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## Fountain University's Strategies of Islamizing Knowledge: An Overview

*Ibrahim Lere Ameen*

### **Abstract**

The intention of this paper is to bring to the fore the strategies of Fountain University vis-à-vis knowledge Islamization. The approach adopted in this regard is basically descriptive coupled with personal observation of the writer. In this paper attempt is made to probe into the historical background of this programme with a particular reference to Nigerian experience of de-Islamization process which eventually necessitated the adoption of the programme in Nigeria. As a background to the study, a synopsis about the university is highlighted coupled with the methods being adopted to ensure not only the acquisition of sound knowledge but also the moral principle through these strategies. The paper concludes that the lofty goal of this programme will be better achieved if all the recommendations made are faithfully observed.

### **Introduction**

In spite of the conscious efforts of some western writers to manipulate and distort the history of Islam regarding its contribution to social development, the Muslims efforts in promoting knowledge in the annals of history remains unobliterated. There had been a period when Muslims had not only the monopoly of the heavenly religious knowledge but also played a leading role in the acquired knowledge known today as modern knowledge. The reigns of Abbasid caliphs such as Al-Mansur, Harun Rashid, Ma'mun and Al-Mutawakkil which gave due attention to the development of modern sciences deserve being mentioned. This period featured the establishment of Baytul- Hikmah (House of wisdom) which was dedicated for intellectual engagement. This intellectual effort which later culminated into establishment of various higher institutions of learning, according to Fafunwa (1975.2) started with religious schools of Thought. He stressed that "it was Islam that revived the pursuit of science and it was through the Arabs and not Romans that modern world achieved light and power through science".

The contribution of Ibn Sina (980-1037) known as Avicenna remains unparalleled in the annals of human medicine. Ibn Haitham (d.1039CE), the first scientist to draw the eye and analyze the Phenomenon of reflection and expansion still lingers in the books of history. Also, the input of Ibn Rushid in the studies of philosophy which held sway on European thoughts is worthy of being mentioned (Adebayo 2009:184, Fafuwa 1975:2) Here in Africa, the Muslims' contribution in writing history of the region cannot be under estimated. Of the Muslim figures with leading role in this regard is Hasan Ibn Muhammad al-Wassan al-Zayyati who, according to Fafunwa, was taken into captivity and renamed Leo Africanus. Mention must also be made of Ibn Batuta whose works on history of Africa remained unrivaled. It is worth mentioning that it was as a result of avalanche of information about Africa, well recorded in Arabic that necessitated the creation of the department of Arabic and Islamic studies in University of Ibadan. This was, according to the present Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor. Bamiro, to serve the department of history already in existence in the University. (Hunwick, 2008: v).

However, the collapse of Muslim dynasties which was partly due to Muslim's decline to knowledge acquisition was seen by the West not only to arrogate this glory to itself but also to de-Islamize the long natured Islamic institutions all over the world. The harrowing experience of Nigeria Muslims with the demolition of Sokoto Caliphate still lingers in our memory. The search to reclaim this past glory has brought about various strategies both at regional and international levels. In the recent conference held at Al-Asmariyyah University Libya, a call was made towards rewriting the history of Islam in West Africa to correct certain misconceptions caused by some aggressive western writers. Here in Nigeria a call has also been made to government to review the school curriculum at all levels to allay the fear of Muslims of having the religious identity of their wards eroded in the process of schooling. Equally Islamic model schools are being established to ensure the realization of the goal.

The recent approval of Nigerian government for operation of private university by individuals, corporate entities and private concerns (Osagie, nd./np.) is being seen by Nigerian Muslims as another measure to further their course. However, in spite of this unique opportunity, Nigerian Muslims can only lay claim on four universities which are: Al- Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kastina State University, Kastina and Crescent University, Abeokuta which

were licensed in 2005 and Fountain University established in May, 2007. (Alanamu et al, 2009: 164). Characteristically, two of these faith based Universities, Crescent University and Fountain University do not have Arabic & Islamic studies as an awardable degree programme, the scenario which make some Muslims doubt the seriousness of the schools regarding their claim of being faith based. Of these universities, this paper therefore aims at looking at veracity of the claim and analyzing the strategies being adopted by Fountain University at consolidating the efforts of several other Islamic institutions in the area of "Islamization of Knowledge".

