

## **Examining the Impact of Slate Schools (*Makarantun Allo*) in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Reflections over the situation in Nasarawa State and its inhabitants in the earliest centuries lead to a better understanding of the real impact of Islamic intellectualism and scholarship on the life of the people of the State. People of Nasarawa State were profoundly influenced by the literary contributions of Islam. Islam is a concept which is connected in a number of linked political, social religious, economic, cultural, civil and educational organisms which covers an immense area in space and time. In different regions, Islam has presented different feature under the impact of, and in response to local geography, social and political forces. In this paper, effort is made to examine and assess how the Slate schools (*Makarantun allo*) influenced and molded the behavior of the people of Nasarawa State. In other words, it examines various aspects of life of the people of Nasarawa State ranging from the social, political and economic and see how the teachings of Islam influenced them. Recommendations were made towards improving the status of Slate schools (*Makarantun allo*) in Nasarawa State.*

**Keywords-** *Islam, slate, schools, education, teacher, Glorious Qur'ān, impact.*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

As it is the case in other societies, there is no doubt that Islamic education and civilization contains many unique features as well as influenced other educational and cultural factors from other parts of world. During the great educational and cultural awakening after the rise of Islam in the seventh century, Muslim scholars carefully translated and preserved knowledge from many sources. Islamic scholars incorporated this abundance of inspirations in creative ways (Gada 2010:99). In Islam, there are no advantages due to race, gender or nationality, for Islam wants to unite humanity in solidarity and mutual respect. The Glorious Qur'ān sums up this concept in one verse which says:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (Q 49:13).

Islam accepts all the goodness that civilizations can yield. It does not encourage dissidence among its members since it advocates the unity of humanity and the closeness of relationships among people of different races and inclinations (Qutb, 2007: 94). Islamic society was strong in medieval times because there was unity of purpose among all Muslims. They spoke the same language; they worshipped the same Creator in the same manner and openly stated that their goal was cooperation, understanding and transparency rather than creating factions and disunity.

Islamic intellectual penetration and establishment of Islamic educational institutions in a community contributed to the total and gradual process of social, cultural and political transformation in the universal conception of that community. This is because the acceptance of Islam motivates followers to strive hard in acquiring knowledge leading to its proper understanding, while belief in it transforms and mould the life of the believer to concentrate and act in accordance with the demands of Islam (Gada, 2010: 111).

It is vital to note that in Islam, there has never been any juxtaposition between individual and the community, between religion and politics, between this life and the life to come, between the spiritual and physical and between man and nature. In Islam there is unity between various aspects of life and the universe, between religion and nature, thus giving Islam a much wider meaning and sense compared to other faiths. Islam may be said to have restored communal solidarity and have attached it to the total community of Muslims rather than to any smaller unit (Watt, 1962:29).

In fact, the secret of Islam powerful appearance and the fact that it is not only a religion regulating the spiritual side of the believers but also an all-embracing way of life governing the totality of the Muslim being

(Farah, 1976: 14). For this reason, this study intends to examine the real impact of Slate schools (*Makarantun allo*) in the life the citizens of Nasarawa State.

### 1.1 General Impact of Islamic Education in Nasarawa State

Perhaps the most profound impact and vital contribution of Slate schools (*Makarantun allo*) was demonstrated by its advocacy of universal, free education. Islam encourages the education of boys and girls and the acceptance of teachers of different races and persuasions. Long before western Europeans championed the concept of educational opportunities for everyone; the Muslims had implemented this philosophy in a variety of ways as Muslims were the first to structure and organized higher education in the world (Gada, 2010: 78).

Islam encourages children of even the lowest socio-economic status to have access to Islamic education. Islam has established a legacy of outstanding moral guidelines, which there is a crying need for it in the contemporary society. The propagation of Islamic education and virtues eliminates the dissension caused by tribal discrimination among peoples (Toynbee, 1948: 205).

The impact of Islamic education on the life of the people of Nasarawa State could be seen in the reduction of some unacceptable traditional practices and the transformation of the traditional institution of the ruling class and their relationship with their subjects. Since people could not imagine themselves to be worse under their old traditional political systems, they had a better chance of being better off by being under Islamic rule. This is the main reason why Islamic teachings on the political system appealed to the life of both the ruling class and their subjects. Islamic education has impacted a lot in terms of provision of administrative guidance in the Muslim areas and in providing models for non-Muslim sovereigns (Omotosho and Hassan, 2010:191).

