

**Reforms for the Promotion and Development of Tsangaya Schools in
the Context of the Nigerian Educational System**

by

Bashir S. Galadanci

Department of Software Engineering

Bayero University, Kano

October 2014

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION¹

Nigeria, like other predominantly Muslim countries, has had a strong Islamic traditional system of education since Islam was introduced to the country by Arab Muslim traders several centuries ago. When the colonialists came to Nigeria at the beginning of the 20th century they found this educational system - particularly in the Muslim North - solidly in place with its various levels catering for the needs of children, youth and adults. It was very different from the western christian system that they (the colonialists) eventually imposed all over the country. There has, since then, been a long drawn battle between the two systems of education which is yet to be finally resolved. The earlier animosity between the two systems especially during colonial times when all attempts were made to weaken the Islamic system has gradually given way in the post independence period to attempts to integrate the two systems together. As a result of the fundamental differences between the two systems in many respects including worldview, philosophy, curricula and methods, the efforts at integration have not been easy.

This paper is an attempt to study the Islamic education system in Nigeria and discuss the necessary reforms required in order to address the problems being faced by the system. It starts with a historical overview of the system and an analysis of the major challenges and problems faced by the system. This is followed by the experiences of other Muslim countries especially their efforts at integrating between the Islamic and conventional systems of

¹ This paper is a revised version of an earlier paper presented by the same author at an International Conference in Malaysia on the topic "Synthesizing Traditional and Modern Knowledge: The Nigerian Experience"

education. Finally, the paper gives a few suggestions on lasting solutions to the myriad of problems faced by the traditional Islamic educational system especially through a well planned, co-ordinated and implemented integration of the two systems.

SECTION TWO: OVERVIEW OF THE ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The current Islamic educational system in Nigeria consists of several types of schools. Some of these types date back several centuries ago when Islam first came to this country. Because of the great importance Islam attaches to the pursuit of knowledge, the early traders who brought Islam into Nigeria generally travelled with their teachers who would give them lessons when they were not carrying out their commercial activities. These teachers were the same ones that set up lessons for the new converts and their families. Given the central importance of the Holy Qur'an in Islam, emphasis was given to the teaching of the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an as well as the understanding and implementation of its teachings.

As the indigenous communities grew, particular attention was given to teaching children and special schools were established exclusively for them. Parents enrolled their young children in these schools so that they could get introduced to the teachings of Islam at an early age. In order that proper attention was given to the Qur'an, students exclusively studied the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an as the first stage of the educational system. When they successfully completed this stage, they were then introduced to other forms of Islamic knowledge. This stage generally involved studying

specific subjects from individual scholars. When a student completed this phase of study he became a scholar in his own standing and imparted knowledge to his own pupils and students.

For several centuries, this system of education remained virtually the same with few changes to the curriculum, methods of teaching, and the teaching and learning materials used. The teachers offered their meritorious services free of charge without demanding payment. However, the societies where they lived, especially wealthy individuals and rulers, supported the teachers in different ways and provided different forms of assistance. During periods of Islamic reform, such as the time of Shehu Usman Dan Fodiyo and Muhammad Bello, the educational system received special emphasis and treatment as well as government support. On the other hand, when there was decline, such support was abandoned and the schools were left to suffer.

The schools were initially day schools with the students returning to their homes at the end of their lessons. Begging amongst the students of the first stage of this educational system started when they became boarding schools. Initially it was a way of instilling discipline, patience and endurance. Some students, especially those from wealthy backgrounds, were sent out sometimes to beg in order to instill such virtues in them. Unfortunately, with time, this tradition became prevalent and it came to be accepted as an inseparable part of the system of education with virtually all students having to beg. This was probably convenient for the parents of the children because they did not have to provide for their welfare.

When colonialism came to Nigeria, the colonial rulers made calculated efforts to destroy the Islamic educational system and this further undermined the already weak system. All forms of state support were stopped and the entire Islamic educational system was portrayed as inferior to the western educational system. By that time, there were three related subsystems in place. The makarantun allo, which were day Qur'anic schools, had students from ages 3 to early and mid teens that were devoted to learning the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an. Some of the students in this system graduated into the tsangaya schools which were the boarding equivalent of the makarantun allo and generally had older students (from age 6 to late teens). In addition to the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an, these schools continued up to the writing of the Holy Qur'an. Then there were the Ilimi schools that taught the other branches of Islamic knowledge including Islamic law, jurisprudence, seerah, hadith, ulum ul Qur'an and usul ul fiqh.

Perhaps, the first major reform of this educational system took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s when Islamiyyah schools began to be established in some parts of the Northern Region. These schools which were generally at the primary level attending to young children had a curriculum that extended beyond Qur'anic recitation and memorization to cover other areas of Islamic knowledge. The method of teaching also differed from the individual student approach relying more on the group/classroom approach that was in some way similar to what obtained in the secular schools. Even though they did not teach any secular subjects, they were ferociously attacked as being surrogates of the secular system established to adulterate and weaken the makarantun allo and tsangaya schools. It was a fierce fight but in the end,

the Islamiyyah schools succeeded in consolidating themselves and becoming a modern parallel to the traditional Qur'anic system.

Starting from the 1980s, another development began which is gradually changing the landscape of the Islamic educational system. This is the establishment of Islamiyyah primary and secondary schools, in some northern states notably Kano, that could be said to be the first community-based attempts to integrate Islamic and secular western educational systems. These schools tried to combine the curriculum of the Islamiyyah (General) schools (Islamic subjects such as Fiqh, Hadith, Seerah, Qur'an and Arabic) with that of the conventional secular schools (subjects such as Mathematics, English, Science and Social Studies). The graduates of such schools were expected to master both aspects as envisioned in the comprehensive notion of education in Islam. To a large extent, these schools could be adjudged to have succeeded in this integration project especially when one notes the number of students from such schools that have been able to transit to the conventional secular system and eventually complete their studies in diverse professional fields such as accounting, medicine and engineering. However, it is worth noting that the academic standards of such schools have generally been poor compared to regular primary and secondary schools.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, other types of schools were added to the Islamic education spectrum notably general tahfeez, tahfeez primary and tahfeez secondary schools. These emerged as a result of the increased interest amongst the Muslim populace in the correct recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an with Tajweed (the correct rules of recitation of the Qur'an) with the introduction of national and international

competitions (musabaqa) on the recitation of the Holy Qur'an where students that emerged victorious were awarded very generous prizes. The general tahfeez schools are those modeled along the lines of Islamiyyah schools which give special attention to the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an over and above the other Islamic subjects. In the same vein, the Tahfeez primary and Tahfeez secondary schools were variations of the Islamiyyah primary and Islamiyyah secondary schools where special emphasis was given to the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an.