### *The Conceptual Framework and Literature Review*

The word "Islamization" is etymologically of Arabic root, derived from a nominal word "Islam" and made undergo an English morphological process, to realize the term. The semantic impression given through this process implies that the term "Islamization" is all about Making things that are originally unislamic Islamic. This linguistic connotation has, in recent time, generated a lot of arguments from some scholars and researchers who disagree to the suitability of the term, in spite of the laudable implication of its content. Bidmos (2003:144) describes the term as being "a divergence instead of congruence between the term, its objective and content as what is currently referred to as western education has its Islamic origin". To this group of scholars other term are suggested for the replacement. These include: "de-westernization", "de-secularization", and "resacralization of knowledge".

Putting this linguistic argument apart, various scholars have advanced different technical definitions to this term, depending on individual understandings and orientations. In his definition, Alatas as quoted by Yaapar (2009:1) sees islamization in general as "... the liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic, natural contradiction and then secular control over his reason and his language". Also, Khalil, as quoted by Adebayo (2009:184) defines it as "practicing (i.e discovering, compiling, piecing together communicating and publishing intellectual activity based on Islamic concept of the universe, life and man".

In view of the reality revealed through the above conceptual analysis, one cannot but affirm the strong need of Nigeria to involve proactively in the struggle for the actualization of Islamization project. This is because, as argued by Aliero (nd:1) its history as old as the history of Islam itself.

According to him, at "the beginning of revelation received by the prophet (SAW), Allah commanded him.(the prophet) to read, to seek knowledge and to make use of the pen". This scenario which "presupposed that there was something to be read and acquired in line with Allah's injunction and there was something to be written" in compliance with divine injunction. The prophet, in spite of his being unlettered, gave a greater attention to this instruction, such that he asked his companions to travel as far China in search for knowledge. He (SAW) also rated it to the status of compulsion (Jimoh, 1996: 222) being a pre-requisite for understanding the *din*, which is itself obligatory. This legacy left behind, intact, for the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs was strictly preserved and developed throughout of their ruling period.

Tracing the origin of de-Islamization in Muslim world, Adebayo (2009:184) attributes the cause to the disintegration which eventually occurred within the Muslim Ummah. Aliero also observed that the scenario is not unconnected with rapid expansion of Islam. His word:

*With the rapid expansion and influx of foreign culture in Muslim countries, some aspects of un-Islamic practices began to manifest in their institutions and centers of learning. This became more pronounced after the colonization exercise. In fact after the colonization, the colonialist planted their western style of schools to enhance and perpetuate foreign colonial domination at the expense of traditional Islamic schools. (Aliero: nd:2)*

This intellectual takeover -a by-product of colonization, is what is technically termed as "de-Islamization" of knowledge which eventually gave rise to the Islamization of knowledge. However, the process of de-Islamisation is a globally floated programme aimed at dismantling not only the existing Muslim dynasties at the point of take-off; the focus was beyond the Fatimid in Egypt, Umayyad in Spain and other Muslim dominated areas such as Palestine and Turkey. The plan was to cover any Muslim quarter yet unborn. Here in Nigeria, the Islamisation process which began with the emergence of Sokoto caliphate, under the *Amirship* (Leadership) of Shaykh Uthman bin Fodio, was tactfully toppled in the name of colonization. The well structured Islamic institutions already in place were de-Islamised; the school curricula were changed to reflect the western values, Shariah Courts were abolished and their power of jurisdiction was reduced. The Qadis could only exert power on litigations with exclusion of criminal offences. Arabic, which was an effective

language of intellectualism, was replaced with English. (Birni-Tudu, 1996:161).

