

**THE SCENERY OF MAKARANTUN ZAURE/ILIMI (CENTRE FOR
ADVANCE STUDIES) AS AN ARENA OF IMPARTING ISLAMIC
STUDIES AND ARABIC LETERATURE**

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Abstract

Early scholars of Islamic and Arabic teaching and learning had often established fully educational activities, based on their time and ability. This was attributed to what they have rendered to their Ummah and how they secured the classical mode of Islamic/Arabic teaching, in spite all challenges. their effort assisted in planting the art of Islamic/Arabic scholarship in the whole Northern Nigeria prior to and after Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye's Jihad, till today their endeavours is been witnessed through Zaure system of education by using traditional syllabus and equipment as was depict in the scenery and the mode of teaching and learning in Zaure classical activities. Till today the system is functioning and remains a legacy generation after generation.

Key Words: Scenery, Makarantun, Zauren/Ilimi, Centre, Islamic Arabic

Introduction

This topic shades light on the features of *Makarantun Zaure/Ilimi*, which serves as a center for Islamic and Arabic advanced studies, and being a center of learning, it is a place for acquiring both Islamic and Arabic knowledge under a particular scholar, either at his home or a designated place with his students around him. This, as an attractive system of learning is adopted in most of Northern States. But, due to the importance of the contributions of these Centres, certain terms that are related to it have been defined, these terms are: *Zaure, Almajiri, Malamin Zaure and Karatun Zaure.*

1. Zaure: Simply means a lobby,¹ or a large hall that is open to the public used for people to meet and talk.² It can also be translated as main entrance, a large place or passage that leads to the main internal parts of a house.³ This is usually found in Hausa and Fulani traditional buildings in the Northern part of Nigeria, and this part of a house to a Hausa people is called *Zauren Gida*.⁴ The traditional Muslim scholars build such lobby in their homes separately for teaching purposes. It depends on the capacity and ability of the owner.

2. Almajiri:

Linguistically *almajiri* has two different meanings; *Almajiri* can be a learner who left his place to somewhere, in order to meet a scholar for the purpose of learning. On the other hand, the word Almajiri can be translated as a beggar or a person following door to door seeking for food or any assistance that people may render to him.⁵

To modern scholars, the term *Almajiri* is a word derived or borrowed from the Arabic word *Almuhajir* which means an emigrant.

Fafunwa expounds that:

They (*Almajiris*) were considered to be *muhajirun* (Emigrants) who had left their homes in search of knowledge. Even today a pupil (the one undergoing training) in the traditional way of education is called *almajiri* in Hausa, which is a corrupt form of *Al-muhajir*, meaning an emigrant.⁶

Rafindadi emphasizes such fact where he says: "The word *almajiri* in Hausa comes from the Arabic word *al-muhajirun*".⁷ According to him, *Almuhajir* is referring to people who migrated from Makkah to Madinah in the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him), but continued to be used referred to those who travel from one place-to-another, together with their mentor called *Malam* (a teacher) while learning the Glorious Qur'an.⁸

Generally speaking, the word *Almajiri* refers to a Muslim learner or a Muslim student who humbly submitted himself to a scholar in order to learn Islamic and Arabic knowledge from him.

3. Malamin Zaure: (Teacher/Tutor)

The name *Malamin Zaure* refers to a learned Muslim scholar who usually stays at the lobby of his house or any designated place for students to come and learn or ask questions concerning any religious

and linguistical matters. This is in line with Abu-Bakr's description⁹ where he says: Traditionally, a scholar in most communities takes many responsibilities, and would be required to respond to many issues raised by many people on different areas of Islamic and Arabic sciences such as; the Qur'an, Prophetic tradition, *Tauhid*, *Lugha* and Arabic grammar among others. Some of these scholars have indeed reached the hierarchy of being *Imams*, *Khatib*, *Shaykh* and *Muftis*, and for that, they are highly respected and recognized, especially in the Northern region.

