

Evaluating the *Madrasah* School System in Lagos State: Transformational Agenda to Meet 21st Century Modern Needs and Realities

Khadijat O. Olaniyan-Shobowale
Faculty of Education, Lagos State University, Ojo
Email: solalaniyan_2004@yahoo.com

Abstract

The “Madrasah” connotes schools purposely built for the preservation of the Islamic faith. They are schools that made the survival of Islam possible even with the presence of imperialists and colonial masters in Nigeria. These schools scattered all over Africa, have equally gained popularity among the Yoruba populace of Lagos State. However, despite the popularity they enjoy among Muslims, the Madrasah system has yet to gain government recognition, approval and neither does it enjoy acceptance and the goodwill of formal education stakeholders. The main objective of this study was to show case the realities of these schools in relation to their functionality with an aim to transforming them to meet up with contemporary and globalized educational needs of the 21st century society. A Survey research design was adopted with the use of a qualitative approach. Using the incidental sampling technique, 23 popular and notable Arabic schools were selected with the objectives to giving a full description of: their teachers and recruitment system; school management policies / systems; available physical environment and resources as well as the viability of the products of such schools. The study concluded with suggestions and recommendations that include amongst others; the imperativeness of the need for stakeholders’ involvement and a transformative agenda for effective needed change in the system.

Keywords: Arabic education, Lagos State, modern realities, transformation agenda, *Madrasah*

One of the most cardinal issues in Islam since the time of the Prophet (SAW), is seeking and disseminating knowledge, especially the knowledge of the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* (tradition of Prophet Mohammad), both, sources of Islam. This aspect of the religion cannot be overemphasized, as verses of the Qur’ān as well as numerous traditions of the Prophet have pointed to the compulsion and the importance of seeking knowledge.

In the early days of Islam, several methods of studying the Qur’ān were employed by the Prophet (SAW) and his companions. Despite the divine intervention in his memorization, the Prophet engaged in continuous recitation with his teacher – Angel Jibril – with whom he read and studied the Qur’ān. The Prophet (SAW) would in turn teach his companions the Qur’ān with its meaning, employing different pedagogical methods including questioning and role play (Demirci, 2017).

After the death of the Prophet (SAW), knowledge of the Qur’ān and Islam advanced from being taught in the city of Madinah when some

companions of the Prophet travelled to different places to engage in propagation of Islam as well as teach the knowledge of the Qur'ān. Over the years, the knowledge of Islam has spread, and different communities have defined their own Islamic knowledge, thus different systems of studying the Qur'ān came up, based upon the time and geographical locations. This is because Islam recognizes education as the most powerful tool to bringing about positive social change and to putting an end to ignorance and superstitions. Hence, Muslims wherever they settle, situate a learning centre thereof.

No doubt, the aim of *Madrasah* (pl. *Madāris*) system of education is to inculcate the belief and practice of Islam among its followers and guide them to follow the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet. The foundation of *Madrasah* education, therefore, basically stands on the two pillars of Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Even though the structural form of *Madrasah* that we see today did not exist in the period of Prophet Muhammad, a strong system of learning and teaching was in place (Basheer, 2016).

According to Basheer (2016), the origin of the *Madrasah* goes back to the time at which the Prophet of Islam established the first such *Madrasah* in his mosque, *Masjid al Nabawi* in Madinah, with dedicated learners called *Ashāb al- ṣuffah* (Ogunbado, 2016). There he would teach them the tenets of Islam and explain to them the contents of the revelation which he had received. Starting from *Masjid al Nabawi* of Madinah *Al Muna wwarah*, the *Madrasah* steadily developed through *Nizamiyya*; Zaituna, Tunisia (732); *Baitul Hikmah*, Iraq (830), founded by Caliph al-Mamun; Al Qaraviyin, Morocco (859); Al Azhar, Cairo (972), founded by Caliph al-Muizz; *Madrasah Nizamiyya*, Baghdad (1067), founded by *Nizām ul-Mulk* Hassan Bin al-Tusi; Grenada and Qurtaba (Cardova); and Jami 'ul-Andulus of Andulus, Spain, before spreading all over the world. The establishment of *Madāris* as organized institutions took place much in the 21st century later.

