

SHEIKH ADAM ABDULLAH AL-ILORY AND EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION: PROSPECTS AND ASPIRATIONS

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Abstract

Education is an essential tool for the development of nation in all ramifications. The contributions of Muslim scholars in Nigeria in attaining this objective can never be underestimated. This paper examines Sheikh Adam Abdullah al-Ilory and educational revolution: prospects and aspirations. The study adopts historical, analytical and phenomenological approaches in addressing the topic. Historical approach is used in discussing the life history of Sheikh Adam al-Ilory, analytical approach is adopted in analysing his contributions to revolutionization of Arabic and Islamic education while phenomenological procedure is sampled to discuss the relevance of his contributions to modern approaches in education. The finding of the study shows that Sheikh Adam Abdullah al-Ilory is an innovative, creative and prospective scholar in his approaches to education. The study concludes that Sheikh Adam Abdullah al-Ilory's approaches align with 21st century and therefore suggests that Muslim scholars in Nigeria should emulate late scholars like Sheikh Adam in their creativity, reflection and foresightedness.

Key words: Shiekh Adam, prospects, aspirations, approaches,

1.0 Introduction

The frontage of education is changing persistently as a result of consistent transformation in the field of teaching, learning and research. This phenomenon makes educational blueprint innovative, adaptive and transformative. Like scholars from other field of education, Muslim scholars have been working painstakingly to re-direct and restructure Arabic and Islamic education approaches and pedagogies to align with the need of 21st century. Exegesis of al-Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhaammad (PBUH) that are considered the primary sources of education in Islam had been enjoying divergent scientific, logical and philosophical interpretations that portray undeniable synergy between revelation and reason. Sheikh Adam al-Ilory is one of the famous scholars who had forecasted the transformative development in the field of Arabic and Islamic education through proposed approaches and pedagogies.

2.0 Historical Life of Sheikh Adam al-Ilory

Sheikh Adam al-Ilory was born in 1917AD/1340AH at a place called Wasa in Dahomen, presently Republic of Benin. His father, Abdul-Baqi was a prominent native of Ilorin, the state capital of Kwara state, Nigeria. Abdul-Baqi was an itinerant Islamic scholar who always transported goods from one place to another¹. He used to travel cover Yorubaland and some West African countries where Benin Republic is one of them². His mother was Princess Aishat who was among the daughters of a village head in Wasa. Aishat was given in marriage to Ilorin scholar Abdul-Baqi due to his extra-ordinary human relation, emotional resilience and conflict resolution strategies³. The marriage was blessed with many children whom Sheikh Adam Abdullah al-Ilory was one of them. His early education was monitored, supervised and managed by his father and that solidified it. He received the knowledge of Qur'an and Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) directly from his father.

1. Yusuf & Gambari (2023). Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory (1917-1992): A Muslim reformer of 20th century in Yorubaland, Nigeria. P 5
2. Ibid
3. Ibid

Afterward, his father took him to Ibadan-based Ilorin scholar Alfa Esinniobiwa where he continued his Arabic and Islamic education between 1934 to 1937. This three years of academic rigor exposed Sheikh Adam to divergent aspects of knowledge which widened his scope and strengthened his retention and motivation. Having discovered the level of sagacity, excellence and proficiency demonstrated by Sheikh Adam in Arabic and Islamic education, his father encouraged him to proceed to Lagos where he met another Lagos-based Ilorin scholar in person of Sheikh Umar Agbaji before he later travelled to Kano where he studied under another prominent scholar Sheikh Adam Namaji till 1941⁴.

Finally, Sheikh Adam in having strong ambition to join the global race in education he travelled to Egypt to study in Azhar University Cairo where he gained great opportunity to meet with emeritus and learned scholars. This period marked a remarkable transformation in the life of Sheikh Adam Abdullah al-Ilory⁵. His coming back to Nigeria gave birth to unprecedented development in the field of teaching, learning and book publications in the field of Arabic and Islamic education, science and philosophy⁶.

To have an evergreen legacy that would contribute to academic development of Muslim children in Yorubaland and beyond, Sheikh Adam established Arabic and Islamic center (*Markaz't-Talimu 'l-Arabi wa 'l-Islami*) in 1952 at Abeokuta Ogun State before it was transferred to Agege Lagos State after two or three years of its inception⁷. This Arabic and Islamic institution had been impactfully contributing to excellence in Arabic and Islamic education to the extent that great numbers of professors, doctors, engineers, lawyers, politicians among others are its products⁸. Globally *Markaz't-Talimu 'l-Arabi wa 'l-Islami* is recognized for its credibility and millions of Muslim graduates have been produced. However, the institution has many branches in Lagos, Kano, Kwara and many African countries established by the products of Markaz Agege.