In Southern Nigeria, the situation was slightly different. While some of the schools have similar origins to those in Northern Nigeria, many of the Islamic schools today are a response to the challenges posed by missionary schools that tried to convert young Muslim children into Christianity. Muslim individuals and communities felt the need to establish their own schools which, even if they offered the same secular curriculum, protected their children from being converted.

SECTION THREE : THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEMS

The last section has given a brief history of the Islamic educational system in Nigeria that led to the emergence of different types of schools and the current status of these different school types. In discussing their problems, it is important to note that while there are common problems that cut across all the types of schools, some other challenges are particular to specific types. The different types of problems are briefly discussed below:

1. Lack of Recognition

Perhaps, the most pervasive problem that cuts across all the types of schools is the lack of recognition by the different tiers of government. Islamic education, to a large extent, of whatever form is not considered to occupy any meaningful position in the educational policy of the nation and therefore those that pass through this system of education are not considered to have undergone any education at all. Obviously, this is very wrong especially when it is recalled that before the advent of colonialism, this was the educational system that was fully in place all over most of the Northern Region and it was the one that produced all manners of the people required by the State whether they were the political leaders, the judges, the teachers, the public servants, the traders or the artisans.

2. Lack of Funding

Resulting from the lack of recognition, none of the types of schools that make up the Islamic educational system receive any form of funding from the various governments. They are all either funded by community and individual efforts or not funded at all. Many of the problems that these schools suffer from originate from this lack of funding. Education, as is well known, is an expensive venture requiring sufficient funding for infrastructure, teachers, and teaching and learning materials amongst other forms of expenditure if it is to produce the right caliber of products. Given the poor state of funding for the entire spectrum of Islamic schools, it is no wonder that a majority of them are in such a despicable state.

3. Lack of Opportunities for Products of the System

Also resulting from the lack of recognition of the system is the fact that at the end of their educational accomplishments, the products of the Islamic educational system do not have the opportunities that products of the secular education system have. There are no plum career opportunities. Indeed there are no working opportunities at all. The products of the Islamic educational system end up with only two options; either to return to their schools and become teachers or to take up menial jobs as petty traders, labourers, shoe polishers and nail cutters.

4. Inferiority Complex of Products of the System

As a result of the above mentioned problems, the products of the Islamic educational system often exhibit inferiority complex and lack of confidence. This is obviously because the society, in general, considers them as having no education at all or at best sub-standard education. The only ones amongst the products of the Islamic education system that escape from this are those that are able – at a certain point in their educational careers – to transfer into the secular education sector and excel therein.

5. Curricula Problems:

The different types of schools face a variety of problems related to curricula. With respect to makarantun allo and the tsangaya schools, the curriculum is extremely restricted. It is limited to the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an. Meritorious as this is, it is too narrow to fit within the

comprehensive notion of education in Islam. In today's world, in particular, where skills and knowledge are so important in securing jobs, the curriculum makes the products of such schools unable to participate fully in society.

The Islamiyyah and Tahfeez schools also have problems related to the curricula. First, there are generally no uniform curricula and syllabi that are acceptable for the different types of schools under this category. Even when a school is using particular syllabi, it is difficult to ensure that it is following it to the letter. This is because there are no supervisory agencies that are responsible for inspecting Islamiyyah and Tahfeez schools and ensuring their compliance with required standards. The effect of all this is that the quality of such schools is generally far below standards in all respects; the quality of the teaching staff, the state of the physical infrastructure, the strength of teaching and learning, and all other indices.

6. Welfare Problems

The welfare problems especially those faced by the students of tsangaya schools (almajirai) are multifarious. First, they are generally homeless with no accommodation. In many schools, there is no infrastructure other than the house of the alamma. The almajirai sleep in the outer rooms of the alamma's house, in congested rented stalls or in uncompleted buildings. Only in very few cases, is it likely to find a Qur'anic school with hostels for the almajirai and where they exist they are normally overcrowded and in dilapidated conditions.

Secondly, most almajirai have to beg in order to get food to eat. The disadvantages of begging by almajirai are numerous. In addition to taking away a large chunk of the time that they could use in their Qur'anic studies, begging reduces their self esteem and induces in them indolence, laziness and dependence on others. It also exposes them to all sorts of deviant behaviour and immoral practices. Furthermore, it undermines the image of Muslims and portrays Islam as a religion of poverty, backwardness and filth.

Thirdly, most almajirai have no form of healthcare whatsoever. When they become sick, their alammomi do not have the financial wherewithal to take them to hospitals or even buy drugs for them. Therefore, at best they are given traditional medicine. Otherwise, they are left in pain and hardship.

Fourthly, they do not enjoy other basic necessities of life such as clothing, shoes and bedding materials. This is why they are always seen barefooted and in tattered clothes. Unfortunately, they do not even have soap to clean their bodies and wash their clothes. Thus, they are perpetually in dirt with the resultant increased risk to diseases.

Fifthly, the almajirai, especially the young ones of tender age, are deprived of the love, compassion, care and moral upbringing that they deserve at this stage of their lives. All this is of course best offered by the parents, especially their mothers. Instead of spending this period of their lives under the gentle and loving care of their parents, they pass this important phase of their lives under the harsh and authoritarian rule of the alammomas and the cruel and often callous treatment of older almajirai.

In short, the plight of almajirai is one of homelessness, disease and dirt; the very opposite of what they ought to be as students of the Holy Qur'an.

