

ISSN 2474-1542

**Journal
OF UNIVERSITY**

Scholars

in

RELIGIONS

(JUSREL)

ISSUE 7

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WESTERN EDUCATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: A HISTORY OF MUSLIM FEMALE EDUCATION IN ILORIN EMIRATE, 1914 – 1984

Dr. Yahaya Eliasu

Introduction

The issue of female education did not receive adequate attention since the colonial period. Despite the introduction of Western Education by the British Government, the level of female education in the region was not encouraging. This was as a result of the fact that the motive of introducing western education was to train the sons of the Emirs at the expense of the female folk. The female did not form part of the experiment team at that period. This might not be unconnected with socio-cultural nature of the area especially Ilorin. In Ilorin, not much effort was made to ensure that women folk were enrolled for western education. Therefore, this paper makes use of both primary and secondary sources to examine the development of Muslim Female Education in Ilorin Emirate between 1914 and 1984. This becomes necessary to highlight the perceptions, problems and trends of Muslim women education in Ilorin. It touches on the bandwagon effect, the delay in the embrace of Western education in Northern Nigeria on Ilorin. However, women education becomes crucial for viable socio-political and economic development because any state that fails to give proper attention to female education would fail to get to the level of statehood.

The British missionaries, in an attempt to spread their evangelism as early as the 1950s, built schools in Badagry and Abeokuta to instruct primarily the four R's namely, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Religion so that their converts could understand the Bible. In point of fact it was after a decade of the establishment of first boys' secondary school called Church Missionary Society (C.M.S), Grammar School (1859) that a female secondary school, the Church Missionary Society Girls Seminary was founded in 1869. Other female schools were established thereafter, such as the Methodist Girls' High School, Lagos; Edgerly Girls' School, Ibadan to mention but just a few. In the North however, parents and the Emirs were wary of cultural contamination and almost instantaneously became skeptical and suspicious of Western education. They perceived it as a threat to Muslim values and not because they hated education. However, those who held the view or notion that Islam was against Western education seem to have lost sight of the facts of history and did not pay adequate attention to doctrinal differences of both Christianity and Islam in their attempt to position education.

A Concise history of the establishment of Ilorin Emirate

There are a lot of secondary works on the history of the establishment of Ilorin Emirate. As such, only a brief account as it is necessary for the purpose of this work is given here. In 1796, the *Alafin* or Emperor of the Old Oyo Empire appointed a man called Afonja as the *Are Ona Kakanfo* (that is commander-in-chief) of the empire. In that capacity, Afonja was stationed at Ilorin, which was a part of the empire, so as to repel attacks from the Northern section. By the first decades of the 19th century however, the internal problems of the empire became precarious. Afonja like some of the other provincial governors in the empire seized that opportunity to carve Ilorin and environ out of the empire as his own independent domain. To ensure his success in that regard, Afonja requested for spiritual assistance from an itinerant Fulani Muslim scholar then based in Ilorin called *Shaykh Alimi al – Salih*. Afonja's effort seemed to have succeeded at least temporarily because the later was assisted by the former in warding off attacks from his overlord, the *Alafin* of Oyo turned enemy as a result of Afonja's wish to become independent of Old Oyo Empire (Hogben,; 151 – 156).

However, a tussle after *Shaykh al-Salih*'s death, between Afonja and *al-Salih*'s eldest son, Abdulsalami over who should be the ruler of the independent Ilorin led to the defeat of Afonja in favour of Abdulsalami making Ilorin the nucleus of an Ilorin Emirate within the Sokoto Caliphate over which he proclaimed himself the first Emir in about 1823.

Following the death of *Shaykh Alimi*, his first son called Abdulsalam had the opportunity of getting a flag from Sokoto which culminated into his appointment as the first Emir of Ilorin. It must be stated at this point that power seemed to have been shifted from the Yoruba to the Fulani ruling oligarchy and by implication the emanation of Ilorin to the caliphate system of governance. Therefore, the emergence of Abdulsalam as the first emir of Ilorin led to a sharp beginning of emirate system in the history of Ilorin in 1823. Ilorin emirate gained the fame of being called Islamic city as a result of its knowledge in the teaching and dissemination of Islamic knowledge and Islamization of Yorubaland. This bequeathed to it a quality referred to as the "a Local Mecca" of Yorubaland (Gbadamosi 10).

