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## **Islamic Studies and Private Universities in South-West Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

*Islamic Studies is one of the core and pertinent courses offered and taught at both private and public universities in Nigeria. The subject prepared its graduates to have potentialities, capabilities manpower in teaching, administration, politics, economic, legislation and judiciary in Nigeria. Despite these significant contributions, the subject has confronted with a lot of deprivations in the enrollment of students, recruitment of staff and availability of physical and instructional materials. Based on these, the paper therefore, intends to explore the teaching and learning of Islamic studies in the southwest Nigeria private universities, identify problems facing its teaching and learning and proffer solutions to these predicaments. The methodology adopted is analytical with information from both oral interview and written sources from libraries in Nigeria. Among the findings of the study are that the Subject-Islamic studies needs more experts to teach its core courses in private universities in Nigeria and students who wish to enroll for the subject should have rudiments of the discipline before admission.*

**Keywords:** *teaching, learning, course Islamic studies private universities.*

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## **Introduction**

Islamic Studies is one of core and pertinent courses in Nigeria Universities both in the public and private. Islamic Studies is an academic study of Islam<sup>1</sup> started in the ninth century in Iraq as submitted by Richard.<sup>2</sup> Islamic Studies is a combination of two words; Islam and Study. Islam is verbal noun emanated from the word *Salam* which means peace. It is a religion which advocates for peace and harmony, introduced by Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) in 610 A.D in the imperial soil of Arabia. While study is the process of acquiring knowledge by observing things in the environment.<sup>3</sup> Islamic Studies, therefore, is a study of Islamic realms of knowledge such as theology, jurisprudence, *hadith*, Qur'an, philosophy, history, geography among others. Its learning was started in the elementary Islamic and Arabic Schools in the Northern part of the Nation and later extended to the South-West Nigeria. The course is officially designed among other courses taught in the art/humanities in Nigeria since 1950's, flourished and widely available in colleges and tertiary institutions in 1968.<sup>4</sup> The rationale behind this inclusion was to inculcate the ethical values that are expected from students of Islamic Studies such as truthfulness, services to humanities, patience, humility etc.<sup>5</sup> The course also prepared its graduates to have potentialities, man power in teaching, administration, politics economics, judiciary, and other manifold aspects of human life.

Private Universities are the institutions established for profit purpose. Belfied and Lavin declared it as non-public or independent universities that do not receive government financial support and are universities that do not receive governmental financial support and are administered by secular boards.<sup>6</sup> According to Olaniyan and Ndebbio, private Universities are institutions that are solely owned, financed, and managed by individuals.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, proprietorship, source of funding, resources, and system of social control are analyzed as the predominal conditions proposed for differentiating between public and

private owned organizations.<sup>8</sup> This further means that private Universities are owned and administered by individuals while the public Universities are owned and directed by government. In another vein, private Universities are sourcing their financial pool through tuition fees and other levies charged against students. In addition, the institutions have outlined strategies to provide support for the labour market.<sup>9</sup>

South-West is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. This is considered as an educationally advanced geopolitical zone in the nation.<sup>10</sup> South-West consists of six states *visa viz*: Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Lagos and Ekiti. The people of the geopolitical area can be grouped into Muslims, Christians and Traditionists. Their medium of communication is Yoruba dialect, they are regarded as Yoruba tribe. Interestingly, Yoruba dialect is spoken among this tribe with different idiolects and intonations such as Ijebu, Egba, Ikale, Ijesha, Egbado etc These states of Yorubaland almost share the same weather condition throughout the year. It rains from March to November and the dry season overtakes this weather from November till February.<sup>11</sup>

Nigeria is among the West African countries that have varying climatic conditions. The people of Nigeria are diverse in culture. There are over hundred spoken languages in Nigeria, which include Hausa, Yoruba, Fulani, Edo, Igbo, Ibibio, Tiv etc. Nigeria has 36 states plus state capital which consists of 774 Local Government areas. There are numerous resources in Nigeria namely reservoirs of natural gas and petroleum.<sup>12</sup>

Challenges mean something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination.<sup>13</sup> It sometimes denotes an unwanted issue that is confronting or hindering the prosperity of a thing. In other way, it connotes the problem that reduces the probability of one's achievement. Moreover, it is a condition of being challenged with something that requires high intellectual or physical energy for the purpose of having a successful completion of the task.<sup>14</sup> In this context it is used to mean the problem disturbing the smoothness learning of Islamic studies in private Universities of South-West Nigeria.