SECTION FOUR: EXPERIENCES OF OTHER COUNTRIES

Nigeria is not the only country that is facing challenges with respect to its Islamic education system vis-à-vis its secular counterpart. Many other countries with predominantly Muslim populations in Africa as well as Asia have had somewhat similar histories and have ended up with similar challenges and problems. Several of these countries, in the last few decades, have used various policy measures in order to address these problems.

This section provides highlights of the experiences of a few countries so that Nigeria could learn and benefit from them. The countries that are treated include Bangladesh, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Gambia.

Bangladesh

Like Nigeria, Bangladesh, for a long time, had the secular system of education running parallel to the traditional Islamic educational system. In addition, there has been, since the 1930s, a quasi-integrated system of Aliyah madrasahs that combine secular and Islamic curricula. In 1987, the Government of Bangladesh established the Madrasah Education Board and has since then gradually modernized the Aliyah madrasah system. The country currently operates three parallel systems of education as itemized below:

- Secular Schools: They have a secular curriculum and are all under the Ministry of Education. They are fully supported by the Government
- Aliyah madrasahs have an integrated curriculum; they are supervised by the Madrasah Education Board, their teachers are paid by the government and their certificates are equivalent to those of secular schools.
- Qomi madrasahs offer only Islamic studies; no support from the government whatsoever; their certificates are not recognised inside Bangladesh

It is very interesting to note how Bangladesh has been able to integrate between the secular and Islamic systems of education. First, the Government brought out a strong policy to re-organise Madrasah education in Bangladesh and backed it up with appropriate legislation. Secondly, the infrastructural facilities in terms of classes, hostels and other physical facilities is good in majority of the Aliya as well as Qomi madrasahs at least compared to those in Nigeria. Surprisingly enough, these are generally constructed by communities not government. The lesson here is that there is no reason why the infrastructure in Nigerian Islamic schools should be so bad.

Thirdly, the curriculum in Aliya madrasahs is integrated combining Islamic and secular subjects. Even though students of the Aliyah madrasahs are weaker than students of general schools in secular subjects and weaker than students in Qomi madrasahs in Islamic subjects, they at least are combining the best of both systems. In any case, with proper control the quality of education in integrated schools can reach the required standards.

One of the best things that the Government did in its efforts to equate between the two systems is that teachers in the Aliyah madrasahs have the same conditions of service as teachers in general public schools. Also Government has equated different levels of the Aliyah madrasah system with corresponding levels in the general education system giving the products of the Aliyah system the same recognition as those of the secular system. Furthermore Government substantially funds Aliyah madrasahs by paying all the teachers in every school.

In terms of welfare, the students in both Aliyah and Qomi madrasahs are clean, healthy and well fed with many of the schools having boarding facilities. Thus, there is no reason why we should have almajirai in Nigeria in such a dejected state roaming about the streets begging.

It is also interesting to note that there are lots of female madrasahs and both government and community are keen on giving females qualitative Islamic education. The lesson to be learnt from this is that special attention must be given to female education to bring gender balance at all levels.

Egypt

Egypt operates two parallel educational systems, secular and Islamic, with each having recognition and funding from Government. The Al-Azhar Islamic educational system in the country is well developed dating back to the establishment of the world's oldest university in 972AH. The system consists of more than 8,000 schools across the country, with about 2 million

pupils. Students who successfully complete the secondary stage and pass the examinations are automatically given admission into Al-Azhar University. The subjects studied are the traditional Islamic subjects such as Qur'an, Fiqh, Seerah, Hadith, Arabic Language, Usul ul Fiqh and Ulum ul Qur'an. Males and females attend separate classes.

There is not much integration between the secular educational system and the Islamic educational system but Al Azhar University has conventional faculties. Also students in the Islamic educational system study some basic subjects.

In addition to the schools under Al-Azhar University, there are also large numbers of traditional Islamic schools known as katatib (singular kuttab) generally attached to mosques. These are very similar to the makarantun allo and Islamiyyah schools in Nigeria. Many students, especially those in urban centres, combine their studies in katatib done very early in the mornings with formal schools later in the day. However, many others, especially those in rural areas, attend only the katatib.

There has been some attempt to integrate the katatib into Al Azhar educational system. Students who go through katatib are given the opportunity to get admitted into Al Azhar schools if they pass the appropriate examinations.

In addition, there are some private schools that have attempted to integrate the Al Azhar curriculum into the conventional secular curriculum so as to give their students a more well-rounded comprehensive curriculum. Such schools are partially supervised by Al-Azhar University and after graduation

students from such schools can choose to join either Al Azhar University or any of the other conventional universities.

Sudan

The Islamic traditional system in Sudan consists of khalwas where students are primarily taught the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an together with other Islamic subjects. The Khalwas of Sudan are very similar to the traditional Qur'anic schools (tsangaya) of Nigeria. In addition the system of studying the Qur'an using slates and based on the individual student approach is identical in both systems. However, the curriculum of khalwas, while concentrating on the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an, allows other Islamic subjects. Also, the welfare conditions of students of khalwas are substantially better than for almajirai. Khalwas get a lot of support from the Government and the communities. Furthermore, some khalwas have an integrated curriculum allowing students to proceed to Islamic universities.

There is a Ministry of Religious Affairs, part of whose functions is to take care of khalwas. There are also a number of religious institutes that admit graduates of khalwas and take them through a curriculum of secondary Islamic education at the end of which they can get admitted into the Islamic University of Omdurman or the University of the Holy Qur'an and Islamic Sciences. Some khalwas have within them this secondary branch which allows students to proceed directly to the Islamic universities.

There have been attempts by the current administration to introduce more religious values and Islamic teachings to the overall educational system so that the curriculum in all schools, colleges, and universities would consist of two parts: an obligatory part based on revealed knowledge concerning all disciplines and the optional course of study that would permit the student to select certain specializations according to individual aptitudes and inclinations.

There has also been a project to integrate Qur'anic memorization into secular schools. The idea is to have all students memorize the Qur'an using traditional methods while in primary school. The project started as a pilot project by an NGO that managed some Islamic private schools and it succeeded very well resulting in some states adopting the method in their conventional public schools.