4. Yusuf & Gambari (2023). Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory (1917-1992): A Muslim reformer of 20th century in Yorubaland, Nigeria. p 5

5. Gambo & Sulaiman (2019). The role of Sheikh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilori toward educating Nigerian people. P110
6. Ibid
7. Yusuf & Gambari (2023). Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilori (1917-1992): A Muslim reformer of 20th century in Yorubaland, Nigeria. p 8
8. Ibid

3.0 Sheikh Adam's Contributions to Revolutionization of Arabic and Islamic Education in Nigeria

Sheikh Adam is a prominent paragon, polymath and global figure in the field of Arabic and Islamic education including science-oriented subjects like Chemistry, Geography, Astrology, Mathematics among others. His contributions to the field of teaching, learning and research are unlimited. He modernized Islamiyyah schools to meet the needs of incoming generations and demands of time. Sheikh Adam in collaboration with principal Imams in Ilorin established Daarul Ulum by the directive of 9th Emir of Ilorin Zulqarnayn Gaambari with the objectives to widen the scope of Arabic and Islamic scholarship, increase students' accessibility to useful materials, introduce modernity to teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic education, produce Arabic students who have developed sound listening, reading, speaking and writing skills, and prepare younger generation who would become the custodians of Arabic language and Islamic studies in Ilorin particularly and world in general⁹. For that reason, he developed a strong, adaptive, and transformative curriculum that possessed ability to rescue the knowledge seekers and the entire society now and forever. On this note, it was noted that Sheikh Adam prepared a powerful blueprint that contained all activities expected to be done in the school which include development of curriculum, syllabus, availability of suitable text books and admission styles and procedures¹⁰. In addition, Raji¹¹ explained that Sheikh Adam's approaches to Arabic and Islamic studies teaching delivered Islamic education from traditional bondage and socio-cultural skepticism. Like Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Miskawayh, Sheikh Adam incorporated integrative learning, collaborative learning, inquiry-based learning, and problem-solving approaches to teaching and learning Arabic and Islamic studies.

9. Yusuf & Gambari (2023). Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilori (1917-1992): A Muslim reformer of 20th century in Yorubaland, Nigeria. p 5

10. Ibid

11. Olatoye, Raji Mubin. (2012). “Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory and the Development of Arabic and Islamic Learning in Yorubaland: A Survey of His Reformation Agenda.” P279

3.1 Integrative Learning Approach

In learning process, the approaches adopted by the teachers determine the nature of students’ success in their academic performance. In the global demand integrative learning is among worldly effective learning approach that fast tract teaching effectiveness at all levels. It is a modern approach to education which enhances students’ creativity and thinking abilities. It is an approach that promotes interactive learning environment, reduces teacher’s dominance and fosters students’ engagement¹². Shiekh Adam’s application of integrative learning approach is well obvious in numerous occasions. Yusuf and Gambari¹³ in explaining Sheikh Adam’s application of integrative learning approach stated that Adam began to introduce his students to new approaches in education when he discovered that majority of Muslim scholars at that period upheld complex, unprogressive and less-dynamic approaches. This idea created great opportunities for the students to utilize their God-given intellect to discover themselves in the realm of Arabic language and Islamic sciences and philosophy.

According to Noer and Nadia¹⁴ integrative learning approach is the integration of varieties of experiences to develop comprehensive understanding of a concept and real-world case studies. This provides learners’ opportunities to navigate complex social problems, enhance critical thinking and logical interpretations¹⁵. It also allows learners to explore, collect, process, refine and present information about a given topic in a logical and synthetical ways¹⁶.

12. Ogunfowode & Asare (2019). Effect of integrative teaching approach on students’ academic achievement in secondary school Mathematics.

13. Yusuf & Gambari (2023). Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory (1917-1992): A Muslim reformer of 20th century in Yorubaland, Nigeria. p7

14. ST. Noer & Nadia (2024). Harmonizing tradition and modernity; teaching critical thinking in Islamic Religious Education. p181
15. Ibid
16. Ibid

This approach is adopted widely by Sheikh Adam as reported that when Sheikh recognized the fact that virtually all approaches adopted by the scholars were traditional and unprogressive, he took the bull by the horn and began to introduce different methods that can yield faster understanding and comprehension. In recognizing the application of integrative learning approach in the teaching life of Sheikh Adam, Gambo and Sulaiman¹⁷ expressed that Adam's style of teaching allowed students master, integrate and differentiate among the elements of literatures which relevant to synthesis part of Bloom Taxonomy.

Consequently, the approach equipped Arabic and Islamic studies students with the knowledge to realise the connectiveness and interrelationship among the disciplines and curriculum areas which aided their understanding and proper interpretation of texts^{18;19}. In addition, this allowed students to grasp Arabic literature and history and knowledge of different fields of learning²⁰. Conclusively, this approach sharpens students' critical thinking, creativity, logical, synthesizing and convincing presentation of points. Without exaggeration, testimony is manifested in his books, methods of teaching and Islamic propagation²¹.