Apart from teaching and learning, these scholars are known for their involvement in activities leading to the development of Islam and spreading Arabic language in their various communities, through guiding people as well as worshiping and remembrance of Allah (*Al-Zikr*).¹⁰ Thus, these activities are their commitments during the day and night times.

4. Karatun Zaure:

This meant a traditional system of teaching Islamic knowledge to higher Islamic students/disciples, popularly known as "*Markarantar Ilimi*". Often, this is regarded as *Karatun Zaure*, and the beauty of this system is that, students were meant to master as many fields as they

could.

Still, *Makarantar Zaure* stands to signify a certain stage of Islamic and Arabic Educational System that is an advance stage, where it is believed that its student's elementary stage of study is *Makarantun Allo*, and they were conversant with the Qur'an and some preliminaries of Arabic language in written, memorization and reading.

According to Khalid:

The *Makarantar Ilmi* is the school of advanced learning which covers the whole range of Islamic literary, theology and legal education. In most schools, the pupil starts with either treatises or booklets on theology (*Tawhid*). This is followed by Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*...¹¹

The student will keep on attending school without specified or prescribed years of completion, and for the subjects he will be taught can include; *Tafsir*, *Hadith* and some advanced books of jurisprudence and theologies in Islamic studies, also *Nahwu*, *Balagha* and *Lugha* in Arabic language. Abbas explains the situation thus;

In the traditional *ilmi* schools in West Africa, Qur'anic exegesis, Haidth, History, poetry, jurisprudence, historiography, scientific works, medicine, philosophy, ethics, and other Islamic disciplines are taught¹²

SOME COURSES TAUGHT IN ZAURE AND FORMAL ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING

The development in fusing Islamic sciences and Arabic language into formal system of education, led to the introduction of some Islamic and Arabic courses to be taught in these conventional schools.

Some of these courses are:

- a) Qur'an: this to enable an individual to understand the Qur'an properly through its language (which is Arabic) in its various fields such as *Tafsir*, *Qira'at* and its Arabic writing style among others.
- b) *Hadith*: hadith which is also considered as the second most important after the Qur'an, is also being taught in order to give guidance to Muslims in nearly all aspects of life and their religious activities as well as making him literate in Arabic vocabularies.
- c) *Fiqh* (jurisprudence): this represents the theory of law (*Shari'ah*) and every Muslim is expected to know something from it. It is not therefore only limited to intending jurist alone, but also to introduce Muslim to the wisdom and philosophy behind some religious rites in Islam.
- d) Arabic literature: this consists of Arabic verses, grammar, syntax, etymology and rhetoric. Mostly from text of *Maqamat al Hariri*, *Alfiyat bn Malik*, *Lamiyat al Af'al* to mention but a few.
- e) Theology: which consist of explanations of basics of Islamic

doctrines of *Tawhid* (oneness of Allah).

the philosophy behind maintaining these subjects is to make Muslims to be keen in their religious knowledge and be morally ground to allow them to be pious and righteous.

The mode of Teaching and Learning in Zaure System of education

Usually the traditional Islamic teaching operates five days of the week, from Saturdays to Wednesdays and the lesson time is normally early in the morning,¹³ a time immediately after Morning Prayer and it will continue till noon. Some schools begin after Sunrise.¹⁴ Some '*Ulama* starting their lessons in the afternoon (*Zuhr*) to evening (*Magrib*), while others from *Asr* prayer to Night. Therefore, the time for lesson in *Makarantun Ilmi* depends on the chance and schedule of the scholar.¹⁵

The system of the teaching is according to the classical methodology is on individual bases, and no matter the number of students, each one of them will come along with at least 2, 3 or 4 text books and all will be taught, while others are listening.¹⁶

The traditional Muslim scholars use two important methods to

teach. Either the student reads from his copy of the text while the teacher translates and makes comments or the teacher reads the Arabic text then translates and makes comments himself while the student listens to him with affirmation using the word “*Na’am*”.

