing new sets of teachers who worked for the development of new *Islāmiyyah / Tahfīz* schools in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it is apparently observed that there was a decline in the area of orthography and retentiveness in memorization which were the top priority in the old system.

### **Role of Qur'anic Recitation Competition in Promoting the Studies of Qur'anic Sciences and Proliferation of *Tahfeez / Islamiyyah* Schools**

Undoubtedly, the emergence of QRC in the last two decades of the twentieth century is a strong factor behind the establishment and proliferation of modern *Tahfīz* schools in Bauchi. With the establishment of such schools like that of *Iqāmatus Sunnah* Gwallaga and others, a new system was introduced in the field of Qur'anic studies. These schools operate based on modern school settings. The learning environment, the student composition and arrangement are entirely different from what is obtainable in *Makarantar Allo*. The students are grouped into classes and the study is carried out collectively in most cases based on class level as against individual performance.

The new school system, even though confronted with serious criticism and rejection in the town, like in many other parts of the north, is now playing a dominant role in the field of Qur'anic scholarship. The concentration of school children and their parents is in favour of the new system as against the old *Makarantar Allo* system. This can be justified by the number of enrolment of students in such schools and the fact that the *Makarantun Allo* are no longer patronized by the majority of the people.

Many factors may be considered responsible for the emerging changes and the advent of *Jamā'atu Izālatu Bidi'ah* movement is in many ways one of such factors. Other factors include the increasing number of Nigerian graduates from Nigerian higher institutions and those of other Muslim countries, particularly Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. Another important factor is, of course, the introduction of QRC at all levels. This new system also gives opportunity for Qur'anic students to further their studies in colleges of Arabic and Islamic Studies and from there to advanced levels of education within and outside the State. In all these levels of study there are significant changes in the curriculum as new sciences relating to the Qur'an form part of the syllabus. The theoretical and practical knowledge of *tajwīd* receive high emphasis and some text books of *tajwīd* are taught in these schools. The science of *Tafsīr / Tarjamah* (exegeses and / or translation of the meanings of the Qur'an in local languages) became an independent subject at all levels. In addition to that, there is a course *Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Sciences of the Qur'an) for Senior Islamic Studies students which is designed to introduce to students the general aspects of *Ulūm al-Qur'an* such as the history of revelation of the Qur'an, compilation of the Qur'an, modes of revelation and recitation of the Qur'an, the Makkan and the Madinan revelations, the science of *tafsīr*, abrogating and abrogated verses of the Qur'an, the miraculous nature of the Qur'an etc.



Students' records for some of these schools in Bauchi show that those who participate in QRC pay more attention to this subject than their other colleagues. As such, most of those who participate in the competition at all levels from Bauchi receive training from one of these schools that were mentioned earlier as the popular *Islāmiyyah* Schools in Bauchi metropolis.

At the moment there is a significant improvement in the mastery of other forms of recitation in addition to the only one known in the past. In fact, most of the students nowadays are more conversant with *Riwayat Hafz* than the *Warsh*. Many scholars and students today in the town have good mastery of all the (seven / ten) popular modes of recitation. In all these changes, the competition has impacted a lot on the introduction and promotion of the new system. As at 2015, there are not fewer than 500 *Tahfīz* and *Islāmiyyah* schools within the metropolitan city of Bauchi. There are also about twenty (20) Junior Islamic Secondary Schools and ten (10) Senior Islamic Studies Schools (Malam Sani Ahmad, personal communication, October 24, 2014). At the higher level, there are about seven Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) awarding institutions in Bauchi city. In all the institutions, Islamic Studies is one of the most popular courses of study. This factor also helps significantly in the promotion of the study of Qur'anic Sciences as one of the major components of Islamic Studies programme.

### Conclusion

No doubt the Qur'anic Recitation Competition has impacted positively on bringing about new orientation in the field of Qur'anic studies in Bauchi. The Programme brings about significant improvement in the area of learning and comprehension of the meaning of the Glorious Book beyond a mere mastery of its recitation. Many of the students of the Qur'an learn the text along with its meaning in line with Allah's saying:

A Book (the Qur'an) which We have sent down to you, full of blessings, that they may ponder over its verses and that men of understanding may remember (Qur'an 38:29).

There is also an improvement in the standard of recitation in terms of words articulation, ability to observe the rules of recitation, and in-depth knowledge of the meaning of the Qur'an. The students are also exposed to the knowledge of division and classifications of the Qur'an and the features of each division. They can easily explain the differences between Makkan and Madinan revelations. However, there is a sharp decline among the students today in the quality of memorization and retentiveness. Orthography (the art of the writing) of the Qur'an is also diminishing among the new breeds. Many of those who memorize the Qur'an in the modern system can hardly write the text out of their

memory which used to be a sign of perfection in the *Tsangaya* study system. A reciter may find it difficult nowadays to identify areas of mistakes if he were to be challenged to that. There is also a weak or lack of concern from the students today in respect of *tadabbur* of the words and sentences of the Glorious Qur'an.

To this effect, it is important for the organizers and managers of the competition at all levels and the modern *Islāmiyyah* / *Tahfīz* schools to revisit the guidelines of the programme and the curricula. There should be emphasis on the mastery of reading and writing of the Qur'an to ensure the promotion of both means of the preservation of the final revelation. Writing of the Qur'an as a means of its preservation is as equally important as its preservation in memory right from the time of the prophet (SAW).

The system should also emphasize the study of other modes of recitation in addition to *riwāyat Hafṣ* which is the dominant *riwāyat* in the schools and *musābaqah* programmes. *Riwāyat Warsh* which used to enjoy monopoly in *Tsangaya* schools is becoming a strange *riwāyah* in most of the modern schools. It is a challenge to the stakeholders to look into the situation in order to rescue the one-time popular mode of recitation from decline.

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