THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY AND ITS NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON RELIGIOUS STUDIES: THE CASE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

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Abstract

Islamic Studies generally refers to the study of Islamic Sciences (ulum al-din) which had been in existence in northern Nigeria for many centuries. In fact, it preceded the western secular education that was brought into the country by the colonial masters in the early years of the 20th century. Since its arrival, it had its own policy on education, but when the British came, they introduced their own policy, and since then, various educational policies were introduced one after the other up to the present education policy that made Islamic Studies and all other religious studies as elective courses, thus relegating the importance of religion to the background. The paper attempted to discuss what Islamic Studies entails as well as the objectives of Islamic Studies. It then discussed the various educational policies that were introduced into the educational system of the country up to the present policy; giving the negative effects of these policies, particularly that of the new senior secondary school curriculum. Recommendations are finally given.

Field of Research:

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1. Introduction

There is no gainsaying the fact that religion plays a significant role in the development of individuals and the society at large, as it dominates the whole life of individuals. Religion virtually touches on every aspect of life and society, and thus should provide guidance on multifarious topics ranging from issues concerning the self, interpersonal issues and even issues affecting the larger society. Thus, it becomes necessary that religious studies should be a core compulsory cross-cutting course at each level of education.

2. Islamic Education

2.1 Definition, Objectives and Importance

Islamic Studies generally refers to the study of Islamic Sciences (ulum al-din) both originally researched and as defined by the Islamization of Knowledge. It includes all traditional forms of religious knowledge, such as Tawhid, Qur’an, Hadith, Fiqh, Kalam, Islamic civilization etc, but also incorporates other recent fields of study generally considered secular in the west, such as Islamic science, Islamic economics, Islamic banking and finance etc.
The importance of Islamic Studies in any society cannot be over emphasized. There are many Qur’anic verses to that effect. Even the very first verses revealed to the Prophet (S.A.W) (Q95: 1-5) were on general knowledge, both religious and worldly. There are other numerous verses, such as, “Allah will rise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge...(Q58 : 11), “…those truly fear Allah among His servants, who have knowledge…” (Q35 : 28), etc. Likewise, there are also several hadith on the importance of acquiring religious education. For instance, it has been reported from the Prophet (S.A.W), that, “If Allah wants to do good to a person, He makes him comprehend the religion” (Bukhari 14: 71), and he (S.A.W), is also reported to have said, “Do not wish to be like anyone except in two cases: a person whom Allah has given wealth and he spends it righteously, and a person whom Allah has given wisdom (the Qur’an) and he acts according to it and teaches it to others” (Bukhari 16: 73).

Islamic Studies was introduced into the Nigerian curriculum with the following objectives:

i. To inculcate the knowledge of Islamic religion into the students.
ii. To enable the students live peacefully among themselves.
iii. To teach them good moral conduct.
iv. To enable the students know their civic duties.
v. To propagate the religion.
vi. To enable the students to understand the purpose of life.
vii. To inculcate peaceful coexistence with other members of the society (Ibrahim, 1996, 21).

2.2 History

Islamic education had been in existence in northern Nigeria for many centuries. In fact, it preceded the western secular education that was brought into the country by the colonial masters in the early years of the 20th century. This is because Islam goes hand in hand with its education, as whenever the religion was introduced, it came with its education. According to Sambo (1989; 21):

When Islam entered Africa, it did so with education as an integral part of its culture. Islam and learning to a convert are equal. No sooner was he converted, than he was taught to read and the importance of knowledge was impressed upon him. Consequently, the desire to acquire knowledge led to the establishment of schools and development of centers of learning in various parts of the African continent.

The development of Islamic education began with the introduction of Islam in the 13th century and continued to progress through the reigns of the various rulers that ruled, some Muslims, others non-muslims. But all in all, the development and advancement continued to progress as a result of the contributions of notable Muslim rulers and scholars. Of importance were Sarki Ali Yaji, Sarki Muhammad Rumfa, AbdulKarim Al-Maghili, AbdurRahman Al- Zagaiti, Abdullahi Suka to mention but a few. Islamic education however reached its peak of development with the Jihad of Shehu Usman Danfodio in the early 19th century as learning and dissemination of knowledge were their priorities and the main reason for the establishment of the Caliphate. The leaders of the Jihad concentrated more on the educational task by establishing many schools. Basically, there were two levels of schools: the Qur’anic schools, known as the Makarantun Allo, which were mainly concerned with the Qur’anic recitation and memorization, and Islamic Higher Education level, known as the Makarantun ilmi, where other Islamic
subjects, such as Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, Tawhid, Tasawwuf, Sirah, Mantiq, Tibb, Adab, Balagah, Sarf etc were taught. Islamic education then used to provide the Muslims with all their needs.

