MUSSLM WOMEN AND CHALLENGES OF WESTERN EDUCATION

Dr. Mrs. Sa’adatu Hassan Liman
Saaliman70@gmail.com

Dr. Abdullahi Adamu Sulaiman
abijahfaz@gmail.com

Dr. Muhammad Tanko Aliyu
mtankoaliyu@gmail.com

Department of Islamic Studies, Nasarawa State University Keffi, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Education, any education, is beneficial to humanity and enjoined upon Muslims to seek for it and use it within the confines of Islamic framework. Education turns harmful only when it is stripped of moral values. Western Education being secular in identity and purpose had some inherent and inadvertent negative effects on the Muslim women which are regarded as challenges to their Islamic personality. This paper, using the qualitative analytical approach delves into the challenges affecting the Muslim women who pass through Western Education at the points of study and work to earn livelihood and develop their nation. The paper discovered obstruction of prayer time, eroding family responsibilities, moral laxity manifesting in sexual licentiousness, imposition of un-Islamic dressing and indiscriminate mixing of sexes as major challenges of Western Education to the Muslim women. The paper recommends the intertwining of Islamic moral values with Western Education and its institutions as the way forward in addressing the challenges.

Keywords: Muslim Women, Moral Values, Western Education, Secularism, Islamic Education

1. Introduction

Education is the backbone of every nation, the major function of which is to produce men and women who are able to make successful living, and can also adjust to society and contribute to its socio-economic and political well-being. As such, education is an important factor in the development of any given society. The level of development of any nation is usually determined by its level of education. Education is the most important initiator of social changes that bring about a change in outlook and attitude of man; social changes such as rules of behaviour, values, social organisations and cultural symbols. At the same time, the nature of education available in any community will depict how that affected community would look like.
Religious education on the other hand, forms the very education on which education is structured in such a manner that wisdom from God and signs of God are reflected in any subject taught and in all classroom activities. As such the implication is that all students irrespective of their specialization will offer it because as creatures of God, they are all supposed to be well acquainted with their creator, well aware of His Grace and His favour on them, and be informed about how to appreciate Him (Bidmos, 2003).

The western system of education separates between Religion and life and does not recognize the supremacy of Religion. Islam, however, does not recognize dichotomy between Religion and Science and any education that disregards religious moral teaching is doomed to fail. Afzalur Rahman cited in Shittu and Malumfashi (2013) writes: “If education is divorced from Religion and Moral values, it will lead to the disintegration and destruction of social fabric of society. This may be seen from the achievements of liberal education in the west as in the east”.

The work will look at the influence of western education on the life of Muslim women. While looking at that, it is important to bring to fore the fact that the way of life of a Muslim is totally guided by the dictate of Islamic law or the Sharīa which is a way of life and full of guidance for the Muslims. This will mandate us to also look at the philosophy of Islamic education in parallel to the moral virtues of western education and upon which a conclusion will be drawn.

2. Nature of Western Education

Western Education is also referred to as secular education. Secularism, according to Webster Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary is a state of indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations (1061). Secular education, against this background, is the learning programme that is packaged and executed without the involvement of religion or religious-related matters. It is an education system in which man and not God determines the entire enterprise (Bidmos, 2003).

The educational theories in the modern time (examples of the United States and Britain; including Nigeria where education is fashioned along the Western School of thought) declared that the purpose of education be determined by man and not externally imposed on him. On the purpose on Western Education John Dewey writes:

…The aim set must be an outgrowth of an existing condition. It must not be imposed externally. Education as abstract idea has no aim but teachers and parents have, and the object of aim is the learner. Therefore, the aim of education as set by the parents and teachers changes due to the dynamism in human life (Cited in Bidmos, 2003).

Bidmos (2003) also cited Tyler posits that: "Objectives of education mean statement of changes to take place in students’ pattern of behaviour which is to be selected through the study of contemporary life as a criterion”.