In Nigeria, the presence of Islam has been in Yorubaland since the early sixteenth century during the time of emperor Mansa Musa of Mali, when the Yoruba came to know the religion through the Mali traders and ambassador present in Oyo-Ile (Al-Aluri,1990). As opined by Abubakre (2004), history recalls that; there was presence of some Arabic scholars and the mosque of Oyo-Ile in 1550 C.E; that Iwo had been exposed to Islam since 1655 CE; Iseyin was introduced to Islam in about 1760 C.E; the first mosque was built in Lagos in about 1774 C.E while Oyo traders were said to have introduced Islam to Osogbo in 1820 C.E.

As it was in the time of the Prophet (SAW), the introduction of the Islamic religion ushered in its education. Thus, since Islam is a vehicle that transports its learning, it was necessary for the Yoruba Muslims to establish centres of learning where Qur'ān and other aspects of the religion could be learned and taught. This learning soon extended traditionally outside mosques to places such as under the trees, courtyards or residents of Islamic scholars. Then called "Ile-Ikewu", they became popular in all of Yorubaland such as Ilorin,

Ikirun, Iwo, Osogbo, Epe, Ijebuode, Abeokuta, etc. With the onset of colonial rule in Nigeria in the 50s, the *Madrakah* education system received massive waves of shocks, not only due to the substitution of political power but also due to the destruction of the particular Islamic / Arabic way of life and a particular culture. The changing way of life as inculcated through the Western education system implanted by the colonial rulers rendered the *Madāris*, which were until then a basic source of empowerment of the community in social, economic, cultural and emotional domains, almost redundant.

After the independence of Nigeria in 1960, the *Madrakah* system turned from being a system that produces learned people to a mere burden on the government. The students and teachers of the system shunned English language and the Western education, deeming it Christian-European and therefore anti-Islamic. It bred the fear that a child with Western belief will eventually lose his Islamic identity and embrace vices that negate the values and principles of Islam. Thus, some parents preferred to enrol their children in this school system rather than formal school.

Thus, the imposition of Western education system in the Muslim lands led to the loss of focus and direction and the nonchalant attitude to Islamic Education by the Muslim ummah. The graduates of such schools were subsequently regarded – albeit erroneously – as illiterates and unqualified to be employed in the mainstream society.

Only the voluntary efforts of committed religious leaders of the community salvaged the system, though in its narrowed-down form. Such voluntary attempts to support and sustain the *Madrakah* system continues even till present day.

If evaluated, the merits of the *Madrakah* System of Education are many; aside enabling a strong system of Qur'ān literacy, these schools were the bedrock of literacy in Nigeria and have for decades inculcated relatively observable Islamic religious values in the Nigeria society. This form of education can also be said to be one of the few known systems in the Muslim World today that has retained the reproduction of the Qur'ān in writing direct from memory. In addition, throughout Muslim rule, *Madāris* not only catered for the socio-cultural development needs of the community but were also able to meet all kinds of needs of the people in the civic, administrative, business and scientific studies spheres (Siddiqi, 2016). Their relevance and importance are therefore not in contention among Muslim populace and as part of the general population, should therefore not be neglected by the authorities.

There is currently no available data as to the number of *Madāris* operating in Lagos state, but they can be found in every nook and cranny where Muslims reside and are in the majority. This system is traditional and needs to align with contemporary times and necessities. This paper therefore, advocates for extensive researches and concern as a matter of urgency. The *Madrakah* system of Education has rarely attracted scholarly attention due to its unique

characteristics, differing from many other systems of education in terms of philosophy, objectives and structure.

Methodology

The study employed a survey method that utilized the qualitative approach. Three Research Questions were raised and answered thus:

1. Under observation, what is teaching in the *Madrasah* school system like?
2. How ready are teachers of the *Madāris* to adopt technology in the classroom?
3. What manner of changes are expected in the *Madrasah* school system to meet up with modern realities and contemporary needs?