When the British invaded Nigeria by way of colonization, they succeeded in implanting a new system of education among people who had been under the Islamic influence for over seven centuries. They introduced the western system of education which was meant to serve their interest, thus relegating the Islamic system of education to the background. The Islamic education system was systematically substituted with that of the colonial design which emphasized on clerical and elementary agricultural courses for their selfish interest; and that was why the first schools established were mainly to teach the 3Rs (reading, writing arithmetic), and basic agricultural courses in order to enhance the productivity of the cash crops for export. Thus, their educational policy was more interested in the exploitation of the natives than their real education. And that was the educational policy inherited by the people after independence, a policy that had its roots in European culture, (Yusuf 2006; 25).

3.0 The National Education Policy

3.1 National Education Policy over the Years

After independence, Nigerians realized that, the educational system they inherited from the British no longer meet the needs of an independent Nigeria, and therefore decided to have a well defined national policy on education. This generated much debate which eventually led to the establishment of the Federal and State commissions all of which made recommendations towards promulgating a new policy. In January 1977, the Nigerian government issued a policy statement on education which enumerated the specific aims and objectives of the philosophy of Nigerian education as follows;

a. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
b. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
c. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies, both mental and physical, as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

Since then, various educational policies were introduced one after the other up to the present education policy.

3.2 The Present Policy of 9 – 3 – 4 System

The present system of education tagged 9 – 3 – 4 aims at facilitating the attainment of the core elements of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). It was developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), and approved by the National Council of Education (NCE). Under this system, children are required to go for basic education of nine years, (lower level basic education of three years, middle level basic education of three years and upper level basic education of another three years), senior secondary education of three years and a tertiary education of four years. During the basic education level, religious studies is among the compulsory subjects to be studied, which means it is compulsory for all the pupils to study their various religious subjects. However, that is not the case at the senior secondary education level. The Senior Secondary Education Curriculum has the following philosophy;
Every senior secondary education graduate should have been well prepared for higher education as well as acquired relevant functional trade/entrepreneurship skills needed for poverty eradication, job creation and wealth generation; and in the process strengthened further the foundations for ethical, moral and civic values acquired at the basic education level (The New Senior Secondary School Curriculum Structure at a Glance).

The new SSEC structure comprises of the following:

I. **Core Compulsory Cross-cutting Subjects**: A group of five compulsory core cross-cutting subjects that must be offered by all students, irrespective of their field of study. These are:

   a. English Language
   b. General Mathematics
   c. Computer Studies/ICT
   d. Civic Education
   e. Trade/Entrepreneurship subject

II. **Four fields of studies**: These are groups of subjects representing a student’s potential area of specialization. These are:

   a. Science and Mathematics
   b. Technology
   c. Humanities
   d. Business Studies

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III. **Trade/Entrepreneurship Subjects**: A group of 35 trade/entrepreneurship subjects, to choose from are;

Auto Body repair and Spray Painting, Auto Electrical Work, Auto Mechanical Work, Air Conditioning Refrigerator, Welding and Fabrication Engineering Craft Practice, Electrical Installation and Maintenance

IV. Elective subjects

Electives are subjects chosen outside the student’s specialized field of study. For example, a science student may decide to take Music as an elective, and a Humanities student may choose Commerce as elective.

All in all, in this new system of education, a student is expected to offer a minimum of 8 subjects, maximum of 9, which must include;

a. All the 5 core compulsory cross cutting subjects.
b. 3 - 4 subjects from the student’s field of study.
c. A compulsory core trade/entrepreneurship is to be selected from the group of 35 trades.
d. 1 elective subject may be selected from another field of study or from the 35 trades, provided that the total number of examinable subjects is not more than nine.

4. Implications of the New Senior Secondary School System

The Senior Secondary School age is one of the most important period of the students’ life as that is the teen period when the children are in their adolescent stage. Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to adulthood, which is the period when the children are in the senior secondary school level. It is the most critical and difficult period of development, as during this period, there is increased interaction between the opposite sex, increased desire for autonomy and increased peer influence. If these tendencies are not channel properly and appropriately, there is likely to be problems. And the right way of doing that is through the religious studies, as each religion has its injunctions regarding these issues. But when religious studies is missing in this important and critical formative years of students, there is definitely going to be repercussions;

i. In this structure, new subjects that were hitherto absent are now made part of the curriculum, and are even accorded the position of core cross-cutting subjects; subjects like trade/entrepreneurship and civic education, while very important subjects which were core compulsory subjects are now being relegated to the status of field/elective subjects. One of such subjects is the religious studies both Christian and Islamic Studies. In this system, religious studies is not compulsory on anyone, even those students that offer Humanities may decide not to take religious studies as they have variety of subjects to choose from. So, eventually all the religious subjects will gradually phase out from the senior secondary school level and the tertiary level. So, even though the introduction of these two subjects (trade/entrepreneurship and civic education) is commendable because they are equally important, but their inclusion should not be at the detriment/expense of religious studies
which is far more important than anyone of them, as almost all that is in them is there in the religious studies, e.g. civic education.