### 1.2 Impact of Slate Schools (*Makarantun allo*) in Nasarawa State

Indeed learning and seeking for education are considered as acts of worship in the Muslim tradition and a fulfillment of Allah's commandments. The Prophetic Traditions are even more emphatic about knowledge. Several traditions of the Prophet (SAW) describe learning and wisdom as equal to worship, and also describes men of learning as successors to the prophets. According to Hasan al Basri, "The ink of the scholar is holier than the blood of the martyr" (Al-Suyuti, nd: 17). A Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) said: "Allah ease the way to paradise for him who seeks for knowledge" (Al Tirmidhi, vol.5 no. 2646). Again the Prophet (SAW) said: "Angels spread their wings for the seeker of knowledge as a mark of Allah's approval of his purpose" (Abu Dawud, vol. 3, no. 3643). Another Hadith said: "Whoever follows the road to knowledge Allah will show him the road to paradise" (Ibn Majah, vol. 1, no.223). More so, the Prophet said: "scholars are the heirs to the prophets" (Ibn Hanbal, vol. 5, no. 2176). However, with particular reference to the learning of the Glorious Qur'an, the Prophet said: "The best of you is he who learns the Qur'an and teach it" (Bukhāri, vol.6, no. 5027). Thus learning in Islam is viewed more as an act of worship than a process of acquiring wisdom and skills, and the teacher (*Malam*) is not just a mere functionary who draws salary either from the state or from a private organization. Far from that, he was a spiritual figure, a model to be emulated. The teacher was required not only to be a man of learning but also to be a person of virtue, a pious man whose conduct by itself could have an impact upon the minds of the young ones. It is not only what he taught that matters, what he does, the way he conducts himself, his deportment in class and outside, are all expected to conform to an Islamic ideal which his pupils could unhesitatingly accept and emulate.

It is in view of the above that in Nasarawa State, the *Makarantun allo* and the teachers of *Makarantun allo* threw their gate wide open to the entire members of the community. The *Makarantun allo* is manifestly continuous with their cultural and religious tradition and at the same time in harmony with their dominant economic activity. There is no doubt about the fact that the traditional *Makarantun allo* in Nasarawa State has produced highly knowledgeable Muslims.

The impact of *Makarantun allo* in Nasarawa State and perhaps elsewhere is the sustenance of social cohesion, assistance and cooperation. *Makarantun allo* has two categories of pupils- those whose parents lived in the same town, and those who came from other towns, usually the poorer rural areas, where there was shortage of teachers (*Malamai*). The pupils whose parents live in the town usually returned home, while the out-of-towners (the *almajirai*) were fed by the *Malam* or begged for food; in other words, taken care of by the society. The older students earned income through trading or crafts e.g. nail cutting, cap sewing, shoe shining, etc. In those days, the rich and the poor lived a symbiotic life in the same ward. The rich gave out *zakkah* and charity to their immediate neighbours, the poor (*talaka*). Since their children attended the same *Makarantun allo* as those of the poor, it means they also subsidized the education of the children of the poor through giving *zakkah*, charity and fees to the teachers (*Malamai*), and often times also provided free accommodation to the teachers (*Malamai*) and their pupils (*almajirai*).

The poor in each ward could look up to the rich in their midst for assistance, and generally felt they had a stake in the wealth of the rich, and their well-being. The rich could in turn look up to the poor for their security. Many Muslim children went through this system even if they did not go on to become *Malamai* themselves. Many went on to become leaders, craftsmen, business men etc. But whatever they became, they never looked down on the system (*Makarantun allo*) or the pupils (*almajirai*), and they always respected the

*Malamai*. And because the rich went to “school” with the poor, they were always accessible to them, whatever they became. Therefore, the teachers (*Malamai*) of *Makarantun allo* in Nasarawa State took care of the education and spiritual development of children on behalf of the society and parents, while the society and parents took care of the *Malamai*. The society also took care of the *almajirai* through giving them food, and offering them opportunities as house helps. This unique system did not exclude willing students even if they were poor. The *Makarantun allo* produced world class scholars in every field of Islamic knowledge as it required little infrastructure and maintained social cohesion by promoting the interaction between the rich and the poor. In addition, the *Makarantun allo* develops the skills, aptitude and techniques required for organization and administration of a community (Malam Hamidu)<sup>1</sup>.