Prospect is a particular event that will probably or definitely happen in the future.<sup>15</sup> It is used especially when one is talking about how one is feeling. According to Oxford Dictionary, it denotes the possibility or likelihood of some future event occurring.<sup>16</sup> In this study, it means the expected good result that will be seen after providing solution to the challenges facing the good standing of learning Islamic Studies in private Universities in South-West Nigeria.

Islamic Studies as a course has not found its solid foundation in certain Universities that are privately owned especially in South-Western zone of Nigeria. Hence, the percentage of non-Islamic faith-based institutions among the private Universities in South-West Nigeria is higher to that of Islamic faith-based institutions, which makes Islamic Studies to lag behind among the courses in private Universities to receive proper attention. This unpleasant scenario has prompted the objectives of this paper to identify the challenges faced by Islamic Studies in South-West private Universities in Nigeria. In achieving this, the paper analyses the prospect for Islamic Studies and suggests recommendations for proper attention of the course in the South-West universities that are privately owned in Nigeria. The paper is divided into various segments, the introductory part, emergence and list of private Universities in Nigeria, challenges faced by Islamic studies, its prospect and conciliated conclusion.

### **History of Private University in Nigeria**

The evolution of private Universities in Nigeria came towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>17</sup> There are various factors surrounding this emergence. Private Universities in other African countries have prioritized monetary gain over other precious universities values. This simply means and connotes that the main objective of private Universities is profit making; while other objectives are to enhance the development of the educational system, bridge the gap in education opportunities, easy access to different skills among others.

Consequently, the historical aspect of the starting of private Universities came in two phases. This journey started in the 1960s but seized to exist as a result of intolerance and refutation shown by the Federal Government of Nigeria as at then.<sup>18</sup>

However, the second attempt was made in 1980 and recorded a success with the establishment of Tandem University, Owerri by Dr. Basil Ukaegbu.<sup>19</sup> Covertly, it was later abolished and seized to function again when the then head of state, General Muhammad Buhari, promulgated a law under Decree No. 19 of 1984 in Nigeria constitution which regarded the establishment of private Universities as null and void.<sup>20</sup> This might be due to the monetary gain motive suspected to be the sole purpose of its establishment or the government felt of having autonomy in the educational system. Thus, during the short time of existence of private Universities between 1980 and 1984, there exist, especially in South-West Nigeria, a formidable number of twenty-six (26) private Universities.<sup>21</sup>

After the abolishment of first-ever private Universities in Nigeria, the government later realized the worthy need of supportive stand of private investors to boost educational opportunities for the citizenry.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it became necessary for both government and individuals to stand, defend and fill the lapses in Nigeria's educational system by providing more access to higher education because of the more rapid increment of the seeker of self-improvement through education. However, Decree No. 9 of 1993 was promulgated by General Ibrahim Babangida to revoke the Decree No. 19 of 1984 which put an end to the sprouting of privately owned Universities in Nigeria.<sup>23</sup> Private Universities resumed their early mission after the proper regulations and guidelines set by the federal government of Nigeria.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, this liberation spurred the prayers of religious organizations or groups and individual to establish various varsities across the nation.

Subsequently, private Universities play a significant role to complement efforts intensified by the federal government to the standardization of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is a great turning point that paved way for any Nigerian who wishes to be

educated. Moreover, the country had witnessed and still witnessing the proliferation of private Universities.<sup>25</sup>

There were various religious organizations and individual personalities that craved the establishment of private Universities by 1999. However, three private Universities were licensed and authorized to operate. Those Universities were considered as the first set of private Universities under democracy in Nigeria. These are Madona, Babcock, and Igbnedion Universities.<sup>26</sup> It is appropriate to attach glory to Tandem University of Owerri, the first ever private university under the military rule.