Gambia

The Islamic educational system in Gambia, in spite of lack of recognition and funding from the Government, has remained intact to date. It consists of the traditional Qur'anic schools, virtually identical to the *tsangaya* of Nigeria known as *khalwas*, and the more modern *madrassas* that are the equivalent of Nigeria's *Islamiyyah* general and *Islamiyyah* primary and secondary schools. The *madrassas* follow a curriculum using Arabic as a medium of instruction which emphasizes Islamic education. They are privately-owned and operated, with their students having to pay fees, but they do also get substantial financial assistance from foreign religious organizations. A

majority of the madrassas have excellent infrastructure, have adequate and qualified teachers, and offer good teaching.

Recently, there have been efforts to introduce the teaching of English and other conventional subjects into the curriculum of madrassas so that they comply with the newly revised Educational Policy (2003). These efforts are being co-ordinated by the General Secretariat for Islamic/Arabic Education (GSIAE) which is being assisted by a number of NGOs that are involved in the promotion of Islamic education.

In contrast, the khalwas concentrate only on teaching the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an similar to the tsangaya of Nigeria. There is, however, a striking difference with the tsangaya. The students of these khalwas, in spite of the fact that they are boarding, do not beg at all. This is surprising in view of the fact that Gambia is a poor country especially when compared to Nigeria. The students' welfare needs – feeding, housing, clothing and health – are taken care of by a combination of the efforts of the parents of the students, the communities around them and the teachers.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia operates two parallel systems of education side by side with each system recognized and fully funded by the Government. Each system goes all the way to the university level. The conventional system follows a curriculum similar to what obtains in other countries. The language of instruction is Arabic for all subjects up to the secondary level with English as one of the subjects. In the tertiary level, some courses, especially

medicine, are offered in English. There is a strong dose of Islamic studies in the entire curriculum from the primary level all the way to the tertiary level.

The Islamic system of education concentrates on the traditional Islamic subjects such as Fiqh, Seerah, Hadith and Qur'an naturally offered in Arabic. The system is geared towards producing Islamic scholars that ultimately get jobs as teachers, judges and, in some cases, civil servants. Over and above the formal Islamic educational system, there is a strong wave of Qur'anic study circles that are springing up in mosques all over the country

SECTION FIVE: PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT REFORM

Introduction

Since independence in 1960, there have been various attempts in Nigeria to address the problems of the Islamic educational system. They have been done by the defunct Northern Regional Government, the Federal Government (through its agencies), the state governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Some of these attempts are highlighted in this section. The recent efforts by the Kano State Government under the Shekarau Administration are also discussed. It is a pity that these various attempts have not resulted in concretely addressing these problems and, to a large extent, many of the problems are still as they were 50 years ago.

Efforts by the Defunct Northern Regional Government

The first efforts were by the defunct Northern Regional Government which set up a special high powered committee to carefully study the problems and proffer recommendations. The committee, amongst other activities, visited a number of North African countries to study the prevailing Islamic systems of education in these countries and at the end of their assignment they submitted a comprehensive report.

Unfortunately, a military coup overthrew the then government and the recommendations were never fully implemented. It is however worth noting that the few efforts by some of the northern states, to a large extent, all derive from these original recommendations

Efforts by Federal Government Agencies

Many of the parastatals under the Federal Ministry of Education have initiated programmes and projects aimed at addressing the multifarious challenges being faced by the Islamic education system. In the last few years, these attempts have become more vigorous. The most active organization has naturally been UBEC given its mandate to provide access to qualitative education for all children of school age. UBEC has held various workshops to discuss issues related to especially almajirai in addition to providing funds to some of the SUBEBs (state universal basic education boards) to carry out certain pilot projects.

The Education Trust Fund has also tried to intervene in a positive way. In addition to holding its own workshops, it has initiated a process of establishing, in collaboration with state governments, model tsangaya schools in some northern states. These schools are expected to operate an integrated curriculum which emphasizes Qur'anic recitation/memorization together with the normal secular subjects in a conducive learning environment.

Other agencies such as National Mass Education Commission and the National Agency for Nomadic Education have also, in various ways, made efforts to address these problems.

Perhaps, the boldest efforts in recent times have been done by the current administration through a special "Madrassah Committee" established by the Federal Ministry of Education headed by Prof. S.A.S. Galadanci with the secretariat at the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). This committee, in addition to designing integrated curricula for the various levels of the tsangaya system, have established a large number of schools in different states across the country. These schools have been designed to allow the teaching of both Islamic and conventional subjects. In addition to classes and laboratories, they have mosques and recitation halls for the memorization of the Holy Qur'an. Once the schools are built, they are handed over to the state ministries of education which, according to the arrangement, are to provide teachers and all other requirements for the proper functioning of the schools.

Efforts by Non Governmental Agencies and International Organizations

A number of NGOs have been operating in the arena of Islamic education and have been making efforts to address the problems therein in various ways. The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Nigeria Office, has carried out a number of studies on the problems facing the Islamic education system and has produced various academic reports and papers. The Islamic Development Network, Kano has carried out pilot projects in a number of tsangaya schools aimed at improving the quality of education and improving the welfare of almajirai. The Millenium Hope Programme, Kaduna, has also been making admirable efforts in supporting the almajirai of tsangaya schools and providing for them avenues to get secular education in addition.

There have also been several international development agencies such as USAID, DFID, UNESCO and UNICEF that have intervened in various ways and have tried to share the experiences they have accumulated in working on the same issues in other countries. DFID, in particular, has in the last few years had pilot projects in a number of northern states where teachers are sent to traditional Qur'anic schools to teach them conventional subjects.

All these efforts, disjointed as they have been, all provide experiences that are useful in the current attempts at transforming the Islamic system of education.

The Kano State Experience

At the inception of the first tenure of His Excellency, Malam Ibrahim Shekarau, the Executive Governor of Kano State, in May 2003, he pledged to the people of Kano State that his administration would bring about a revolution where Government accords due importance to the Islamic educational system, gives special attention to the upliftment of its standards, squarely addresses all the problems and challenges facing the system, and duly recognizes and employs the products and teachers of the system. Shortly thereafter, he created the office of the Special Adviser on Education and IT to carry out this assignment and tasked the office to undertake a comprehensive study of the entire system of Islamic education (including the traditional Qur'anic schools known as the tsangaya system, the Islamiyya and ilmi schools) and thereafter come up with concrete strategies aimed at addressing all the problems of the system.