Statistically, there are no available data as to the number of these *Madāris* in existence in Lagos state. Thus, the initial intention of this study was to visit 25 randomly selected ones scattered across the nook and corners of Lagos state. However, due to providence, only 23 were eventually visited. The study employed 2 instruments for data collection namely; *Madāris* Observation Checklist for Facilities and Instruction (MOCFI) and *Madāris* Inventory Checklist (MIQ). The instruments were administered within a period of 3 weeks with the assistance of 2 research proctors.

Results

Demographic Profiles of Schools and Teachers

Year of Establishment

Responses showed that 90% of the *Madāris* visited had been in operation for a period that span 43 years. The oldest having been established in 1978 while the most recently established was in 1990.

Academic Qualifications of Proprietors / Owners

On this item, the academic qualification of the proprietors/owners ranged between a Diploma, Bachelor's degree in either Arabic or Islamic studies and a Master's degree. One of the proprietors is recorded to be currently running a PhD in Arabic studies while 08 of those visited possessed only a *Thanawy* certificate (equivalent of higher secondary school level). On the recruitment system, findings showed no special procedure and process followed in the appointment of teachers. Teachers are majorly selected upon graduation from the same school and thus carry on the tradition they passed through or on friendship with the owner/ proprietor.

Number of Teachers in the School

The field assessment showed that the population in the *Madāris* were impressive with the maximum being 25 and the minimum 09 teachers. Forty percent of these teachers possess a first degree in Arabic or Islamic studies, 59% were *Thanawy* graduates of the same school while only 1% hold a master's degree in either Arabic language or Islamic studies.

Lesson Plan / Notes

Planning and writing a note of lesson is one of the key components of an effective instructional process. This phenomenon however, seems to be missing in the activities of the *Madāris* visited. Only one teacher of the visited schools responded in the affirmative to the availability of a lesson notes, although written on occasional basis not regularly.

Population of Students

Eighty-five percent of the *Madāris* visited had an impressive number of students on their register ranging between a maximum of 350 and a minimum of 90 students. Expectedly, majority of these students were male (78%) while the remaining were female (22%). On belonging to any professional body, all the *Madāris* visited do not belong to any professional body and neither are they regulated by any quality assurance agency. The implication of this is that every school owner and proprietor operates and runs the school based on personal whims or tradition of the school that he graduated from. Responses also showed that there was no standardized or uniform curriculum in use across these schools.

Awareness and Use of Technology to Teach

The researcher was keen to seek Arabic teachers' use of technology in the classroom. Their responses to this question showed an abysmal disparity between participants' knowledge of technology and their practical use in Arabic language classroom. Only 13% of them agreed that they have through one device and media or the other ever used technology to teach Arabic. One participant said, *"I have never taught Arabic language with more than textbooks, chalk and board."* Another clearly responded, *"We don't use any form of technology to teach Arabic in my school."*

Findings hence, majorly showed that majority of teachers (85%) were aware of the need to use technology to teach Arabic. They however complained about lack of resources, scarcity of technology available to teach Arabic content and paucity of proper training to use technology. This means that these schools were not moving in line with current trends. According to Paige (2009) adopting a 21st century curriculum should blend knowledge, critical thinking, innovation skills, media, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) literacy. Jouejati (2011) argues that teachers should be ready to take students to a higher level of learning by applying best practices and consequently, making the digital experience a personal one through constructing meaningful, concrete and lasting experiences in learning.

The lack of resources experienced by teachers was mainly due to limited funds. Funding has been identified as one of the challenges bedevilling this school system. With no support from government and its agencies, the running of *Madrasah* is majorly dependent on the meagre fees paid by the students, funding assistance from Arab / Muslim agencies and goodwill of philanthropies. No doubt, for the schools to attain the modern changes

envisaged and advocated and to meet up with 21st century needs and realities, these sources cannot suffice. Abdul-Raheem (2020), advocates for funding assistance from Zakat, sadaqah and endowment funds agencies in Nigeria to boost the running cost of *Madāris*.

