

The Role of Islamic Scholars in the Surfacing of Integrated School Systems in Nigeria

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Abstract: The emergence of integrated school systems in Nigeria, schools that combine Islamic and Western secular education reflects decades of reform efforts led largely by Islamic scholars (Ulamā'). This paper offers an academic opinion on the critical role of these scholars in shaping and legitimizing the integrated school model. It examines their contributions to curriculum development, institutional reform, public advocacy, and the harmonization of Islamic and Western knowledge systems. The paper argues that Islamic scholars were instrumental not only in addressing long-standing educational gaps within Muslim communities but also in bridging cultural suspicion toward Western-style education. Their leadership facilitated community acceptance, improved teacher training, and fostered collaborations with government and civil-society actors. Ultimately, the integrated school system in Nigeria stands as a product of scholarly activism aimed at balancing religious identity with the demands of modern life. It's becoming increasingly clear that this integrated school system is the best system for Nigerian Muslim and the paper advice the Government at all levels to prioritize the system due to it enoumous important in improving enrollment and enhancing girl's child participation.

Review Paper

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education in Nigeria has historically been characterized by dual systems: Islamic/Qur'anic schooling in the northern regions and Western-style education introduced through colonial administration and Christian missionary activities. The coexistence of these systems created tension, particularly among Muslim communities that associated Western schooling with cultural erosion. Islamic scholars emerged as key mediators in this landscape, advocating for a harmonized system that would preserve Islamic values while equipping learners with modern competencies.

The rise of integrated schools since the late 20th century can be traced to strategic efforts by Islamic scholars who envisioned an educational model that upholds Islamic epistemology while embracing contemporary disciplines such as science, mathematics, and civic education. Their role, though often understated in mainstream educational narratives, remains central to the success and expansion of integrated school systems across Nigeria.

2. The concept of integrated school

Integrated education refers to combination of approaches that that makes unified system that promote holistic learning in Nigeria it is typically involved

1. Integration of both western and Islamic education.
2. Inclusions of learning with special needs in the mainstream school.
3. Combinations of current cognitive, moral and vocational learning.

According to national policy on education integrated school system is aim at giving equal education opportunities and reduce disparities among different groups.

The development of integrated school system could be traced to pre colonial era when indigenous education is focused on preservation of cultural values and live skills, and Islamic education flourished in northern Nigeria. western education was introduced by the missionaries, it operated separately from Islamic education. During the post independence era effort began to unify educational systems the universal education program expanded access to education the government

introduce Almajiri model schools to integrate Islamic education and secular subjects such as English language Mathematics and science. Learners with disability are also integrated in class room promoting equality and social inclusion, subjects are taught in connected manner rather than in isolation, improving understanding and practical application.

Benefit of integrated school system

1. **Improve access to education:** Integrated school system brings marginalized groups such as Almajiri in to formal school system.
2. **Holistic Development:** Students receive academic, moral and vocational training.
3. **National unity:** It bridges cultural and religious divide

Reduction in social problem

Educated youths are less likely to engage in crime extremism or street begging.

3. Challenges of integrated school system

1. **Inadequate funding:** Many integrated schools school lack infrastructure and learning materials.
2. **Shortages of qualified teachers:** Teachers are often not taught to handle both religious and secular subjects.
3. **Cultural and religious resistance:** Some communities are reluctant to accept integration.
4. **Poor policy implementations:** Most of the time government policies are not consistently enforce.
5. **Security challenges:** In region like northern Nigeria security challenges disrupt schooling.

Despite all this challenges the future of integrated schooling is promising due to government support and international agencies like (UNICEF). So also there is growing awareness on the importance of education and expansion in teacher training program.

4. The Historical Basis of Islamic Scholarly Influence

Islamic scholarship has long held social and political authority in Northern Nigeria. Scholars historically served as judges, advisers, community leaders, and educators within the Tsangaya and Islamiyyah systems. Their influence provided the legitimacy that was necessary to introduce educational reforms without provoking community resistance.