What the above quotations point to, is that, when the educational planners of any nation are set to select the aim of education, they ought to consider the needs of the society. Accordingly, education is a means of preparing the learner to be useful in terms of contributing to the existing situation and making corrections and adjustments where necessary for the overall objective of attaining good life.
The bottom line in this dispensation is good life which must be quickly defined. It means a society or situation where the welfare of an individual is guaranteed and his/her life is maximally protected and secured; a situation where an individual is not hunted by poverty. Furthermore, it is a situation where a society is economically buoyant and maximally protected against external aggression (Bidmos, 2003).

The characteristics of secular education include:

1. Seeking good life for man;
2. Dependence on man’s intellect;
3. The use of observable truth only;
4. Considering metaphysics a cog in the wheel of man’s progress (Bidmos, 2003).

In his analysis, Bidmos (2003) explicated that, the summary of Dewey’s thesis and likes of it earlier quoted is that educational purpose must derive from the purpose/end of existence. But for the fact that man cannot unaided perceive the end of existence on his own implies limitations of human thought. Human thought and feeling have a capacity beyond which man cannot operate. And whenever economic, political and educational decisions are taken based on the limitations of human thought and feeling, the outcome is bound to be reflective of the limitations. Subsequently, the actions forthcoming will yield awkward results.

3. Influence of Western Education on Muslim Women

Muslim women in our societies today are bedevilled with numerous challenges which affect the smooth running of their lives as Muslims. And this is largely due to the influence of western education which comes in with western culture and way of life.

To start with, Islam enjoins modesty in women in their utterance, appearance and behaviour in the society. This is aimed at preserving the dignity and pride of womanhood, and to ensure the existence of refined moral values which largely unveils the woman. The great challenge facing the Muslim woman today is how the west expose woman as someone who is beautiful, attractive and a commodity of display and advertisement and some of the resultant effects are as follows:

**Time of Prayer:** The Muslim woman often encounters problems whenever it is time for prayer in her academic career and also when she starts working. Most of the time, exams are fixed without respect for the time of prayer. Likewise, meetings are arranged without having consideration for time of prayer. And this is because it is not part of the schedule of western education to consider the time of prayer when planning events. The act of prayer is that which differentiates between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. This is based on the prophetic declaration that "the covenant between us and them is prayer, whosoever abandons it has committed disbelief" (Tirmidhi, 2007) He also said: "Between a man and *Shirk* and *kufr* stands his giving up the *salah* (Muslim, 2007).

**Dressing:** When a Muslim woman works as a Banker, a Lawyer, an advertiser or she works in the Military forces or Para-military agencies or even as a student etc. she cannot help but to adhere to
the dress code of such institutions. This does not depict the Islamic teaching on dress code; it is
counter to the Qur'ān injunction on modesty. Unfortunately, some Muslim women take it as a pride
and an opportunity to dress anyhow. On the other hand, some women do not respect the Islamic
form of dressing on their own accord, but largely due to the influence of western education as
against the emphasis on proper covering by the Islamic texts. The Qur'ān States:

وقل للمؤمنات يغضبن من أنفسهن ويخففن فروعهن ولا يبددن زينتهن إلا ما ظهر منها ويسرن بنهم على
جُيوبهن ولا يبددن زينتهن إلا نحوهن أباهن أو أباهن أو أباهن أو أباهن أو أباهن أو أباهن أو
بني أخواتهن أو بنو أخواتهن أن ليروهن من الرمال أو الحفل التي لم يظهروا عليها غزوات
النساء ولا يفخرون بهم إلا فيما يخفن من زينتهن وصلوا إلى الله جمعاً أن كُلُّ دعوة في ثغورهن

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty;
that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily)
appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their
beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband’s fathers, their sons, their
husbands’ sons, their brothers or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women,
or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or
small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their
feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! Turn ye all
together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss (Qur’an 24: 30-31).

Qasim (2007) elucidated that this injunction obviously aims at guarding against the parading of
finery and absurd display of beauty in order to prevent the excitement of uncontrolled passions
among the sexes.