Report on the Classroom Observation

The most important role in any classroom is that of what a teacher does with his students while instruction goes on as his role goes beyond merely imparting knowledge and evaluating learning. One of the purposes of observing a teacher in action is to dissect the current status of instructional process that is part of the teaching standards set by the school and thereby become the basis of restructuring and improving the instructional format of the school for its teachers. The elements that were observed on visitation to the *Madāris* were: teachers' demonstration of knowledge of content, and their interaction with students, presentation skills and language of presentation.

Eight classes were observed. There was poor teacher-students interaction observed, although the students seemed enthusiastic to learn and were easily urged on by the teacher. Lesson objectives were clearly spelt out at the beginning of the class to students. The teachers observed projected their voices clearly and loud enough to involve all students in the classroom. The teachers demonstrated high levels of content knowledge but with very little pedagogical know-how or knowledge of different teaching methodology or strategy.

The classes observed were arranged in the traditional sitting where students sit in rows facing the teacher. No collaborative, peer or group learning was observed at any point in the classes or during instruction. The usual lecture method was used by the teacher all through the lessons. No attempt was made to utilize any form of instructional materials with total reliance on the use of textbooks. Only one of the visited schools had access to the public address system and that was limited only to its use in the mosque for Friday sermon, rather than for instructional purposes.

Overall, the classes observed were teacher-centred as students were passive and not actively involved. They had very little time to express themselves verbally. Class activities were limited to teachers' efforts explaining the subject matter and writing on the chalkboard. The teaching approach and strategy in most of these school still remains the traditional approach where a teacher teaches the content by repetition, making students say or write the same thing over and over again which made class less interesting. Teachers then assess student knowledge by using tests and quizzes at the end of the unit or year in order to identify students' learning level.

School Management

Every *Madrasah* followed its own pattern in the matter of study structure. There was no uniformity with regard to subjects, books or emphasis. This is subjected to and determined by where the owner graduates from. As

observed by Oderinde (2007), most textbooks, in use across these schools were either outdated, not up to standard in quality of print and content or are not made for local use. As equally observed by Adeyemi (2016) and as corroborated by the field assessment, content of textbooks in use were usually not within students' culture and experience or were not readily available for purchase by students nor available for use in libraries.

They employ a highly centralized organization and management. All authorities and decisions belong to the owner / proprietor. They operate under a monolithic system of education and an independently formulated curriculum with overreliance on textbooks available from the Arab world particularly on religious sciences.

Field experience by this writer in the *Madāris* visited and from unscheduled interviews with some proprietors and teachers revealed a negative and perhaps lackadaisical attitude to change in the manner of the schools' management and administration. There was a general orientation and apathy to change to modern times and needs. Furtherance to this attitude, is the air of arrogance, pride, unhealthy competition and conceited attitude among some proprietors and *Madrasah* owners. Their conduct and administration of the schools is usually shrouded in mystery and secrecy.

Recommendations for Improvement

Based upon results findings, this study is recommending an overhaul of the *Madrasah* system of education by advocating for a model. The model that should be developed in the southern part of the Nigeria should be unique and distinct in the sense that it must endeavour to strike a balance between religious and modern educational needs of the community, and offer them the opportunity to address both of these types of need without any compromise of the religious aims. The model should recognize the following fundamental principles of the right of any student in any citadel of learning:

1. That Muslims who attend these schools like any other citizens have intellectual and educational capacity to participate actively in the social, economic and political endeavours of the larger society. Their education most therefore be such that would make them able to compete in the job market locally and international and to upgrade his/her quality of life.
2. That the students who attend these *Madāris* shall have opportunity to advance their educational status without prejudices to their former education.
3. That there is a need for the strengthening of the present *Madrasah* educational system as avital component of the national education system.