Antecedence of Western Education in Northern Nigeria

Islam predated Christianity over a period of three hundred years in Nigeria. These two notable religions, Christianity and Islam have contributed significantly to the Nigerian educational system. However, much as they have had significant impact on Nigerians, when compared to the traditional education; they seem to be recent in development. The main reason was that the indigenous type of education was as old as man in Africa (Fafunwa 14). It should be pointed out that ever before the arrival of Western education Quranic education had been going on in the various Emirates of Northern Nigeria. This assertion was corroborated by Lugard himself in 1914 thus: "Lugard was to estimate that in 1914, there were some 25,000 of these schools Quranic schools, scattered throughout the Emirates, many consisting of one class of small boys learning to read and write under the instruction of an elderly village (Graham 1). It was however stated that there were more boys than girls attending Quranic schools and their numbers stood at less than thirty per cent. He further stated that reasons for poor attendance by girls in Quranic schools were both economic and social (Albert 6).

The development of a school at Nassarawa in Kano in 1909 led to the expansion of Western education in Northern Nigeria. It was after this was achieved that Western education for the sons of the Emirs was promoted at the expense of their female folk because it was alleged that the Northern Emirs refused to send their daughters to schools (Osinulu 109). But perhaps the main reason was that the Lugardian policy for education in Northern Nigeria was discriminatory against female and this was a reminiscent of the kind of attitude that was prevalent in Europe at that time. Totally unaware of the role the female were playing in their various villages, the colonial government established for them schools which were biased in nutrition, childcare and home management. This training hindered their job opportunities and prepared them more for various roles as wives and mothers in the houses of the male elite of policemen, clerks, teachers and catechists (Okonjo 1026). Therefore, it must be mentioned from the foregoing that it was not until 1930s that the first set of female had the opportunity to acquire Western education in Northern Nigeria. Following this development therefore, the Kano Girls' Training Centre was built in 1930 and in 1932, one Hajiya Madaki, the daughter of the Emir of Kano and wife of the Emir of Katsina, was reported to have built a school in the Emir's palace in Katsina.

A brief history of Western Education in Ilorin during the Colonial Period

The origin of Western education in Ilorin dated back to 1914 that was the year when Mr. H. H. Annets arrived Ilorin to set up a provincial school in Muslim town of Ilorin. One of the major problems which he faced on his arrival into the town was how to get teaching staff for the school. Hence, he set up a class of local *malams*, among who had already got some education from Nassarawa in Kano and had returned home since 1914 (Eliasu 40). Among them was Alfa Adio, Malam Ibrahim in (Isale – Oja), Malam Musa (from Keffi) Malam Saliu, Yahaya Awodi and Alfa Muhammed Wosin. With these teachers under the supervision of Mr. H. H. Annets, the school started. However, there was no building until 1915 when a mud house with a thatched roof was built. This school with fifteen local *malams* as students was established in 1915. It must be pointed out that only ten students were able to complete their studies. The colonial government designed the curriculum and this centred on the teaching of subjects such as Arithmetic, Reading, Qur'an, Geography, General Knowledge, Writing, Hygiene and Drawing.

Ilorin Muslim Community and Western Education

Western education was unpopular with the people Ilorin as parents refused to send their children to school. They showed their reservations to the establishment of a provincial school. Their reservations emanated from the suspicions that Western education could turn their wards against Quranic education (Danmole 94). Generally, suspicions often attended the introduction of Western education among Muslims and particularly Ilorin during the colonial period. It was in line with this development that Gbadamosi observed that the Yoruba Muslims, especially in Lagos, were not hostile to Western education as such but were very skeptical and suspicious of the kind of education their children would receive from the Christian Missionary Schools. There were some discernible causes of apathy shown to Christian oriented scholarship. The first was noticeable in the novelty of the Christian Missions education. Muslim parents became wary of the new innovation and this trend continued till the end of the 19th century. The instruction was deliberate and the need to get a large number into their religion among the Muslim scholars before they graduated was emphasized (Gbadamosi 105). To some Muslims in Ilorin, the introduction of Western education was an insult on the culture of Islam, while it may be pointed out that the colonial government might not have intended to use schools for the teaching of Christianity, many Muslims in Ilorin and perhaps in the whole of Northern Nigeria perceived the provincial schools as institutions that would snatch away their children from the Quranic schools (Danmole 172).