Apart from the individual lessons, sometimes a group of students who are colleagues or were at the same level of learning would be assigned a particular text book and *Malam* teaches them in a group lesson.

Scholars in this respect dedicate and teach without collecting fees or receive any salary or assistance. However, most of them are economically independents because many of them are farmers and some of them undertake local business activities to make a living.

The traditional Muslim scholars (Malaman *Zaure*) who are more elderly hardly do something that will distract them from paying attention to their scholarly works and activities. This they do in order to concentrate more on their teaching and writings activities. *Shaykh* Uthman did exactly the same as mentioned by Yola.

The *Shaykh* virtually retired from active public administration and subsequently moved to Sokoto where he spent the rest of his life in teaching, writing and meditation.¹⁷

According to Abdulkadir Safiyyu, the *Zaure* educational system

otherwise known as traditional Centre of learning has some features, whereby any center that possesses such features will be regarded as *Zaure*, Kuttab or *Dihliz* in Arabic. He said that, *Zaure* is a place where a single scholar is heading and he is the only master who is in charge, unless if he assigns someone else among his trusted disciples stand for him.¹⁸

Teacher Student activity in *Zaure*

Scholars at traditional Learning Centres are always aiming at indoctrinating the students with good behaviors and etiquette, by allowing the students learn integrity and being assured in what they are taught, which eventually help in grooming a well behaved personality. Respecting and obeying the teacher is a required manner in *Zaure* system, so that student will acquire all the designated objectives there.

The Traditional Islamic learning at this level has its major objectives of making student to be more familiar with the knowledge of Qur'anic exegesis, *Ahadith* of the prophet, Islamic law and jurisprudence and the existence, uniqueness and the attributes of Allah.¹⁹

Student will acquire such discipline and make them part of his life; these will allows him to be humbly knowledgeable. The individual lessons are delivered based on first come first have in *Zaure* system of learning. It is called "*sabikanchi*" in local dialect or "*Sabiqi*" in Arabic.

Immediately when the teacher comes to the arena of the teaching (i.e. *Zaure*/Centre of Learning), he will ask for the students that came first, and the days lessons will immediately be started with him.

Abubakar spoke a lot ²⁰ on *Zaure* system of teaching and learning, how lessons is delivered from the lower stage to upper, he also mentioned how the teacher will interact with the students and vice-versa.

The nature of breeding and orientations induced in students prevent them from arguing with the scholar or asking of silly questions during lessons, sometimes due to crowd or large number of the students attends, questions and criticisms are hardly heard or entertained. Time factor may not be adequate on the side of the teacher to elaborate more on some issues related to terms or Islamic decisions, thus, no room for long discussion with the students or detailing on complicated terms, ideas, as well as long analysis. The Teacher is mostly racing against time; often he has little time so he is able to translate contents from the text books only, in the period of the lessons. However, realizing educational needs of their students, some of the Scholars give a chance to their closest Disciples for discussion and sharing ideas where necessary. Vis-a-vies the above mentioned factors; vacuum may still remain in this system of teaching and

learning. That has been the nature before, but some Centre's have started taking the corrective measures to reshaping and modernizing the system in (*Dars*) lesson Classes.

The traditional Muslim scholars developed interest and are sending some of their children and students to the Formal Islamic and Arabic schools; now there are many who are hitherto *Zaure* oriented students but are now specialized in modern Islamic and Arabic studies. Some are even lecturers in the, higher institutions such as Universities and during vacations, in their free time or during retirement; they engage the *Zaure* students at their various domain/areas.

The new classes of scholars who *Zaure* product were nowadays functioning, they are using more interactive methods of teaching, and in delivering lessons.

If that is the scenery of the *Zaure* system and the endeavors of the traditional Muslim scholars there, thus, some possible helping hand or government intervention is needed, in order to assist and enable them in boosting the *Zaure* system of learning by organizing the traditional intellectual contributions especially in all the Northern parts and the Nigeria at large.