Eroding Family Responsibilities: The ultimate end of western education is to get enlightened and
have a means of livelihood by seeking for a job or any entrepreneurial skill. It does not however, look
at the purpose of creation of man as does the Islamic education. Some of the resultant effects
particularly on the woman is the abandonment of family life. The purpose of creation of a woman as
taught by Islam is to procreate and to rear new generation. Though she can also do some other task
like engaging in economic pursuit, taking a career job etc., but procreation is her greatest and
primary work that no one can rival her. She has been prepared for that by her creator both
physically and psychologically. But due to the ego to achieve the goal of western education, women
often abandon this primary responsibility in the pursuit of working career. As such, one finds women
that have passed marriage age not married at all.

Furthermore, house-helps and maids have now assumed the role of parents as far as taking care of
children is concerned. Very early in the morning both parents leave for work, leaving the child to the
care of the house-helps. By the time they returned in the night, the child would have been in bed.
Come next day, the child would still be asleep while parents would have gone out in the morning.
When then do parents (especially the mother) stay with the child to train, correct and make the child
happy?

Free Mixing of Sexes and Shaking Hands: Based on Islamic teaching, Sharī’ah has placed restrictions
on men meeting strange women in privacy. Similarly, no man other than her husband and some
restricted closest relatives are allowed to touch any part of a woman’s body. The Prophet (SAW) was
reported in many traditions as forbidden and warning against these kinds of practices and said: “Do not call on women in the absence of their husbands” (Bukhari, 1997).

Aisha also said:

The Prophet (SAW) accepted the oath of allegiance from women only verbally without taking their hands into his own hand. He never touched the hands of a woman who was not married to him (Bukhari, 1997).

According to Maududi, these commandments apply in respect of young women. He said: “it is lawful to sit with the women of advanced age in privacy and touching them is also not prohibited. It has been reported that Abubakar (R. A.) used to visit the clan where he had been suckled and shook hands with the old women (cited in Doi, 1983).

Western education promotes mixing of sexes in every activity. Be it learning in class, recreational activities, working places, etc. But Islam teaches and preaches contrary to that because of the evil consequences that it may lead to. These consequences range from promiscuity resulting to adultery and fornication and unhealthy competition between the two sexes which leads to loss of identity.

In spite of this clear guidance from the Prophet (SAW), many Muslims continue to indulge in such Western practices which are clearly against the dictates of *Sharī'ah*. The reason behind these injunctions is to prevent any practice that might lead to evil results.

**Using Public Bath, Swimming Pools, Dance Halls and Gymnasiums:** The *Sharī'ah* teaching prohibited the Muslim woman from using public baths or swimming pools in order not to expose herself to evil inferences. The mixed gymnasia where women remove their dress and wear tight and scanty costumes for doing various physical exercises and where the curves of their bodies and feminine charm may attract onlookers are also intolerable for *Sharī'ah* (Doi, 1983). The tradition of the Prophet (SAW) states: “Whosoever woman removes her clothes in the houses other than that of husband, Allah tears off the *satr* between her and Allah” (Ibn Majah, 2007).

Unfortunately, western education and culture considers these recreational activities in a mixed manner as a fun, more civilized, and even part of school extracurricular activities which will be scored. Although, these activities are beneficial and healthy in life but they can be done without mixing of sexes.

**Beautification:** There are other practices that are contrary to Islamic teachings which are all prohibited by the *Sharī'ah* e.g. tattooing sharpening or spacing the teeth, shaving or picking hairs, joining of plaits of hair. The Prophet said:

Those women who remain naked even after wearing their dresses and those who walk flirting and those who plait other heads like the humps of camels’ thus inviting people’s attention will not enter paradise nor would they smell its fragrance though its fragrance can be smelt from a very long distance (Muslim, 2007).
The Messenger of Allah also has cursed the woman who tattoos, and one who gets herself tattooed, one who engaged in sharpening the teeth (as a mark of beauty) and one who gets teeth sharpened (Bukhari, 1997).