Given this state of affairs, the search for vibrant means of reclaiming the Islamic Legacy now remains a concern of conscious Muslims. According to Adebayo (2009:184) some Muslim reformers have tried different approaches but failed eventually. And this is what eventually brought about the present approach- Islamization of Knowledge – whose spade-work, according to Bidmos (2003:141) covers a period of ten years: 1982-1992. Yaapar (2009:1) submits that the right and best place to initiate and nurture the process of this “Islamization of Knowledge” is the academic. Adebayo (2008:iv) identifies two notable international Islamic Universities that are already floating the programme. These Universities are the International Islamic University, Malaysia and The International Islamic University, Islamabad. Also identified here in Nigeria are Usmanu Dan Fodio University, Sokoto, Bayero University, Kano, and The Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences. But it could be argued that those institutions that are not directly under the influence of secularistic governments could effectively handle the programme while those under such governments find it difficult to give it deserved attention. Attesting to this, Aliero, (nd: 3) submits thus;

*...in some institutions like Usman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto, where some Islamically oriented courses were incorporated in Social and Management Sciences, the National Universities Commission, (NUC) Accreditation Committee viewed them as unconventional and thus suggested for a review in order to revert to the so called conventional ones.*

### ***Fountain University and the Channels of Islamizing Knowledge***

Of the achievements of the World Conference on Muslim Education which held in about seven countries is the identification of potent channels by which the process of knowledge Islamization could be achieved. Notable among those channels as identified by Adebayo (2008:66-77) are: formulation of educational aims and objectives, organization of conferences, seminar, workshop, and enlightenment programmes, the production of islamised syllabi, publication of textbooks and journals and rise of educational and intellectual institutions and organizations. In Nigerian, prominent among the organization with profound efforts in the struggle is Nasrullahil Faith society of Nigeria (NASFAT).

Having had facile success in its initial purpose of establishment it repaired to floating an educational institution known as Fountain University sited in Osogbo. The university was licensed to operate as a private institution in the year 2007 (Ibrahim: 2010:3) It Commenced its academic operation with two colleges; Social & Management Sciences and Natural & Applied Sciences with foundation students estimated at 187 (Student Hand Book: 2007-2001:5). The initial courses run by the university includes: Industrial Chemistry, Biological Science, Computer Science, Physic / Electronics, Micro-Biology, Banking & Finance, Economic, Business Administration, Accounting and Political Science. Some other courses such as Sociology, Industrial Relation / Personnel Management, Chemistry, Organic Physic, Zoology, Animal Systematic and Plants Science Economy were later introduced. Presently all the initial courses have been accredited while the newly introduced ones have been fully prepared to withstand the accreditation rigor. The Vision of the University in not only to be a pace- setter in terms of character building and service to humanity at all strata but also to renew the commitment of Islam towards intellectualism, as showcased by early Muslims. This belief of Fountain University finds an expression in the submission of Aliero (nd:3) thus;

*...unless Muslim Scholars get together to create their own school of Social Sciences and Humanities and rise to challenge the hypothesizing western scientists who ignore the operation of the divine Will in nature, the time is not far off when Muslim societies will be as 'permissive' as Western societies are and Islam will be safely preserved in the Book – form in the Qur'an and Hadith...The longer the Muslims to depend on others for their developmental needs, the more actualization of Islamization of Knowledge will continue to be a mirage."*

It is in view of this that Fountain University sees the need to design its academic programmes in such a way that reflect Islamic ideal.