Iguda outlined some possible ways in which *Tsangaya* system of education can be assisted and revived. The suggestions he mentioned are also suitable to be applied in maintaining the traditional centers of

learning (*Zaure*), through government intervention to support the enthusiasm of the traditional Muslim scholars to uplift the standard of Zaure Centres. This is because they occupied a notable position in the society in helping to minimize the level of illiteracy within the society, by giving some vulnerable direction and rehabilitating them to goodness. He mentioned that:

Government parastatals such as Universal Basic Education (UBE), National Teachers Institute (N.T.I.) Education Trust Fund (ETF), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) and Boards for Arabic and Islamic studies (BAIS) from states like: Jigawa, Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina and Bauchi should intervene and rendered contributions to them²¹.

The Islamic traditional (*Zaure*) system of teaching and learning and its position in most of northern Nigeria region

Islam has encouraged seeking of knowledge and literary activities. The traditional system of education is among the earliest known institution of learning that played a vital role in preserving the real Islamic and Arabic studies/knowledge in the early era of Islamic propagation.

Islam in West Africa strengthens its basis by adopting the traditional education, which is an essential means of *Da'wah*. The non-corrupted

²¹ S. Iguda K/Nasarawa, *Tsarin Tsangayun Al-kur'ani, a arewacin Nijeria, tarihinsu da zamantakewarsu da hanyoyin rayuwarsu*, Islamic Foundation Bookshop, K.mata Kano, 2006, p. 157-158.

Sufis contributed in spreading the traditional educational activities as research expound earlier, the educational centers were established in Mosques by teaching *Usul Al din* to the general public in a Muslims communities and *Madrasas* for student to learn their religion as an alternative venues/centers for imparting Islamic teaching and learning. Gada's statement asserts that:

The *Katatib* and *Madaris* were the real centres of learning through which Islamic scholarship operated and developed. They were known as Islamic schools where Islamic –and Arabic- education was imparted to both children and adults respectively²².

This system continued to spread wider to some locations. The Muslim scholar's enthusiastic attitude towards teaching and learning made them to carry the task of teaching and propagating Islam and Arabic language without any charge, couple with the fact that knowledge was brought to them, many Muslims attend places of learning. This effort expanded through the desert to what is known as old Bornu area or Lake Chad, down to some places in Northern region.

During the missionaries' arrival to Northern region, the traditional Islamic/Arabic education was in existence. Even Mungo Park, who came to educate for the Scottish church, he found some traditional schools and active teachers everywhere he travelled to in Africa in

areas with Muslim populations²³ adopting Islamic and Arabic teaching and learning and were cultured to it.

The above statement justified the existence of non-formal Islamic/Arabic education many decades ago. The traditional teaching established after *Shaykh* Uthman's *jihad*, as well as how traditional *Ilmi* centres are in the flag bearing areas. This shows that, the people of Northern Nigeria upheld the traditional Islamic and Arabic system of teaching for quite a long period of time and they took good care of practicing it to-date.

Student will start learning of some religious text books designed for beginners, from where he will be upgraded to an advanced level of learning which is the *Ilmi School (karatun littafi)*.

In most cases, the *Ilmi* students are daily classified in two sessions; morning and evening sessions. Although full time *Zaure* student, can partake in the night session as well. The night session usually allows the Scholar extra room to attend to his students who were in most cases less in number. Student participating in night classes tends to accomplish more. This system has no examination as in conventional school system, but a scholar may orally recommend or endorse in written clearance or *Ijaza* to a qualified student to teach

others, or to operate his own school/center (*Zaure*).

The level of patronage into particular learning centers is related to scholar's ethics, etiquettes and the quality of his instructions which usually attract many advanced learners; it is among the good quality that such a teacher should always be accessible to all people.²⁴ In such Islamic/Arabic education, the question of being old or young before enrolling as a student does not arise. Whatever is the age of a student he can participate because, education in Islam is obligatory.