**Legal Laxity:** Islam has a comprehensive legal system called the *Sharī'ah* which is fully rich in content. The knowledge of *Sharī'ah* is basic for every Muslim because it is his guiding principle. It also serves as a better deterrent than the western law. For example, the western law does not hold fornication or adultery by itself as a crime, it becomes a crime only when it is committed forcibly i.e. rape. In contrast to this, the Islamic law looks upon fornication by itself as a crime and so also rape and adultery. The basic difference between view points of the two systems of law gives rise to the difference in the punishment of the offence, with Islamic law prescribing the severest punishment.

In his analysis of the situation, Sheik posited that, the western nations abhor the infliction of a hundred lashes or stoning to death not because they dislike the idea of physical torture. It is because their moral sense has not yet fully developed. At first they regarded fornication and adultery as something indecent; now they look upon it as fun as a pastime which amuses two persons for a little while. Otherwise, they would have realised that *zina* (adultery and fornication), whether it is committed voluntarily or forcefully, is in each case a social crime that affects the entire society (Sheik, 2012).

**Sexual Licentiousness:** Western education teaches sex-education and its attendant effects. Standard sex education today begins with a biological description of sexual function and ends with indoctrination in conception, abortion and venereal diseases. Sex education, as promoted by some educators is devoid of morality and is, in many ways unacceptable to the Islamic value system (Sheik 320-321) the examples of such teaching of one such educator are:

a) Nudity in home (in shower or bedroom) is a good and healthy way to introduce sexuality to smaller (under 5) children, giving them an opportunity to ask questions. At the same time in the same book, he also states that 75% of all child molestation and incest, half a million per year, occur by a close relative (parent, step-parent or another family member).

b) If your daughter or son is sexually active, instead of telling them to stop, the parents “moral duty” is to protect their health and career by providing them information and means for contraception and avoiding venereal disease (VD) (Sheik, 2012).

The conclusion is that, sex education in countries like America, South Africa etc. has not helped decrease the teenager incidence of VD or teenage pregnancy. And another factor which the sexuality education campaigners have ignored or underestimated is the effect of mass media such as the preponderant show of Hollywood films as well as novels on the sexual behaviour of the Nigerian adolescents. The provocative modes of dressing and wanton display of beauty currently adopted by adolescents are the direct impact of the Hollywood films and novels (Bidmos, 2003). All these provide some kind of education to the young ones, which cannot be seen in Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, etc.

Islam recognises the power of sexual need, therefore this cannot be conceived without marital and family life and these are all to be considered in relation to other Islamic doctrines which control and
regulate the behaviour of a Muslim. The firm belief in the creator must be first established before giving education about anatomy and physiology. Also the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) have given all the necessary knowledge we need to have on sex education.

These are just few examples of both the influence and effects of western education on the life of a Muslim woman who is guided by the western education, culture and way of life. But what does Islamic education provide for the Muslim woman?

4. Islamic Education: An Elucidation

Every education system has its own objectives likewise Islamic education except that Islamic Education is deeper and richer both in content and objective. In realising this fact, the participants at the first world conference on Muslim education 1977 at the end of the conference reaffirmed this and resolved that:

Islamic education empowers women to participate in the economic development of their society within the confines of their religious obligations. For example, Khadijah (R.A), the wife of the Prophet (S.A.W) and the mother of believers, was known to be a wealthy business woman in her time. She was so wealthy that she dedicated her wealth to the feeding of the Muslim Ummah for two years of trial when Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and his followers were severally prosecuted and economically sanctioned by the Makkan unbelievers (Sani, 2005).

This in summary shows that the aim of Islamic education is to produce a good and righteous human being, who worships Allah the creator and acts accordingly to the dictates of Shari’ah. This act of worship requires total submission to Allah as it is supposed to be in line with the Qur’an verse that says: “I have created Jins and man only to worship Me.” (Qur’an 51:56)

This position does not mean that Islamic education is against other sciences taught in secular education system, Islamic education as earlier mentioned is wide and comprehensive. It encompasses all sciences, either mundane or religious. The Qur’an says: “We have sent down to you a Book explaining all things” (Qur’an 16:89).