With the increasing need for literacy and global knowledge in the post-independence period, many scholars acknowledged the limitations of purely traditional Qur'anic schooling. Their reinterpretation of Islamic principles especially the emphasis on knowledge acquisition ('ilm) provided scriptural and intellectual justification for integrating secular subjects into Islamic schools.

5. Scholarly Advocacy for Educational Reform

One of the most significant contributions of Islamic scholars was their public and private advocacy for reform. Through sermons, lectures, and community dialogues, they addressed long-standing concerns about Western education. Many emphasized that Muslim communities must embrace modern knowledge to compete socially and economically. Their advocacy also countered misconceptions that secular subjects conflict with Islamic teachings.

This moral endorsement shifted parents' attitudes and created fertile ground for educational integration. Without this transformation in public perception, integrated schools would not have achieved wide acceptance.

6. Establishment and Development of Model Integrated Schools

Islamic scholars, often in partnership with Muslim organizations, established some of the earliest integrated schools in Nigeria. Groups such as the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), the Islamic Education Trust (IET), and various local scholar-led initiatives in Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, and Borno pioneered schools that blended traditional Islamic curriculum with government-approved secular subjects.

These model schools demonstrated that Islamic education could coexist with Western academics without compromising moral standards. Their success inspired the proliferation of integrated schools in both urban and rural communities.

7. Curriculum Design and Pedagogical Innovations

A major area of scholarly influence lies in curriculum development. Islamic scholars partnered with education experts to create curricula that harmonize Islamic Studies, Arabic Language, and Qur'anic studies with core secular subjects. Their contributions ensured that: Islamic content remained authentic and orthodox;

Contemporary subjects were contextualized within Islamic moral frameworks; and The educational experience fostered both religiosity and intellectual openness.

Teacher training programs, many of which were facilitated by scholars, further strengthened pedagogical quality and reinforced the legitimacy of integrated schools.

8. Bridging Epistemological Divides

The integrated school system is fundamentally an epistemological project: an attempt to reconcile Islamic knowledge with Western scientific paradigms. Islamic scholars contributed to this reconciliation through intellectual movements such as the Islamization

of Knowledge, which seeks to integrate modern disciplines into an Islamic worldview.

By promoting this intellectual synthesis, scholars reduced ideological tension and redefined education as holistic—addressing the spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions of human development.

9. Collaboration With Government and Development Partners

Islamic scholars also influenced policymaking. Their engagement with state ministries, UBEC, NGOs, and international Islamic agencies helped ensure that integrated schools met national standards without losing their religious identity. This collaboration enhanced funding, infrastructure development, teacher training, and curriculum stability.

Scholars served as cultural brokers, translating government policies into the socioreligious language that communities understood and accepted.

10. Impact on Girl-Child Education

Misconceptions about Islamic restrictions on female education historically contributed to low enrollment of Muslim girls in formal schooling. By citing Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings, Islamic scholars played a decisive role in advocating for girl-child education within integrated school settings. Their teaching reassured parents that modern education—if infused with Islamic morals—supports the upbringing of responsible Muslim women.

This advocacy significantly increased girls' enrollment in northern Nigerian integrated schools.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increase funding:** Government should allocate more resources to integrated school system
2. **Teacher training:** Specialized training should be given to integrated school teachers as regards to curriculum delivery.
3. **Community engagement:** Community and religious leaders should be involved.
4. **Policy implementation:** Strong monitoring mechanism should be established.

5. **Infrastructural developments:** Integrated schools should equip adequately with infrastructure and learning materials.

12. CONCLUSION

The surfacing and expansion of integrated school systems in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the ideological, institutional, and moral leadership of Islamic scholars. Their interventions supported curricular reform, improved public trust, bridged epistemological gaps, and aligned Islamic schooling with national educational goals. The integrated school system stands today as evidence of the scholars' ability to reinterpret Islamic tradition in response to contemporary realities. Any future educational policy that aims to strengthen the system must therefore recognize the centrality of Islamic scholarship as both a cultural and intellectual force.

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