Problems and Issues of Muslim Female Education in Ilorin Township

For more than two decades after a measure of achievement had been made for male education, female education along with the Western side was in shambles. It was not in the least encouraged by parents and they had their reasons for this. Reasons such as economic and social were put across to support their actions. However, from social point of view, they contended that education of female was a wasteful exercise. Parents were particularly unwilling to send their daughters as this would take away the girls time where they would have been hawking and selling things in the city, streets, and market places for their parents. There was a strong feeling that girls when educated would not like to return to ordinary jobs of the household which they would consider to be below their status as educated folks. From religious point of view, parents felt that there was the need to protect the female folks because of their flexibilities; they might be convinced to change their doctrine. In addition to females, training in character and Islamic cultural values were emphasized particularly in homes. *Ipsa facto*, females were considered to be transmitters of culture from one generation

to another. Furthermore, education was to instill discipline and efficient government championed by men who were thoroughly bred to lead and not women who were wrongly perceived as home makers (Jean 252). But of course by that time Christian missionaries had succeeded in building schools in Ilorin town. Such was the denial of women education until in October 1928 when Mrs. Leith – Ross, Lady Superintendent of education arrived Ilorin to explore the possibility of Muslim female education. As one would expect, she was terribly disappointed because the people showed no interest. They became vociferous so much so that Mrs. Leith – Ross wrote in her report that: "I do not think that there was an active demand for education ... from the economic point of view, the women were not down trodden and did not need education to raise their status or to defend their rights, nor had the time come when educated men wish for educated wives" (Hermon-Hodge 64).

Despite these observations and remarks, a beginning had been made with female education. Girls were educated to the elementary schools at Oke – Suna, Pakata, Lafiagi and Pategi. For instance, the daughter of the Emir of Kaiama was reported to have been attending Queen's College with the sole aim that she would start a class for girls on her return to Kaiama. There were 33 girls receiving instruction in the Native Administration Schools of the province. They were distributed thus, Oke – Suna 12, Pakata 12 while the remaining were Pategi 5 and Lafiagi 4 respectively.

The influence of Emirs in the establishment of Female Schools in Ilorin

In 1933, attempts were strongly made to establish girls' schools in Kano and Katsina. Both the Emir of Gwandu and Sultan of Sokoto requested that similar schools be built in their domains. They made this appeal to Mr. G. J. Lethem who acted as the Lieutenant – General of the Northern Province when he visited Sokoto. On the 30th May, 1933, they made passionate appeal to Lethem in Kaduna but the visitor simply replied that there was no sufficient fund to pay the two European women who would be charged with the responsibilities of teaching and running the schools. But the Emirs calmly responded that they were ready to augment the salaries of the two European women teachers earlier engaged. With this submission, the acting Lieutenant Governor became satisfied that the Emirs were ready to start girls schools built in their Emirates. Pertinently, he instructed Mr. E. R. J. Hussey, the Director of Education to invite Sultan Hassan and Emir Usman concerning the prospects of establishing girls schools in Sokoto and Katsina during their visit in Lagos.

Mr. Hussey had a discussion with them in 1935 and welcomed their foresight in promoting girls and women education in the Emirates. But he hesitated further that if the government could afford to pay the salaries of the two European teachers, such teachers might not be easy to be appointed. However, the Emirs suggested employing Yoruba women instead who were teaching at Queens' College, Lagos. By this submission which emanated from the Emirs Hassan and Usman, there was a strong conviction that the Education Department must build girls' schools in Sokoto and Katsina. Thus, the Emir of Ilorin, Abdullahi Abdulkadir (1919 – 1959) and other Emirs also keenly requested for the establishment of girls schools. Unfortunately, this request was rebuffed in 1959, this was as a result of the fact that the British administration preferred co-education schools in their native administrative efforts to westernize the impoverished. This reason was ostensibly for the fact that girls' schools were considered to be too expensive to run. Despite the resistance of the Emirs, the native administration went ahead to introduce co-education. The Emirs had fear and strong affirmation that their subjects would not be willing to send their daughters to co-education schools. Suspected that co-education may promote sexual promiscuity among female pupils.