The first result of this project was a comprehensive Action Plan which identified several key strategies thus:

- Government to consult widely with all stakeholders of the system, especially the alarammomi, and to massively sensitize and mobilize them and the society in general using all available means
- Government to improve the welfare conditions of the teachers and students in the system and their learning environments.
- Government to duly recognize the products of the system and create employment opportunities to them as teachers, Imams, civil servants etc.

- Government to widen opportunities for the products of the system to further their education up to the tertiary level.
- Government to improve the quality of education by promoting teacher training and the development of uniform curricula and textbooks especially for Islamiyyah schools.
- Government to motivate organizations, wealthy individuals and the society in general to actively participate in these noble efforts.

Many of these strategies have been tried and some modest achievements have been recorded some of which include:

- Carrying out a state-wide census on Qur'anic, Islamiyya and Ilmi schools (26,000 schools, 2 million students). This provided very useful baseline data that has been very useful for planning purposes.
- Sensitization of major stakeholders of the system through seminars for alarammomi (over 25,000 alarammomi) and regular weekly Radio and TV programmes that are listened by large numbers of the populace.
- Skill Development Programmes for products of Qur'anic schools in tailoring, carpentry, shoemaking, Islamic calligraphy, electrical installation and computers. (Over 1200 young alarammas trained). This has provided job opportunities for the products of these Qur'anic schools.
- Visits of Alarammas to other countries (Sudan, Gambia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bangladesh). This was an eye opener for the alarammomi and in particular it allowed the study of how other muslim countries have dealt with similar challenges.

- Infrastructural Development projects to improve living conditions of almajirai (Over 500 small, medium and large projects undertaken).
- Establishment of Colleges of Qur’anic Studies (Two have so far been completed in Gwarzo and Tudun Wada LGAs and they have already admitted students)
- Feeding programmes for almajirai of Qur’anic schools with the aim of reducing the incidence of begging amongst almajirai. These have been varied including:
 - Mass Food Production Programme that involved the provision of agricultural training, distribution of fertilizer and improved seeds to over 6000 alarammomi (covering over 200,000 almajirai)
 - Distribution of cows and other farming implements to alarammomi
 - Pilot Feeding Programme in Makoda, Ajingi and Warawa LGAs for a period of six months that involved over 1,500 alarammomi (having over 30,000 almajirai). During these months, almajirai in these LGAs stopped begging illustrating that begging by almajirai could be completely stopped.
- Establishment of Tsangaya Trust Fund to encourage the wealthy and well-off members of the society as well as all others to contribute to improving the welfare of almajirai.
- Recognition of the Products of Qur’anic Schools: In 2007, the Kano State House of Assembly passed a law that equates all those that have fully memorized the Holy Qur’an with university graduates. This means that anyone already employed or to be employed henceforth

will enjoy the same privileges as a university graduate in terms of starting salary and allowances.

- **Increasing Islamic Education Content in Government Owned Schools:**
There are efforts to start a pilot project that would look at the possibility of increasing the Islamic education content, especially the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an, in the curricula of government owned primary and secondary schools. This is being done in collaboration with DFID as part of the Islamic, Qur'anic and Tsangaya Education (IQTE) Sub-Sector Plan in the wider 10-year State Education Sector Plan (SESP). This sub-sector plan also comprises recommendations to strengthen data gathering and management capacity and to establish an IQTE board.

The various programmes listed above that were implemented were very successful. They were all helpful in ameliorating the welfare conditions of almajirai and improving the tsangaya system of education. In particular, the pilot programmes all demonstrated that with adequate funding many of the problems of almajirai can be completely solved.

SECTION SIX : EXPLORING THE OPTIONS

The first few sections of this paper have given an overview of the Islamic education system, listed the different types of schools that make up the Islamic education system, discussed the problems associated with the various types of schools and looked at the efforts of some Muslim countries in addressing these problems.

It is important to note that all the problems are essentially educational in nature, even if some of them such as the problems of the almajirai of tsangaya schools may be partially economic. Whatever the case, the responsibility of addressing them falls squarely on the shoulders of the different tiers of government. The Federal Government must have a critical look at the entire system and evolve a specific policy that directly addresses the problems of the system. It must also be willing to intervene financially in order to address some of the immediate problems while providing adequate funding for the appropriate transformation of the system. On their parts, the state and local governments are the primary implementors of educational policy in their domains and they are therefore the principal actors in ensuring that these problems are properly addressed.

The required overall strategy would be to provide a comprehensive system of education that will meet the yearnings and aspirations of the majority of Muslim parents. This would need to cover both Islamic and western education components. The challenge is to modify existing schools so that they meet these requirements and to build as many new ones as possible in the various levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) as are required so that all children of school age would be in school receiving quality comprehensive education

Exploring Various Options

A number of broad possible options are explored in this section. Each option is analysed by studying its benefits and drawbacks and at the end of the

analysis, the optimal option is selected. This option is then expanded in the next section.

1. Maintaining a Single Unified Educational System

To a large extent, the current Nigerian education policy promotes a unified educational system which is largely secular. Many countries all over the world, even those that have fairly divided populations on the basis of language, race or other factors, advocate such unified systems because in the end this brings about citizens that are united and have the same culture, values and worldview.

The main drawback of this system is that it would not seek to address the problems of those within the Islamic educational system (students of Islamiyya schools and almajirai of tsangaya) that are now completely excluded from the system. If at all they are to be integrated into the system, they would have to be forced to abandon the system they are currently enrolled in and migrate to the single recognized system. Alternatively, the Islamic educational system would have to be completely overhauled so as to metamorphose into the single recognized system.