17. Gambo & Sulaiman (2019). The role of Sheikh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory toward educating Nigerian people. P112

18. Yusuf & Gambari (2023). Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory (1917-1992): A Muslim reformer of 20th century in Yorubaland, Nigeria. p7

19. Gambo & Sulaiman (2019). The role of Sheikh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory toward educating Nigerian people. P112

20. Ibid

21. Ibid

3.2 Inquiry-based Learning

Inquiry-based learning approach is a modern technique adopted in teaching and learning to meet the needs of 21st century. This approach is highly interactive, investigative and student-centered. It improved students' critical thinking, self-reliance and logical reflection and reproduction. On this note, Okate and Kpangban ²² explained that is an interactive approach that is basically originated from constructivist theory which claims that real knowledge is actively constructed by the students themselves through interaction, dialogue, debate and questioning. This will consequently lead to meaningful engagement of hand-on activities, and open-ended investigations that develop critical, reflective and progressive thinking of the students.

Sheikh Adam, as a prospective Islamic scholar adopted this approach through his introduction of weekly conference and symposium to prepare the students for external challenges at his academic centre Agege Lagos State, Nigeria²³. In addition, the centre plays significant roles in filling the gap of illiteracy among Muslim children in Yorubaland and beyond to become proficient scholars in Arabic and Islamic education. This approach is highly effective because it allows the students to view the real sense of a phenomenon not mere rote learning or cramming²⁴.

22. Okate, & Kpangban, (2026). Effects of inquiry, problem-solving and lecture methods on achievement of Biology students in Delta central senatorial district. p155

23. Yusuf & Gambari (2023). Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory (1917-1992): A Muslim reformer of 20th century in Yorubaland, Nigeria. p9

24. Odetade, et al. (2026). Enhancing critical thinking skills in Nigerian undergraduates. p2

3.3 Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is another viable approach in 21st century that strengthens students' abilities to think, reflect and ponder. It allows students to take significant portion of the lesson which eventually leads to expected achievement in their academic pursuit. According to Noer and Nadier²⁵ critical thinking is the process of displaying personal disposition, reasoning skills and innovative knowledge. This approach helps students to develop deductive and inductive reasoning skills²⁶. It can be applied in teaching through different methods, models, and instructional strategies, such as lectures, discussions, question-and answer sessions, group projects, collaborative activities, and inquiry-based learning²⁷. Significantly, the approach fosters positive attitude, encourages independent thought, and promotes metacognition through reflection personal thought²⁸.

However, critical thinking is an essential skill in navigating rapid advancement in learning Qur'an and Hadith as the major components of Arabic and Islamic education²⁹ because it encourages students to understand and apply the teachings of Qur'an and Hadith in logical ways that leads to positive achievement. Consequently, learning Arabic and Islamic education will be effective, transformative and innovative³⁰. In addition, this approach gives Arabic and Islamic studies teachers opportunity to provide students full support in developing new ideas, engaging in useful discussion, and exploring diverse techniques in understanding Arabic and Islamic education contexts.

25. ST. Noer & Nadia (2024). Harmonizing tradition and modernity; teaching critical thinking in Islamic Religious Education. p181

26. Odetade, et al. (2026). Enhancing critical thinking skills in Nigerian undergraduates. p2

27. Ibid

28. ST. Noer & Nadia (2024). Harmonizing tradition and modernity; teaching critical thinking in Islamic Religious Education. p181

29. Ibid p180

30. Odetade et al. (2026). Enhancing critical thinking skills in Nigerian undergraduates. p3

Sheikh Adam is a notable scholar that supported the use of reasons in the interpretation of revelation in order to allow students apply their thinking critically to achieve their objectives. Yusuf and Gambari³¹ explained that Sheikh identified the significances attached to critical thinking and therefore enjoyed his students to adopt it in their preaching, teaching and dialogues.

Sheikh Adam is like Imam Ghazali in ideas, views and principles. For instance, Imam Ghazali advocated for educational approaches that liberate individuals from bondage of reflection and critical thinking in order to allow individuals to achieve intellectual and spiritual needs for the attainment of genuine success³². Corroborating the above assertion, Gambo and Bello³³ noted that Sheikh Adam was the first Nigerian scholar to simply learning Arabic and Islamic education for Muslim children through setting a viable curriculum and adopting transformative approaches.

31. Yusuf & Gambari (2023). Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory (1917-1992): A Muslim reformer of 20th century in Yorubaland, Nigeria. p9

32. Ibid

33. Gambo & Sulaiman (2019). The role of Sheikh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory toward educating Nigerian people. P112

4.0 Conclusion

This study dwelled into the life history of Sheikh Adam al-Ilory, his educational background and contributions to the development of Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria focusing his educational approaches such as integrative learning, inquiry-based, and critical thinking approaches. However, Sheikh Adam application of integrative, inquiry-based and critical thinking approaches was discussed in the study in alignment with the 21st century prominent approaches in the field of education in order to showcase their relevance. It showed from the literature that Shekh Adam was the pace setter in the application and adoption of progressive learning approaches in teaching Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria.

5.0 Suggestions

1. There should be a regular symposium where educational contributions of Sheikh Adam would be displayed to the world;
2. There should be an annual Arabic and Islamic education conference for promoting Muslim Yoruba scholars' contributions to the field of education and sciences;
3. Islamiyyah schools in Nigeria should prioritize the use of Arabic and Islamic studies books published by Sheikh Adam and the likes;
4. Muslim scholars in Nigeria should emulate late Muslim scholars in the country in their creativity, reflection and foresightedness.

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