However, this study has also identified as an impact of *Makarantun allo* in Nasarawa State that the economic and educational variables were themselves influenced and shaped the religious values and societal norms and customs. For instance, the behaviour of the host community which provide both the teachers and the pupils of *Makarantun allo* with free shelter, feeding and, in the event of ill-health, free medication, can only be explained in terms of those religious and cultural values associated with *Makarantun allo* which encourage hospitality towards those on “sacred mission” and spending surplus resources on the needy and the less-privileged. The pupils of *Makarantun allo* in addition, became a source of cheap labour in Nasarawa State for anybody that patronizes them, and the secluded urban woman derives benefit from their services, but the man who built a school compound to accommodate the pupils or one who donates part of his residential house for similar purpose, along with he who gave them regular or occasional charity in the form of money, clothing and left over food, did it out of purely religious consideration. This attitude conforms to what Lubeck (1986:274) describes as “the ethics and norms of status/honour” among the privileged members of the Muslim community which necessitated the Qur’anic students receive alms in the form of food and shelter.

Like any traditional Muslim society, *Makarantun allo* in Nasarawa State has pervaded many sphere of life of the children that it remained the decisive reference point for all social and religious practices. In addition, the influence of the *Malamai* is overwhelming. They are the dominant social and religious critics and opinion moulders to the extent that government and politicians had to secure their allegiance and loyalty, during their campaigns and execution of some official programmes.

Furthermore, the *Makarantun allo* has impacted positively on the introduction, practice and development of *ajami* system of writing in Nasarawa State. *Ajami* technically refers to Arabic script used to write any non-Arabic language, in this case Hausa. The word *ajami* is derived from the Arabic word *ajam*, which means non-Arab language (Philips, 2000:56).

Consequently, in those days, *ajami* writing not only grew in quantity, it also developed in quality. As written Hausa literature began to grow through the early production of manuscripts, new Arabic script characters were created in order to express Hausa phonemes which had no Arabic equivalents (Philips, 2000: 64). While some literate members of Muslim societies such as religious leaders wrote exclusively in Arabic, others wrote in Arabic as well as *ajami*, and chose the medium in relationship to the subject matter and intended audience. Historically, Arabic was used in Muslim societies of Africa for communicating outside the ethnic group and for dealing with most theological, legal and broader historical issues. *Ajami* was often used for teaching purposes, especially communicating an understanding of Islam to non-literate members of the society such as women, slaves, children, peasants etc. and to record and disseminate information deemed important to lower groups of society. *Ajami* system of writing was mainly used in those days to teach many educational programmes especially for the adult as in *ajin yaki da jahilci*. *Ajami* manuscripts generally fall in two major categories:

- 1) Religious poems intended for recitation,
- 2) Religious and secular prose and poems designed for keeping records such as family genealogies, historical accounts, advertisements and correspondences (Philips, 2000: 66).

The *ajami* literatures are very little known outside of their language areas, and the numbers of *ajami* users are not generally reflected in official government literacy rates. In many cases, in Nasarawa State today, *ajami* is spreading, especially in the rural areas. Although a large volume of literature is emerging in the Roman script, *ajami* continues to be a major means of written communication in many Muslim societies in Nasarawa State, particularly in rural areas where local Qur’anic schools and *Makarantun allo* remain the primary educational institutions.

In summary *Makarantun allo* has left tremendous impact on the life of the people of Nasarawa State in the following areas:

- unity among the Muslims, hence there is a very strong sense of unity among the people of Nasarawa State particularly those who graduated from *Makarantun allo*.

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<sup>1</sup>.Malam Hamidu is Teacher of *Makarantun allo* in Keffi Local Government of Nasarawa State. He is 70 years old and lived in Lungun Tsamiya, Keffi. Interview conducted on the 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2013.

- mode of dressing of the Muslim children in the State.
- encourage literacy among the Muslims in Nasarawa State
- helped to spread civilization, as Muslim children travelled to other places, to learn from those places and brought back this knowledge to their various communities.
- sense of unity of belief among the Muslims in the State.

In a nutshell, the impact of *Makarantun allo* in Nasarawa State is the creation, provision, development and advancement of Islamic literacy in the State. *Makarantun allo* has impacted positively through the entrenchment of Islamic identity among the Muslims in the State; it has also graduated many memorizers of the Glorious Qur'ān which eventually resulted to the sustenance of the spirit of Islamic education and the maintenance of the entire system.