The history of the Islamic educational system in Nigeria and other Muslim countries shows that the system has an inert strength and latent energy that allows it to survive attempts to eliminate it or force it to abandon its sublime principles. At the onset of colonialism in virtually all Muslim countries, such attempts were made and they never succeeded. They may have resulted in

weakening the system but nowhere did they succeed in completely obliterating the system or removing it from its essential objectives.

2. Creating and Supporting Two Parallel Systems of Education

Many countries facing similar challenges have opted to create and support two parallel systems of education; the modern secular and the traditional Islamic systems. Each system would have its own organizational structure, curriculum, schools, teacher qualifications, examinations etc.

A number of countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia are successfully implementing this model. The main advantage of this approach is that, to some extent, it is the simplest to implement in a country like Nigeria where already the two systems are operating side-by-side except that currently only the secular system is recognized and supported by the Government. It would therefore just involve slightly introducing some modifications to the Islamic system of education, if necessary, and then recognizing and supporting the system in virtually the same way that is done to the secular system

The main disadvantage of this model is the two systems would continuously come out with two different types of products that, to a large extent, are incompatible in terms of their educational experiences, outlooks and worldviews. There would likely be a lot of tension between the two groups which is not good for national unity.

The other drawback is that each system may not necessarily, in itself, be all-inclusive of the type of education required to produce responsible citizens.

Thus, while the secular system may not have enough grounding in morals and values, the Islamic educational system, on its part, may not be able to impart the skill sets that are so necessary to succeed in today's knowledge driven economy.

3. Different Systems with Each Fulfilling Minimum Requirements

This system may well be an amalgamation of the first and second options but it is worth considering it as an option in itself. This is a model where the Government should put in place minimum standards that must be fulfilled by any system in terms of especially the curriculum and other basic requirements. It should then give some level of flexibility that would allow schools to add other contents/subjects/requirements over and above these minimum standards.

The main advantage of this approach is that it brings about products that combine the benefits of both the Islamic and secular systems of education. These would have an integrated education that provides them with all the skills and knowledge required to operate successfully in the modern world while at the same time grooming them morally and spiritually to be responsible and law abiding citizens. More so it reduces the conflicts that arise when there are two groups of products with different worldviews as well as the tensions and frustrations of those left out when there is only one recognized system.

The drawback, however, as has been observed in countries like Bangladesh is that the products of the integrated system are generally weaker than their counterparts in both the purely secular and purely Islamic education systems.

Analysis of the Various Options

From the above discussion on the three options, the first option is certainly not suitable since it is the one that is currently in operation and probably the cause of many of the problems that are being faced. The second option is viable but the conflicts it brings about are not healthy for nation building. It would appear that the third option is the optimal solution to all the problems currently being faced even if there are challenges in implementing such an option.

The greatest challenge in this option is implementing the major policy shift in the National Policy of Education that would allow different systems of education to exist side-by-side as long as they fulfill some minimum requirements. In view of the obvious difficulties in pushing such a major policy shift, perhaps, the way to do it would be to enact appropriate legislation that would recognize the different variations of the Islamic educational system as long as they fulfill the minimum requirements.

The major tasks would then be identifying these minimum requirements one the one hand and transforming the Islamic educational system to conform to these minimum requirements on the other hand.

SECTION SEVEN: THE WAY FORWARD

The last section analysed a number of options and settled on the one which advocates for a national policy of education that sets minimum curricula and other standards and then supports and gives recognition to any system of education that meets these minimum standards. Such a policy will, therefore, allow diverse systems to exist side by side while ensuring that all products of the various systems have some basic common denominator.

The major tasks then in addressing the problems highlighted would be transforming the various schools that represent the entire spectrum of the Islamic education system so that they fulfill these minimum standards and thereby get the required support and recognition from Government.

Looking at the types of schools that were listed at the beginning of this paper to, it is easy to see that the schools that are most likely to meet these minimum standards are the Islamiyyah and Tahfeez primary and secondary schools. This is because already such schools operate integrated curricula that combine secular and Islamic subjects.

General Islamiyyah and general tahfeez schools on the one hand as well as makarantun allo and tsangaya schools on the other hand would have greater difficulties in satisfying such minimum requirements. However, the Islamiyyah and Tahfeez schools are much more likely to be transformed such that they are able to fulfill such requirements than the makarantun allo and tsangaya schools. This assertion is based on the experience that is available which shows that Islamiyyah and Tahfeez schools readily – indeed

eagerly - transform into Islamiyyah primary and Tahfeez primary schools while makarantun allo and tsangaya show very stiff resistance to any form of introduction of secular subjects to their curriculum.

It would appear, therefore, the major thrust should be to motivate Islamiyyah and Tahfeez schools to transform into integrated primary schools and to strengthen existing Islamiyyah primary and tahfeez primary schools. With respect to makaraantun allo and tsangaya schools, perhaps, in addition to whatever encouragement to reform their curriculum to become more integrated, the main strategy should be to establish government owned Islamiyyah and Tahfeez schools (even if they are not integrated to start with) in especially rural areas where the makarantun allo and tsangaya schools are prevalent. This would provide an alternative for parents in the rural areas and as more of such Islamiyyah and Tahfeez schools are established, the weak makarantun allo and tsangaya schools are likely to be eliminated leaving only the strong, viable and well organized ones.

In order for this strategy to succeed, there is the need to address a number of issues under various appropriate frameworks such as policy, legislation, institutional, incentives, welfare and funding. A number of recommendations are given below on these issues:

1. Policy Framework

It is obvious that in order to properly address the various problems that have been discussed in this write-up, the starting point may well be a strong policy. The policy must address various issues including the status of

Islamic education within the overall Nigerian Policy on Education, the extent to which Government should intervene in the system, the types of interventions envisaged and the responsibility of Government in implementing the interventions and providing adequate funding.

As mentioned elsewhere above, it is recommended that Government should recognize the different variants of the Islamic Educational system as long as they satisfy some minimum requirements. The types of schools that satisfy the requirements should get full recognition, support and assistance while those that do not should be encouraged to transform appropriately through suitable incentives. Irrespective of whether a system is recognized or not, it must meet basic requirements of infrastructure and welfare of students in order to be allowed to operate.