However, the student will continue attending the Centre for acquiring knowledge and skills in different Islamic and Arabic fields of knowledge. Arabic language and some related text books of *Ilmi* were taught among others, such as; *Ahdari* in *fiqh*, *Arba'una* Hadith in the prophetic tradition, *Matnul ajarumiyyah*, *Nahwul Wadih*, *Mulhat al l'rab*, *Al balagha al wadihah*, *Ishriniyyah* up to *Maqamah al Hariri* etc. is being taught. The importance of this type of teaching and learning activities is that it is still safeguarded, and it is through this way the scholarly homes (*Zaure*) produced and are producing talented and qualified scholars.

The missionary activities of the colonial masters in the Northern Nigeria on their arrival, gave the Islamic Scholars cause of concern on the fate of the Traditional Islamic/Arabic system of teaching and

²⁴ Ibid, p. 95.

learning, which led the *Zaure* proprietors to tirelessly uphold the traditional centres strongly.

The traditional Muslim scholars later observed the zeal of Missionaries to convert pagans and Muslims to Christianity through some of their activities; these also led the Northern *Ulama* to adjust in fortifying against the effort of missionaries through the Muslim's *Ulama* enlightenment.

The advent of western education to Northern part of Nigeria was delayed and retard because of the effort of *Ulama Al-Islami* and the turning back of the General Muslim of the area against the system ...²⁵

This situation aggravated the re-affirmation and rapid re-creation of the *Zaure* traditional system of education in the whole northern Nigeria.

Tudun Nufawa commented thus:

During the coming of the colonial masters, people are expecting backwardness in the traditional Islamic education, but it keeps spreading, and traditional institutions are rapidly got increased in many areas more than before, which assists in concreting the quality and spreading of Traditional Islamic and Arabic knowledge, as it led to producing of many scholars, whom they provided some estimable writing in Islamic studies, Arabic language and literature.²⁶

That was the state of the traditional *Zaure* system of teaching and how it was reinforced, to the level that continue to be function till date.

Curriculum/Syllabus in *Zaure* centres

Some modern writers held the view that the *Zaure* system has no syllabus or curriculum, but looking at the *Zaure* system and the state of how *Ulama* are imparting knowledge using some specific text books, for specific courses, the research is of the view that, it seems they have a kind of traditional syllabus.²⁷ The series of some text books which students at *Zaure* used to learn and cover chronologically, are serving as syllabus/curriculum. Only that it needs to be reviewed and arranged. Gada explores on curriculum and the methodology of such system and the basis of curriculum of Islamic/Arabic centres.

Scholars, writing on the curriculum of the Qur'anic Centres of learning right from the earliest time, did not go out of this context. Although, the curriculum in the Islamic/Arabic Centres was uniform throughout the region and throughout the period, it did not remain static.²⁸

The traditional system always deals with the whole content of a book, while the modern curriculum system selects topics or portions

from the courses or field of specialization. The art of teaching and reading of whole text books in *Zaure* may be related to the mode of learning Qur'an, which is aimed at reading and learning the whole book completely. These made great impact on *Zaure* system of teaching and learning. *Zaure* proprietors considered the cover to cover reading as an act of worship; this may be among the factors that made the early traditional Muslim scholars hesitate from composing modern modes of teaching in the *Zaure* system of education.

Conclusion

Zaure system and the Scholars handling it deserves government intervention at various levels, to motivate them, for they have right to earn the national assistance. *Zaure* system is a vast educational program that revives Muslims, through what the paper depict in its theme contents, thus; the proprietors deserve all the necessary supports from the communities, governmental and non-governmental organizations. It is not appropriate to keep the endeavors and contributions of such important scholars in historical shelves or inconsiderable institutions.