On the basis of this, this study therefore recommends as follows:

Attitudinal Change: This study, opines that the *Madrasah* system of education can align with some modern changes without jeopardizing and compromising Islamic values. This attitude of “indeed, this is how we found our fore-fathers

doing it”, should not persist. For progress, exchange of ideas, information, technical know-how and expertise must be advocated and encouraged.

Adoption of a Unified Curriculum: As observed, the curriculum and syllabus in use was different from one *Madrasah* to another. Furtherance to this is the imperative need for the system to adopt a curriculum that is 21st century compliant including a blend of different subjects such as English language, Mathematics and one of the science or social science subjects. The aim of this is such that, a learner who has completed the *Thaanawy* level can compete favourably with his mates or age group in the formal school system by sitting for one of WAEC/NECO and compete favourably for admission in one of Nigeria Universities. This is one of the roles the National Board for Arabic and Islamic studies (NBAIS) is expected to play effectively. Schools are urged to popularize the mission of this body in the southwest as it is in the North.

Use of Modern Literature and Texts: The writer advocates for local Arabic book writers to collaborate with experts in content development, psychology of learning, instructional material producers as a way of producing reading materials that will meet modern standards of texts.

Quality Control / Assurance: A body should be constituted that will see to the monitoring, quality control and assurance of the curriculum, administration and general conduct of the *Madāris* just like it is available in the formal school system in terms of accreditation. Checks and balances must be put in place to ensure compliance to rules and regulations.

Capacity Building for Students: Unlike the formal school system of education, a sizeable number of graduates from the *Madāris* system do not find it easy integrating into the modern job markets. This is as a result of the status of certificates obtained that do not prepare them for the available opportunities in terms of skills development. Today, explicitly, any school curriculum and educational endeavour must adopt and integrate future skills to make the school leavers independent.

Funding: Besides the sources of funds already suggested by Abdul-Raheem (2020), this paper would advocate for entrepreneurial opportunities to help grow the internally generated revenue for the schools and or partnership with wealthy well-meaning Muslim individuals or groups.

Improved Teaching Methods and Strategies: Teachers must play a significant role in helping students develop 21st century skills by applying methods that increase students’ abilities. They should use innovative strategies and modern learning technologies that help integrate cognitive and social skills with content knowledge as well as increase student participation in the learning environment in order to promote these future skills. One such approach is problem-based learning. In this model, students can discuss and analyse different issues and topics that are related to the real world. Another of such strategies is cooperative

learning where students are divided into different groups of students with diverse abilities and interests.

Teachers' Development: Teachers of these schools should be made to undergo regular in-service courses on education, including educational technology and educational psychology. This could be done by making them acquire adult education in English language, enrolling them in special courses under the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) or organizing periodical seminars and workshops where educational experts from institutions of higher government will begin to view this system of education as veritable and viable tools in national development not as a stale, outdated and redundant educational system.

Integration of Technology: Times have changed and the *Madāris* system of Education must change with it. Open electronic / technology sources have to be designed to contain materials that would benefit the learners and make it easy for the learning. Students should be able to use social media applications that make most sense to them. They need to see what matters to them in digital form, which is also their way to move on to a higher level of achievement. Education in Nigeria schools is entering into a new phase which occasioned by the pandemic COVID-19, has necessitated learning through technology and *Madāris* cannot be left out of this development.

Stakeholders' Involvement: A stakeholder is an individual or group of people with the interest in the success of an organization and in this context, a school. The administration and management of the *Madāris* should ideally not be left alone in the hands of individuals. Parents, community members, Muslim groups, school officials and the students should be involved in the efforts to fulfilling the mission and vision of the *Madāris*, without jeopardising Islamic principles or the students' future development and aspirations. This is obtainable in other forms of education and the *Madrasah* system should not be an exception. Indeed, the Qur'ān says "... *who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation*" (42:38).

On this note, it is important that the government of Nigeria, as well as state governments in every part of the country where this system persist, prioritize the future of the hundreds of graduates of these schools by planning for their inclusion into the scheme of things.