Islam encourages the quest for knowledge and mandates every Muslim to seek for it. In Islam, moral training is the essence of education and it regards learning as a sacred task and act of worship. Therefore, the goal of Muslim Women in education must not be to obtain power, money, or glory or to act insolently, or to compete with their fellows. The aim of education in Islam is to produce knowledgeable and God fearing human beings who are well balanced, skilful, responsible and conscious of their duties and rights towards their creator and other creatures; to produce a good and righteous man who will worship Allah, his creator, according to the dictates of the Sharī’ah.

Islam is a complete way of life. Its education is for all development (this world & the next). It covers all aspects of human endeavour, spiritual, social, economic as well as political (Yeldu, 2013).

5. Way Forward

Education by definition, no matter from whatever point of view –be it secular or spiritual –means preparation, it presupposes targeting an assignment and aiming at a goal. In other words, when man is prepared, the purpose of this preparation is to carry out an assignment which by extension must
lead to the attainment of a goal. We then have before us three terms; namely; preparation, assignment and goal. The assignment to be performed by man and the end result of the assignment are God’s exclusive preserves. First, it is God who decides for man his assignment in this world since he is here as God’s vicegerent (Khalifah). Secondly, the end result of his assignment is good life (Bidmos, 2003).

In Islam therefore, the rationale for education of man revolves around the purpose of creation which means the assignment divinely decided for man. The assignment is to serve God. If the major assignment for man is to serve God, his preparation i.e. education must take cognizance of both the service and the one to be served –God.

In Islam, man is educated for the following goals;

a) Recognize God as the creator;

b) Identify and exhibit the purpose of creation from God as a supplement to the observable knowledge;

c) Utilize the knowledge coming from God as a supplement to the observable knowledge

d) Build his daily life on the service of God (Bidmos, 2003).

The woman just like the man; is required to seek knowledge whether religious or terrestrial. The Hadith of the Prophet states: “Seeking knowledge is a duty on every Muslim” (Ibn Majah, 2007).

After seeking for knowledge, in using it for the development of the Nation, the woman must remember the limitations and restrictions placed on her by her nature and by God’s laws as far as Islam is concerned. There are things for which women were created and others for which men were created. This informs the margin that has always existed in public as well as private lives of citizens in every state. There is therefore the need for women to bear in mind their intellectual, psychological and social make-up so that they will prepare for which they are created and become productive and constructive members of their family, society and Ummah (Sani, 2005).

Islamic education teaches the woman to always pray to Allah for good in this world and the hereafter and seek protection from the hell fire. Allah commands thus: “O you who believe protect yourself and your family from the hell fire ...” (Qur’an 66:6) It also teaches that, the woman is accountable to God of the people under her e.g. her children and other people living in her husband’s house or her house. The Prophet (S.A.W) said: “you are all shepherds and you will be asked on the day of judgement about your flock” (Bukhari, 1997 and Muslim, 2007).

It is a duty of every Muslim woman to know the contemporary world intimately, to be able to analyse it using principles and concepts from the Qur’an and Sunnah, and to offer alternatives, for the prosperity of her future and that of humanity at large. The Prophet (S.A.W) said: “The best of mankind is he who is beneficial to others”.

---

6. Conclusion

Humans need social change when the existing human needs are overwhelming and when new materials suggest better ways of meeting human needs. Islamic education has brought about phenomenal changes in every aspect of a Muslims life. The work presents the importance of education in the life of every woman. But then at the same time, it has shown that, it is the duty of every Muslim to seek for a beneficial knowledge. Therefore, that the work was able to draw an analysis of both western education and Islamic education is not without reason. Islam is full of teachings and exhortations but most importantly it draws the attention of its adherents to the knowledge and fear of Allah at every step of his/her existence.

The society we live is western education driven therefore; the Muslim woman has no space to express herself in accordance with the dictates of Islamic education and her religion. However, that does not stop her from striving to achieve what the Almighty Allah has commanded of her. And hence, Muslims should endeavour to make the societies we live a conducive environment for the Muslim woman to come out and seek for a living free of all the ills of western education highlighted.
References