2. Legal Framework

Needless to say, it is important for the policy to have legal backing. This would give Government the authority to implement and enforce it. It would also ensure the continuity of the programmes being implemented to actualize the policy and succeeding governments would be bound to carry on with the implementation of the policy unless they reverse the legislation.

The legislation should understandably touch on the broad policy issues, state the overall objectives, set out the major activities to be implemented, clarify on the institutional framework required and explain how funding would be derived.

The broad policy issues would be the status of madrassah education in the overall scheme of things, the minimum standards that madrassahs must attain in order to qualify for government support and funding, and the thrust in ensuring that there is a certain level of integration between the Islamic system of education and the secular educational system.

Issues related to the institutional framework, funding and the major activities to be implemented are discussed later in this section.

3. Institutional Framework

An important issue that needs to be addressed is the institutional framework that is best suited to tackle the multifarious problems of the Islamic educational system and implement the policy on madrassah education. It would appear that UBEC already is overburdened with responsibilities that adding more to it may not be the best way out. There may be the need for a special purpose parastatal that can fully devote itself to implementing the policy of integrating the Islamic system of education with the secular system. This parastatal should obviously be under the Federal Ministry of Education. It should be ideally headed by an Executive Secretary with a board to oversee it. This board should have proper representation from alammomi, Islamic scholars, proprietors of Islamiyyah schools and the like. Its branches should be established in the states, especially the northern states which have a proliferation of Islamiyyah and Qur'anic schools.

The main functions of this parastatal should be to implement the national policy on madrassah education which could include establishing and running

Qur'anic and Islamiyyah primary, secondary and tertiary schools, offering support to community owned Qur'anic and Islamiyyah schools, ensuring the quality of these schools, supervising the schools, offering teacher training, assisting traditional Qur'anic schools to convert into other models so as to get government support and funding, and a host of other related things.

Needless to say, the personnel to man this parastatal at the federal and state levels should be people with wide experience and exposure on both the secular and the Islamic systems of education. In the past, states that had agencies of Islamic education insisted on placing only Islamic scholars in positions of authority. While this had its share of benefits, it often brought about disagreements and differences with the mainstream education agencies.

4. Educational Framework

The proposal, as earlier highlighted, is to have different systems operating parallel to each other but all satisfying minimum standards and having interconnections amongst them. All the systems are duly recognized by Government and are equivalent at the various levels. Furthermore, it should be possible to transfer from one system to another especially at the terminal points of each level. Thus a student who completes his studies at an Islamiyyah primary school should be able to get enrolled in a conventional secondary school if he passes the necessary entrance examinations just as a student who completes her studies in a Tahfeez secondary school should be able to get admitted into the Faculty of Medicine of a conventional university if she fulfils all the requirements.

It would be more difficult for the product of a tsangaya school to get enrolled into a professional degree course but hopefully as some tsangaya begin to adopt integrated curricula, this would be possible. Also, it would be equally difficult for a student who passes out from a conventional primary school to get enrolled into a Tahfeez secondary school unless he has been attending an evening tahfeez school in addition to his conventional primary school.

These examples show the flexibility that should be present within the systems and the options that ought to be available for students. All this can only be possible if there are standard accepted syllabi that are used in all schools.

5. Incentives Framework

There are various types of schools that make up the spectrum of the Islamic educational system. They include makarantun allo, tsangaya, Islamiyya general, tahfeez general, Islamiyyah/tahfeez primary and secondary schools etc. If the policy of minimum standards is adopted, all these schools could qualify for recognition as long as they contain in their curricula the minimum requirements in basic education. If they qualify, then depending on their level of qualification, they could be eligible for various forms of support from the government including grant-in-aid for the development of infrastructure, teachers paid by government, teacher training, donations of teaching and learning materials and the like.

It may be expedient to classify the schools into 3 groups. The first group would constitute the fully integrated schools which would have integrated curricula that are above the minimum requirements for both the secular subjects and the Islamic subjects. They should get maximum support especially grant-in-aid assistance for infrastructural development and provision of teachers.

The second group would consist of those schools that have started the integration process and are committed to undergoing the necessary changes in order to fully transform themselves into fully integrated schools. They should get a different level of support; lower than that of the first group but enough to motivate them to continue the process to its logical conclusion. This could be provision of teachers in specific subjects (perhaps in conventional disciplines), training of teachers, supply of learning materials (books etc) and management/logistic support to make the transformation.

The third group would comprise all the other schools; supposedly those that are not making any efforts to introduce integration. These could include makarantun allo and tsangaya schools where only the Qur'an is taught, general Islamiyyah and tahfeez schools where only Islamiyyah subjects are taught and possibly Islamiyyah and Tahfeez primary and secondary schools that may be operating an integrated curriculum but have fallen short of the minimum requirements and are not making enough efforts to reach the required standards. Assistance to these schools should be minimal or, better still, none at all because that is the only way they would be motivated to become serious on the integration process.

The success of this system of incentives based on grouping depends, to a large extent, on the establishment of an objective method of measuring the extent of compliance of any given school to a set of clear criteria and the strict application of the incentives without fear or favour to those that qualify.

While this may be easy to say, it is important to note that it is going to be very difficult to implement such a system in Nigeria, where there is unfortunately a notorious disregard for following rules strictly as well as a situation whereby incentives are often given as a favour rather than on merit. In fact many states, such as Kano, already have such a policy in place where the State Government provides teachers to Islamiyyah schools in order to motivate them to convert into Islamiyyah primary schools. Sadly, the system is not being properly implemented and the beneficiary schools may not be getting the incentives based on their meeting the necessary requirements.

It may be worthwhile to ask here whether schools should be penalized for their failure to have integrated curricula over and above their inability to secure incentives. This would depend on how far the policy on madrassah education goes in making it compulsory for schools to have an integrated curriculum. If it goes far enough – and this may be too much – then there could be punitive measures. On the other hand, if it only advocates for an integrated curriculum without making it absolutely necessary – which would probably be better – then there cannot be any punitive measures on the schools that choose not to be integrated. In any case, these may be schools where the students are getting their religious education in addition to the

secular education they are receiving in conventional schools as is often the case.