Thus, that the separation of girls from boys in schools advocated by the Emirs was crucial to the establishment of female education in the Emirate (Tebenderana 529 – 530).

Initial Colonial Educational Efforts at the Primary Schools Level

Oke – Suna primary was established in 1915 after the provincial school in 1914. The third primary school was Pakata founded in 1934. In 1946 Okelele Primary School was established. This was followed by Alore Primary School in 1948. One year after, Baboko Primary School in 1949 and in 1954 Oke – Aluko Primary School. Nonetheless in 1950s, the numerical strength of female pupils in most of the primary schools then was considerably lower than their male counterparts. However, the data below will illustrate this further. However, it must be stated that less or not much was done to promote female education prior to the establishment of the Queen Elizabeth Secondary, Ilorin during the period that spanned over fifty years (Jimoh 119).

Table 1: Percentage of Enrolment of Boys and Girls in Primary Schools in Ilorin in 1950s

Schools	Year Established	Classes	Boys	Girls
Oke-Suna Primary School	1915	1	25	15
		2	28	12
		3	30	9
		4	34	6
		5	28	3
		6	25	10
		Total	170 (75.5%)	55 (24.4)
Pakata Primary School	1934	1	34	5
		2	22	14
		3	37	3
		4	35	5
		Total	128 (82.6%)	27 (17.4)
Okelele Primary School	1946	1	30	10
		2	32	3
		3	32	3
		Total	94 (85.5%)	16 (14.5)
Alore Primary School	1948	1	34	6
		2	33	4

		3	31	6
		Total	98 (86.0%)	16 (14.0)
Baboko Primary School	1949	2	26	14
		3	39	1
		5 ^A	32	-
		5 ^B	25	-
		6	36	-
		6A	19	21
		6B	34	-
		Total	221(84.1%)	36(14.6%)
Oke-Aluko Primary School	1954	2	31	5
		4	36	4
		Total	67(88.1%)	9(11.8%)

The Establishment of Female Secondary Education in Ilorin Emirate 1960 – 1984

Queen Elizabeth Secondary School was established on May, 21st 1956. It was the first Girls Secondary School in the entire North then which was renamed Queen Elizabeth School, Ilorin. The establishment of Queen Elizabeth School started before 1956. However, the school started to function in May 1956 even though the official opening of the school was on 21st November 1957 by Her Royal Highness, Alice Mary, aunt to Queen Victoria Alexandra.

It was established primarily to provide sound education for the female children all over the North. It should be mentioned that the number of Ilorin Girls from Queen Elizabeth School at this stage was insignificant because it was 2 from 30 (Reichmuth 10). The pioneer principal was Miss K. A. Player (1956 – 61). Since from inception, Queen Elizabeth Secondary School was regarded as a unity school. It was also a regional and provincial school as its students were admitted equitable from the various provinces of Northern Nigeria (Jimoh 512). On the academic performances of the College, it should be stated that 54 students began the College and by the time the first set of students graduated, thirty seven (37) students sat for the West African School Certificate Examination.

Table 2: Number of Students and Subjects Offered in 1960 West African Examination in Queen School, Ilorin in Percentage (%)

S/N	Subject	Number of Students	Percentage
1	English Language	37	100
2	English Literature	20	54.1
3	History	26	70.3
4	Geography	28	75.7

5	Biology	26	70.3
6	Health Science	11	29.7
7	Mathematics	35	94.6
8	Fine Arts	22	94.6
9	Cookery	23	62.2
10	Needlework	11	29.7

Source: Yahaya Eliasu, 2016.