### 1.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, *Makarantun allo* is currently faced with a lot of challenges in Nasarawa State particularly and Northern Nigeria in general as Okoye and Ya'u have documented that,

*Makarantun allo* has increasingly faced with serious challenge of fulfilling their traditional educational mission. Instead of educating the pupils and giving them skills and knowledge necessary for functioning effectively in society as they used to, *Makarantun allo* have deteriorated to the extent that many people regard them as no more than a breeding ground for street-beggars (2001:85-103).

However, the traditions of Islamic learning in *Makarantun allo* in Nasarawa State emphasize the supremacy of spiritual and moral values over bookish learning, application of knowledge to guide the conduct of everyday life, and intellectual quest as lifelong endeavor. Also central to traditions of Islamic learning is a master-disciple relationship characterized by courteous regards and respect to the master, and sustained through face-to-face oral instruction that transmits not only learning but also spiritual guidance, moral authority, piety and blessing. These traditions of Islamic learning have produced outstanding Islamic scholars, including a number of prolific authors (Malam Rabo)<sup>2</sup>. Although still very much alive, the ancient traditions of Islamic learning, particularly the *Makarantun allo*, are facing serious crises of relevance in contemporary Nasarawa State.

In addition to the above, the *Makarantun allo* in Nasarawa State had perfectly adjusted itself to the economic life of the people. The academic time-table and school calendar unlike the formal schools was designed in such a way that it will not take away the benefits of full-time apprenticeship and assistance of young children in farm-work. The *Makarantun allo* system has many more features which make it more appropriate for a society like Nasarawa State. For example, flexibility of attendance is a feature of *Makarantun allo*. Regular attendance, though required, is not rigidly enforced. This enables those whose economic and social commitments prevent them from maintaining regular attendance in school at their own time and convenience. Commenting on this flexibility, Bray et al stated that:

The Islamic system is in many respects far less dependent for its operation on specific administrative, institutional and organizational patterns. It also tends to be much more flexible and has an admirable leisureliness' (Bray et al, 1986:80).

Moreover, the *Makarantun allo* in Nasarawa State have multiple entry points which also are not fixed. Students can enroll into the schools at any time of the year, provided it is a session. Another important feature which makes *Makarantun allo* more readily acceptable to the ordinary people in Nasarawa State is its egalitarian outlook as observed Malam Rabi'u Lafia that:

Formal education is expensive so much that the parents can neither afford its direct cost nor the routine expenditure for the children. The absence of these economic problems in *Makarantun allo* often makes the parents to prefer the system (Malam Rabi'u)<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, considering the perennial nature of poverty in Nasarawa State, not many parents could afford the cost of formal education like school fees, uniform, text and note books, feeding, transportation and other formal school charges. Therefore, even though the values of Western education are recognized in Nasarawa State, the need to escape the problems of its financial expenditure seems to have out-weighed the desire to acquire it. This is in sharp contrast to the *Makarantun allo* which seems to be in perfect rhythm with the dominant economic activity of the people of Nasarawa State-agricultural production.

### 1.4 Recommendations

To remedy the current crisis situation associated with *Makarantun allo*, the paper recommends the following-

1. There should be political will on the part of the teachers of *Makarantun allo* and the governments at all levels

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<sup>2</sup> . Malam Rabo Murshid, Anguwan Rimi, Keffi, Nasarawa State, 70years, Scholar, 17-07-12.

<sup>3</sup> . Malam Rabi'u Lafia, Anguwan Rimi Uku Lafia, Nasarawa State, 52years, Teacher, 23-07-2013.

of administration to seriously support Islamic educational institutions generally and *Makarantun allo* within the mainstream of the Nigeria educational policies; in addition to developing an acceptable framework in which all stakeholders will participate fully in providing the necessary input to the success of Islamic educational institutions in Nasarawa State in particular and Nigeria in general.

2. Government and stakeholders at all levels should support and promote the existing *Makarantun allo* in the State in terms of infrastructural development, staff training and development; in addition to ensuring adequate supplies of supporting materials and other necessary equipment for conducive learning to take place.

3. Government should strengthen the existing *Makarantun allo* across the State.

4. Government and stakeholders should declare a state of emergency and involve the whole State, in waging a war against illiteracy.

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