END NOTE:

1. As Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, 6th Edition, Oxford University Press, 2000.

- ². Ibid. (see: lobby, noun pl.-les)
3. www.wordhippo.com(internet: 25/08/2015)
- ⁴. This is usually the term used by Hausa people in the Northern region since old decades
- ⁵. A.N. Rafindadi, *The present state of Almajirci and its Socio-Economic Implications on Society*,(a paper presentation)katsina State Economic Summit,16th March 2006.(no page number. first paragraph)
- ⁶. A.B. Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*. p.48.
7. *Op.Cit.*(no page number, first paragraph)
- ⁸. *Ibid.*
- ⁹. A.Abubakar, *Al Thaqafah Al Arabiyyah Fi Nigeria*, p.155-158.
10. This contained all kind of what is known as *Zikr* such as Qur'anic recitation (*Takara*) *Awrad*, *Nawafil*, etc.
- ¹¹. S. Khalid ,*karatun Allo: The Islamic System of Elementary Education in Hausa Land*. A paper presentation in the department of sociology, Usmanu Danfodio Univ. Sokoto(internet,23/8/2015)paragraph 16.
- ¹². U.S. Abbas, *The role of Arabic and Islamic Manuscripts in the preservation of Islamic heritage and civilization in west Africa*, UMYU Katsina(journal)2010,vol.3 No.1,p.48.
- ¹³. Oral Interview: current Chief Imam of Azare, Malam Ayyubu, at his house, Azare, on 22/1/2014,by 2:45 pm, and Mal. Usman Shehu

Maisuga, at his home Bauchi, on 14/01/2014.11:46am

¹⁴ .Oral interview, Malam Ibrahim jalo, aged 75,a tradional scholar, at sabon layi, Darazo L.G.A, Bauchi state. On 10/10/2013,by 2:30pm.

¹⁵ . Oral Interview, Malam Harisu bn Dauda, chief Imam of Jama'are, aged 54, on 26/09/2013 by 5:20 pm at his house in Jama'are L.G.A. Bauchi State.

¹⁶ . Oral Interview, Shaykh Sa'id Hamid Bello, District head of Zungur, Bauchi L.G.A. on 12/9/2015.

¹⁷ . J.H. Yola, *Philosophy among the Sokoto Scholars*, Benchmark publishers l.t.d. Kano 2004/1425, p.7.

¹⁸ . An oral interview with Dr. Muhammad Safiyyu Abdulkadir, Bauchi (H.O.D. languages Fed. Univ. Kashere Gombe) on 08/09/2015.

¹⁹ . A.M. Gada, *A short History of early Islamic scholarship In Hausa land*, Idrisiyya Printing Press, Kaduna, 2010, P.93

²⁰ . A. Abubakar, *Althqafah Al-Arabiyya fi-Nigeria*, p. 155-159.

21. S. Iguda K/Nasarawa, *Tsarin Tsangayun Al-kur'ani, a arewacin Nijeria, tarihinsu da zamantakewarsu da hanyoyin rayuwarsu*, Islamic Foundation Bookshop, K.mata Kano, 2006, p. 157-158.

²² . A. M. Gada *A Short History of Earlier Islamic Scholarship in Hausa Land*, Idrissiya Printing Press, Kaduna, 2010, p. 68.

²³ . A. Ezzati, *An Introduction to the History of the spread of Islam*, Islamic Publications Bureau, Lagos, 1979, p. 228

24. Ibid, p. 95.
25. B. Qadamariy, *Al-Daulah Al-Nigeria*, Darul Ummah Kano, 2011/1432H, p. 37.
26. K. A. Adam Tudun Nufawa, *Al-nathr Al-Arabiy AL-Nigeriy, Suwaruhu wa khasa'isuhu Abra' Usur*, Darul Ummah, Kano 1432/2011, pp. 121,122.
27. According to Dictionary, Syllabus is a list of the topics, books, etc, that students will study in a particular subject at school or college. That is why the research chooses to relate the system of *Zaure* to syllabus (Traditionally) because the series of some books are being taught, and also *Zaure* is a school/institution only that it was not modernized and formalized.
28. A.M. Gada, *A short History of early Islamic Scholarship in Hausa land*, Idrissiya printing press, kaduna, 2010. Pp 81-85