6. Welfare

The deplorable welfare conditions of the students of the tsangaya system, as has been pointed earlier in this paper, is one of the most serious problems that the Islamic system of education is identified with and blamed for. There are a number of ways that these problems can be addressed by the government.

First, from a policy and legal perspective, no communities or individuals should be allowed to operate any type of school unless they meet some basic requirements. In the specific case of a tsangaya, which is boarding by nature, no individual or group should be allowed to establish it unless they show proof that the basic minimum infrastructure exists and the welfare conditions of the almajirai can be guaranteed. The infrastructure would include facilities for lodging the students as well as space where lessons would take place. To start with, the requirements may not need to be too stringent. For example, study sheds may be accepted and not necessarily fully built classes just as rooms/stalls may be allowed in place of proper dormitories. However, the facilities have to be available and owned by the school before it is given permission to operate.

To prove that it is able to adequately take care of the feeding, health and other welfare needs of its students, the school must show in concrete terms that parents are able to pay for these needs or the community (or some other

group or individual) has undertaken to cater for these needs or the school is able to shoulder these responsibilities in some other way.

Secondly, the itinerant nature of the schools has to be banned because it is this aspect that is one of the major causes of the troubles of the system. There is really no reason why almajirai have to be moved about seasonally from one place to another. If such movements could be justified for nomadic education, there is no justification for them in the case of a typical tsangaya. Therefore, a tsangaya should be allowed to operate only if it is permanent.

In fact, the boarding nature of tsangaya should be discouraged because if they were day schools, many of the problems associated with them would disappear. However, it would not be expedient to demand that they must all be day. Those that have the facilities and resources to operate as boarding schools should be allowed to do so but they must prove that they are able to adequately cater for the welfare of their students.

It must be understood that it is very difficult for government - whether at the federal, state or local levels – to be responsible for taking care of the basic welfare needs of its students. This is very clear when one looks at the difficulties state governments face with their few boarding schools. Thus, it is practically impossible for government to be responsible for the welfare of the very large number of children that are now in the tsangaya system in the different northern states.

Should there be any efforts by government to assist tsangaya schools in taking care of the welfare needs of their almajirai? This question is fairly

difficult to answer. With the very large number of tsangaya schools currently in existence, it does not make any sense. However, if it is assumed that, in the near future, the number of tsangaya would decrease while the numbers of Islamiyya and tahfeez primary and secondary schools increase to the point where tsangaya schools become specialized schools then it would make sense to offer assistance to tsangaya schools using some considerations. Perhaps, the guidelines should be to provide assistance to those tsangaya schools that show considerable promise in being able to substantially cater for the welfare of their students. This policy would therefore strengthen the strong tsangaya and hopefully weed out the weak and unviable ones.

7. Funding

To some extent, what would determine the success or otherwise of the various reforms advocated above is the availability of funding. It is therefore important to think about how the implementation of the overall policy would be funded and, in particular, how the specific proposed interventions would get financial backing.

It should be emphasised here that as it is well known education is constitutionally on the concurrent list and this makes it the responsibility of all the governments at the federal, state and local levels. Given the enormity of the problems discussed above and the dire need to address them squarely, all the tiers of government should be required to adequately fund the proposed agency that would be in charge of implementing this policy.

It is suggested that the bulk of the funding should come from the Federal Government. Much as the phenomenon of almajirai and the other related problems are not associated with all states of the Federation, they affect a substantial number of states and in any case the resulting consequences impinge on the progress of the entire nation. It is further recommended that the funds be disbursed to states in very much the same way UBEC distributes funds to states where they have to fulfil certain conditions and in most cases provide counterpart funding.

State governments themselves must be willing to provide substantial funding to these efforts. It must be realized that a substantial number of school age children –up to 50% according to some estimates - in many northern states are currently enrolled only in the Islamic education system. In the face of these large numbers, huge amounts of funds are obviously required in order to positively intervene in this system and bring changes within it that would provide the children with better education.

It would appear that the funds would be used in three broad areas. The first area is to run the administration of the madrassah education agencies at both the federal and state levels. The second area is for the establishment and running of government owned Islamiyyah and Tahfeez primary and secondary schools. The third area would be to fund the various incentives that need to be offered to community owned schools that would likely continue to form the majority of schools within the Islamic education spectrum. These incentives, as explained earlier, include grant-in-aid for infrastructural projects, provision of teachers, teacher training and provision of teaching and learning materials.

8. Recognition of Products of the System and Work Opportunities

One of the earlier highlighted problems is the fact that the products of the Islamic educational system are not recognized at all by Government. This means that they cannot use their certificates to get employment either within or outside the government. It is hoped that once there is a reversal of this policy and the products of the Islamic educational system are recognized, then those coming out of the Islamic educational system would have the same privileges as products of the secular education system and this would boost their self esteem and image.

Even then, there will still be the need to give additional job opportunities to products of this system especially those of the tsangaya system (graduating from colleges of Qur'anic Studies and obtaining Diplomas on Qur'anic Studies). It is recommended that those with such qualifications should be recruited in government owned primary and secondary schools to teach the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an to students. This, as has been earlier stated, is a win-win situation where the teachers get employed and the students of government owned schools get more integrated education that would be better accepted by parents.

SECTION EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to give an overview of the Islamic education system in Nigeria and discussed the efforts to integrate and synthesize between the two

systems. It has been clearly explained in the write-up that the Islamic education system in Nigeria, including the schools that comprise it and the curricula being used as well as the teachers and students of the system, is facing a lot of challenges. These challenges vary from the poor physical infrastructure that exists in most of the schools to limited curricula to the lack of recognition of products of the system down to the very deplorable welfare conditions of the millions of almajirai all over northern Nigeria. Unless these challenges are promptly addressed, they are likely to have disastrous consequences to the development of the entire nation.

This paper has given broad recommendations on how these problems could be solidly addressed. While all stakeholders have important roles to play in solving these problems, the role of Government is very critical. Needless to say, there is the need of strong political will on the part of the various arms and levels of government which should translate into good policy formulation, appropriate legislation, proper funding and strong implementation.