ii. Senior Secondary School students would graduate without proper religious education. It has been estimated that about 85% of Nigeria’s population belongs to the two major religions; Christianity and Islam. There is therefore the need to teach the young one’s how to perform their religions in proper and acceptable manner.

iii. The students may not achieve their maximal potential development, because the main aim of any religious studies is the total development of an individual. Thus, according to Jah (1982: 11), the aim of Islamic education is:

producing well disciplined, highly skilled and responsible human beings, well aware of their rights and how to claim them without affecting other people’s right, human beings who are conscious of their duties to Almighty Allah, and commitments to the services of their society.

Thus, the aim of Islamic education is even more comprehensive than that of the entire National policy of education, and If that is the case, it becomes necessary that religious studies should be compulsory to each student for the accomplishment of the above objective.

iv. There is likely going to be rampant immorality among the students, as religious studies are vehicles for moral development, and the importance of good moral conduct cannot be over-emphasized. There are many verses and ahadith of the Prophet (S.A.W) to that effect. Allah (S.W.T), when praising the Prophet (S.A.W) says, “and thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character”, “ye have in the Apostle a beautiful pattern (of conduct). And the Prophet (S.A.W) has said, “I was sent to complement the virtues of courtesy and good behavior”. Thus any education devoid of morality is incomplete, and any education that fails to place moral values at the very heart and centre of learning is of little importance, and these moral values are mostly taught in the Religious Studies. Take for instance Islamic studies, one of its main goals is to produce an individual of sound moral values. According to Hake (1972):

Islamic education in its entirety deals with morality and ethical values. It ensures the development of high standard of individual conduct and behavior. It teaches extensively on respect for elders as an obligation from Allah, it also enjoins kindness, honesty, sincerity etc.

v. Inter-religions and inter-tribal conflict will be on the increase, because it is only religious studies that foster positive interaction and peaceful co-existence with others. Islamic studies for example, teaches its followers freedom of religion, religious tolerance, kindness towards non-combatant non-muslims, the right way to interact with each and every member of the society, whether a relative or not and whether of the same religion or not, as Islam encourages being good to others, calling to Islam in a kind manner, etc. Allah (S.T.W) says in the Qur’an; “invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good interaction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is (rightly) guided, (Q16: 125), “There is no Compulsion in religion” (Q2: 255-256), and many such verses, such as Q2: 109- 112, 5: 2, 60: 8,etc. The Prophet (S.A.W) has also advocated for peaceful co-existence through a lot of his sayings and actions. For example, he (S.A.W) was reported to have said; “Anyone who kills a Non-Muslim who had become our ally will not smell the fragrance of Paradise” (Bukhari), and “He who
hurts a non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim state, I am his adversary and I shall be his adversary on
the Day of Judgement” (Bukhari).

vi. Disobedience to constituted authority, which could lead to chaos within the society, because
all religions advocate respect to constituted authority, by inculcating values and norms that
are in tune with the cultures and mores of the society. This is to ensure full integration into the
multi-faith Nigerian society. Content of religious instruction particularly at the senior
secondary school level help to mellow brutish instincts in young people, including disrespect
for constituted authority which is the most critical of the forms of indiscipline manifested by
the young at this stage of their physical development. They are mostly in the habit of
disobeying authorities, right from their parents, school authority and even the higher
authority. The Qur’an has said regarding this; “O ye who believe, obey Allah and obey the
Messenger and those in authority among you…” (Q4: 59), “Thy Lord hath decreed that ye
worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old
age in their life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in
terms of honour” (Q17: 23)

vii. Scholars of the different religions may be scarce as most of the students did not offer religious
studies at the senior secondary school level, so they equally cannot take it at the tertiary level,
if they later decided to offer it.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Religious instruction is indeed important and a necessary instrument for the attainment of the total
objectives of the Nigerian National Policy of Education, both new and old, and that is why there is the
need to re-consider the present position of religious studies in the senior secondary school curriculum,
so that it also becomes a core cross-cutting subject, where all students have to offer it at the basic level
as well as the senior secondary school level. Not only that, there is the need to review the present
Islamic Studies’ syllabus as major and important aspects of the Religion are not captured in the syllabus.

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