Conclusion

It should be noted from the foregone that the attention paid to this system of education by government authorities is reluctant and far from being wholehearted (Olaniyani-Shobowale, 2018). It is regarded as Rogers (2004) described non-formal education relating it to the poor and badly dressed guest at the education table, whose presence was hardly desired and who no one knew quite how to approach, yet their presence cannot be ignored for they fill a

certain educational need and vacuum of certain individuals and groups within the society. It is a viable alternative or supplement to formal learning.

No doubt, the Islamic Educational system to which the *Madrasah* system is a focus on takes a holistic approach to learning as it is intended to not only equip students with life's skills but skills for success in the hereafter. The challenges of the *Madāris* are enormous as highlighted in the foregone but they are not insurmountable. Hence, all efforts to equip and elevate this system of education to meet up with and to the 21st century realities must be put in place if they will continue to survive the test of times. Islam is not against change and in fact accords great importance to science, scientific knowledge and developments. Since the *Madāris* education is targeted at balancing the goals of divine education and challenges of development, these schools and institutions of learning should be re-designed and aligned to these realities. Learning should cease being teacher-centred but rather student-based; memorization of facts methods should be supported by a variety of other learning and teaching strategies so that students not only recall but also master other domains of learning. This paper recommended that *Madāris* should enhance their capacity by the inclusion of some basic entrepreneurial skills and training to their curricula. Policy makers and planners should interact with such schools with a view to becoming an issue of interest to education ministries, planning directories and benefiting from donor agencies to education.

References

- Abdul-Raheem, B. (2020). Transforming Islamiyyah Schools for effective performance in the 21st century in South-West Nigeria. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies (IJOURELS)*, 10(1), 33-64
- Abdullah, U. I. (2018): Towards restoring a functional madrasah system <https://educateleb.com/functional-madrash-system>.
- Abubakare, R. D. (2004). *The interplay of Arabic and Yoruba culture in South western Nigeria*. Dar al-ilm publishers.
- Adeyemi, K. A. (2016). The trend of Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria: Progress and prospects. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 16, 197-201. <http://dxdoi.org/10.4236/odml.2016.63020>.
- Al-Aluri, A. A. (1990). *Naslim al-soba fi akhbr al-Islam wa 'ullama' biladyunuba*. Maktaba Wahbaj.
- Alismail, H. A., & McGuire, P. (2015). 21st Century standards and curriculum: Current research and practice. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(6), 150-155. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1083656.pdf>
- Demirci, M. (2017). *Tefsir tarihi*, Istanbul, Turkey: M.Ü Ğ lahiyatfakültesivak yayinlari.
- Drew, S. V. (2013). Open up the ceiling on the common core state standards: Preparing students for 21st-century literacy—now. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 56(4), 321-330. doi: [org/10.1002/JAAL.0014](http://dxdoi.org/10.1002/JAAL.0014)

- Jouejati, S. (2011). *Integrating technology into Arabic classroom engaging the iGeneration*. 12th ISNA Education Forum. <http://innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=38>
- Joyce, B., Weil, M., & Calhoun, E. (2009). *Models of teaching*. Pearson /Allyn and Bacon.
- Basheer, M. K. (2016). *Quality enhancement in madrasa education: An exploratory study*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Ogunbado, A. F, (2016). Historical development of Muslim education in Yoruba Land, Southwest Nigeria. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 4(8), 13-21. <https://www.scribd.com/document/432817474/Historical-Development-of-Muslim-Education-in-Yoruba-Land-Southwest-Nigeria>
- Olaniyan-Shobowale, K. O. (2018). "What are they doing after school? An analysis of the post school activities of Arabic school graduates. *Literacy and Reading in Nigeria*, 17, 170-176.
- Paige, J. (2009). The 21st century skills movement. *Educational Leadership*, 67(1), 11.
- Uyuni, B., & Adnam, M. (2020). The challenges of Islamic Education in the 21st century. *Salaam: Jurnal Sosial dan Budaya Syar-I*, 7(12), 1079-1098. doi: 10.15408/sjsbs.v7i12.18291