The Second Female Secondary School, Government Girls Day Secondary School, Pakata started on the 15th October, 1982 when the Kwara State Government founded the school hand-in-hand with other forty-one (41) other Government Day Secondary School. It must be stated however that, the school formally started teaching and learning activities on the 24th January, 1983, initially located on the temporary site at Pakata Local Government Education Area School. Thus, the school became the only female secondary school in the whole of Pakata area. By the 19th January, 1984, the school was later relocated to its permanent site on a very large expanse of land near *Anifowose* market. Particularly, along *Shaykh Adam al-Ilory's* Road, the school started with the initial population of 101 students, Ten (10) teaching and Nine (9) non-teaching staff members. Presently, the college has students' population of one thousand (1000) in addition to the qualified and industrious teaching and non-teaching staff who have contributed tremendously to the growth and the development of the college (Yekini 10).

The third female secondary school was Government Girls Day Secondary School, *Oke-Suna (Ribwatul Sunnah)*. This school was officially opened on the 21st January, 1983 at the temporary site of Pake Local Government School Management Board (LSMB) with the initial population of Seventy – six (76) and two members of staff. A total number of seventy-six desks and chairs were delivered to the students on the 21st January, 1983. In addition, one Mrs. V. O. Folake reported for duty on the 27th January, 1983. On the 18th February, 1983, Mrs. G. O. Ireymi reported for duty and she taught Commercial Education and in addition to this were two clerical assistants, Messrs Saka Ayinla and Aduagba Yakubu who reported for the duty on the 14th March, 1983. While another junior officer, *Malam Shehu Akanbi* also reported for work as the school messenger of the school on the same day (Alao 15).

The school comprises of Senior Secondary School One (SSS I) with the total population of two hundred and seventy-two (272), the Senior Secondary School Two (SSS II) has a total population of three hundred and eleven (311) while Senior Secondary School Three (SSS III) has a total of population of thirty-seven (37) who duly registered for final West African Examination Council (WAEC). This female secondary school has a staff strength of seventy – three (73) and very close to a bridge called *Amilengbe* (swinging bridge). The last female secondary school, Government Girls Day Secondary School, *Oko-Erin* was established on the 23rd January, 1984 with the initial intake of two hundred and forty-five (245) students and with five initial teaching staff accommodated in a rectangular block of four building excised from Queen Elizabeth School (Titiloye 5).

Table 3: List of Female (Girls) Secondary Schools in Ilorin Township, 1956 – 1984.

S/NO	NAME	YEAR FOUNDED	PROPRIETOR
1	Queen Elizabeth Secondary School, Ilorin	1956	Colonial Government
2	Government Girls Day Secondary School, Pakata, Ilorin	1982	Kwara State Government
3	Government Girls Day Secondary School, Oke-Sunnah	1983	Kwara State Government
4	Government Girls Day Secondary School, Oke-Erin	1984	Kwara State Government

Conclusion

A historical study of Female and Western education has been examined in Ilorin Township. While it was true that for over two decades a measure of success had been recorded for male education was in a doldrums. This was not unconnected with the introduction of western education in the Muslim Community through Christian Missionaries. This gave rise to antagonism. More importantly the colonial policy on Western Education was discriminatory against female. Therefore, only the sons of Emirs were educated along the western line thus female education was kept in abeyance; it is a trend which continued to pervade the society up till the present century. For instance, in the 1950's the numerical strength of female pupils in most of the primary schools were considerably lower than their male counterparts. The total population for boys stood at 768 representing 82.5%. While that of the Girls was 159 representing 17.2%. At the Secondary School level especially the first female institution, the Queen Elizabeth Secondary School, the first female intake stood at 56 and by 1960, 37 female students sat for the West African Examinations. And the number of the girls from Ilorin township was 2 out of 50 (Alao 5).

After almost three decades of the establishment of the first female secondary school in Ilorin three others were later established to promote women education. Government Girls Secondary School, Pakata came about in the year 1982. We had Government Girls Day Secondary, Oke-Sunna built in the year 1983 and Government Girls Day Secondary School, Oke-Erin was built in the year 1984. Therefore, we need to state that the development of female education had been very slow due to the low impetus accorded female education particularly during the period under consideration, 1914 – 1984 in the Muslim Emirate of Ilorin.

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