### ***Fountain University Strategies towards Knowledge Islamisation***

It should be stated from the onset that formulating strategies for knowledge Islamisation is not an attempt to forcefully revert the non-Muslim students and staff alike back to Islam, as such is repugnant to the ethnic of *daw'ah* Q2; 262. The objective is basically to rediscover the values of Islam that have long been dragged into the mud of gross misconceptions, to refine the de-Islamized

institutions wittingly portrayed by the West as the bedrock of all evils. This, it is believed, will go a long way to facilitate the understanding of the religion of Islam and hence create mutual co-existence of those participating in the University programme among different religions adherents. However, these multidimensional strategies are as follows:

- **The Curriculum Design:** Being convinced of the fact that the most efficient weapon used by the West to distort Muslim Ideology and strip them of their religio-cultural Identity was education, the University Management designed the Programme Suitable for the realization of University laudable objective. Though, the Curriculum designed did not initially include Arabic and Islamic as awardable degree Programme. The reason for Non-inclusion, according to the pioneer Vice Chancellor –Professor HOB Oloyede, resulted from the fear of having students to sustain the Department in view of societal attitude towards the courses. Some parents including Muslims are not ready to invest on the Course as they believe it to be of no future prospect. (Ibrahim, 2009:5)

Notwithstanding, the course is designed to be taught to all the university students regardless their area of Specialization and Religious affiliation. Primarily, the Programme is not aimed at teaching Fundamental Pillars of Islam such as an Salat, Zakat, Ramadan Fasting e.t.c as the possibility of having non-Muslim students was considered while designing the curriculum. Rather, the programme is focused on Islamic Ethics and Culture. This enables the Muslim Students understand their religion better, exposes them to the role played by early Muslims particularly in the area of education and the need for them to keep up the struggle. The non-Muslim Students will, at least, have certain misconceptions about Islam cleared in their minds. Ultimately, it engenders the Spirit of religious tolerance and facilitates mutual co-operation in the interest of national development. Another general course relevant for the achievement this laudable goal is the History of Science. The course is always ensured to be taken by the expert in the area, being an aspect that better elaborates or bring afore the contributions of early Muslims in the field of sciences. This, we hope, will further ginger our Muslim wards to be more committed not only in pursuance of academic excellence but also being spiritually balanced in the scheme of things. As a Muslim school, Arabic is chosen as a foreign language to be taught to all students. (Ibrahim, 2009:3).

- **Appointment Strategy:** - in view of its set goal, the management strictly priorities the appointment of Muslim experts without compromising

the standard. This informs the reason why the interview personnel constitute not only experts in individual chosen field but also in Islamic studies. Aside the candidate's soundness in his chosen carrier, the methodology of imparting knowledge along with the spirit of Islam is also tested. Notwithstanding, the University presently has among its staff some adjunct lecturers who are tolerant non – Muslims.

• **Moral and Spiritual Rehabilitation Centre:** - This centre is an offshoot of Students Affairs Unit of the university. The birth of the centre has no bearing on University plan. The idea was muted by the pioneer Co-coordinator of Student Affairs Unit- Dr. (Mrs.) S. O. Labo-popoola. It was basically to assist the University in its bid to inculcate and maintain moral standard among the students. Noting the level at which the erring students were being suspended as a penalty for certain misconduct, only to resume with most awful behaviour that normally attracted final expulsion, the Coordinator in collaboration with the University Imam (Mallam Ibrahim L.A), put heads together to work out a modality.

A proposal was then presented to the Management for final approval and the Imam was charged to co-ordinate the programme. Henceforth, the cases decided at Students Disciplinary Committee that would have attracted outright expulsion / suspension, are referred to the center-which converts such penalty to internal suspension by a way of letting such erring students undergo spiritual/moral exercise within the stipulated period. The report on such students will then be sent to the Coordinator of Student Affairs who, having been satisfied will ratify and send a copy of such ratification to the Disciplinary Committee, the College and the Department of such student for documentation. The centre uses different approaches to achieve its objective, depending on the kind of offence and the religion affiliation of the erring student(s). Some erring students, having been counseled, are referred to some relevant parts of Quran or Hadith or Bible that speak of the area of their misconduct. They will be confined at the centre to memorize such scriptural portion(s) and will be later summoned for oral discussion. Having been satisfied, they will be ordered to go and write a note on the subject matter. Such notes are edited by the Coordinator and eventually typed and pasted for the public. Those discovered among them to be good speakers are further trained for *da'wah* activities in the Mosque, while the good writers are recruited for Mosque Editorial Exercise.

- **The Role of the Mosque:** - This aspect has little effect on non-Muslims as it is designed mainly to help Muslim students develop their religious knowledge and practice a little already acquired. The mosque activity is coordinated by Mosque Management Committee, presently under the Chairmanship of Mr. RA Abdul-Azeez, with the support of the University Management, particularly the Vice-chancellor, Professor HOB Oloyede. Aside the spiritual talk which comes up mainly after Zuhr and 'Asr prayers, enlightenment programmes are periodically organized. *Fiqh* Forum, also features on Tuesdays between *Zuhr* and *Asr* prayers. During these religious activities, other programmes including academic are closed down in order to allow every member of the University fully participate in the programme.
- **The Role of Hostel:**-The University currently operates fully residential policy under the Management of a company Fafafat Nigeria limited. So, the concern of the company is beyond ensuring the peaceful co-existence of the students. It acts as general coordinator of students' religion leadership and writes appropriate report regarding the spiritual disposition of the students. These reports are forwarded to the Student Affairs Unit for appropriate action.

### ***The Challenges***

There are a number of challenges militating against the full realization of University's goal regarding the project of knowledge Islamization. These problems include:

1. **Lack of fund:** - This is the pivotal of the problems being encountered. The university to which the programme is an offshoot is, itself, financially in need; it must meet up with frequently reviewed financial requirements set out by the National University Commission (NUC). This invariably affects the Islamisation project. In some cases, the expenses involved in doing the programme are taken care by the Mosque Management Committee, and this has always caused bottlenecks in fulfilling its obligations
2. **Conflict of Interest:** the objective of the university is drastically oppositional with some parents, even Muslims, whose intention behind sending their wards to the University is to enculture them in the same pedestal with those attending conventional institutions with designed programme on secularistic values. For instance there had been an instance when a parent challenged the Vice Chancellor as to the reason why the Head covering should be mandated

3. **Cultural Dilemma:** - This problem is a little bit in connection with the one highlighted above. A student coming from a pervasive and permissive environment assumes him or herself as being in a difficult situation, on getting to University premises for the first time. He challenges anything different from the culture he or she had been used to. Correcting such anti-Islamic tendencies, no doubt, requires extra attention, hence slow down the pace of progress.
4. **Acute Shortage of Islamic Literature:** what is meant by Islamic literature here does not necessarily refer to books on revealed aspect of knowledge but also include materials in different field of studies; the books written by those with adequate training, in their chosen field; those who are well grounded in applying the required methodology of *Quran* and *sunnah*.
5. **Staffing:** - As a starter, in spite of frantic effort of the University to employ higher degree holders with balanced ability in both religious and academic excellence, in different field of studies, employing some academically qualified individuals that could be further groomed religiously are occasionally found inevitable.

### Concluding Remarks

The attempt of this paper has been a critical examination of the strategies being adopted by Fountain University Osogbo towards its quest for Islamizing Knowledge. The level of efficacy of these strategies is equally explored. The paper argues that the challenges militating against this lofty objective, if not nailed in bud, may turn the institution to a breeding ground of nurturing brain - washed Muslim scholars in various fields of learning. And to prevent such unfortunate occurrence, some recommendations are offered. More trained staff in the field of Islamizing knowledge should be employed and frantic efforts should be made to retain their souls to a point of ensuring that they produce the likeminded and resourceful personnel that would carry on the struggle. It would be a thing of joy if the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) could voluntarily establish a centre in the University, to assist us in training the trainers- the staff of the University. The existing collaborative centre should be further encouraged by a way of funding and staffing. Also there should be a forum to sensitize the stakeholders of the university regarding the University's mission for them to co-operate fully with the system. It is sincerely believed that if these

recommendations are fully observed the set goal of the university regarding its bid towards Islamizing knowledge will be realized.

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