Laconically, after the above three private Universities, many other private universities sprang up at various locations in Nigeria, particularly in the South-Western axis. The table below shows examples of private Universities across Nigeria.<sup>27</sup>

S/N	Name	Year Established	Location
1.	Madonna University, Nigeria	1999	Okija, Anambra State
2.	Babcock University	1999	Ileshan Remon, Ogun State
3.	Igbinedion University	1999	Okada, Edo State
4.	Bowen University, Iwo	2001	Iwo, Osun State
5.	Benson Idahosa University	2002	Benin City, Edo State
6.	Covenant University Ota	2002	Ota, Ogun State
7.	Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos	2002	Lekki, Lagos State
8.	American University of Nigeria, Yola	2003	Yola, Adamawa State
9.	Ajayi Crowther University, Ibadan	2005	Ibadan, Oyo State
10.	Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin	2005	Ilorin, Kwara State
11.	Al-Qalam University, Katsina	2005	Kastina, Kastina State
12.	Bells University of Technology, Otta	2005	Ota, Ogun State
13.	Bingham University, New Karu	2005	New Karu, Nasarawa
14.	Caritas University, Enugu	2005	Enugun, Enugun State
15.	Crawford University, Igbesa	2005	Igbesa, Ogun State
16.	Crescent University	2005	Abeokuta, Ogun State
17.	Kwararafa University, Wukari	2005	Wukari, Taraba State

18.	Lead City University, Ibadan	2005	Ibadan, Oyo State
19.	Novena University, Ogume	2005	Ogume, Delta State
20.	Redeemer's University, Ede	2005	Ede, Osun State
21.	Precious Cornerstone University, Oyo	2017	Oyo, Oyo State
22.	PAMO University of Medical Sciences	2017	Portharcourt, River State
23.	Atiba University Oyo	2017	Oyo, Oyo State
24.	Eko University of Medical and Health Sciences	2017	Ijanikin, Lagos State
25.	Skyline University, Kano	2018	Kano, Kano State
26.	Greenfield University, Kaduna	2019	Kaduna, Kaduna State
27.	Dominion University, Ibadan	2019	Ibadan, Oyo State
28.	Trinity University, Ogun	2019	Ogun, Ogun State
29.	Westland University, Iwo	2019	Iwo, Osun State

There are seventy-nine (79) privately owned Universities in the country. Out of these thirty-seven (37) are situated in South-West Nigeria where Yoruba tribe predominantly lived. It is important to note that there are other private Universities established by Yorubas but not situated in South-West such as Al-Hikmah University situated in Kwara State precisely in Ilorin, Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Kwara State among others. These latter mentioned Universities shall be given the same treatment in the context of this paper as those of South-Western Nigeria private Universities. This is due to the fact that they were established by Yorubas.

### **Islamic Studies and Private Universities in South-West Nigeria**

Adequately, the number of arts/humanities courses offered in South-West Private Universities in Nigeria cannot be determined. This is because each institution chooses courses to be offered based on their interest. However, in Nigeria Universities, public and private owned, there are seventy-six (76) arts/humanities courses<sup>28</sup> which Islamic Studies is one of the most important. It is not gainsaying to submit that the course is as old as Nigerian education. The origin of education in Nigeria holds that teaching and learning of Islamic knowledge were in existence before the appearance of the missionary in the late

15<sup>th</sup> century in Nigeria.<sup>29</sup> This course as said earlier is offered in both private and public Universities. As regards private Universities in South-West Nigeria, which is the concern of this paper, the course, in some Universities such as Crescent, Fountain, Al-Hikmah and Summit is taught as a single honour course. The two later mentioned Universities (Al-Hikmah and Summit) are culturally part of South-West and geographically part of North-Central Nigeria. However, the duo institutions offered Islamic Studies as a single honor course.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, other South-West private Universities taught it as a combined subject these are Adeleke University, Babcock, Augustine, Joseph Ayo Babalola (AFRED), Bowen, Kings, Macpherson, Afe Babalola, and Mountain Top Universities based on the interest of the stakeholders and the curricular of these Universities.<sup>31</sup>

In a nutshell, there are thirty-seven (37) private Universities in the South-West Nigeria, out of these numbers, only thirteen (13) offered Islamic Studies as either single or combined subject. Consequently, to qualify for admission into these institutions, the prospective candidate has to pass through a demanding assessment of a body that is in-charge of organizing an entrance examination into any chosen institution in Nigeria popularly known as JAMB (Joint Admission and Matriculation Board), has placed the requirements for prospective applicants seeking admission into Islamic studies. Apart from the general requirements these private institutions have varied requirements for candidates seeking admission into Islamic Studies. In this case, these requirements could be categorized into two, the general requirements for all universities and other requirements that are peculiar to private institutions according to their curricular.

Regarding the general requirements, the prospective candidate must have 5 credit passes in (Senior Secondary Certificate, SSC), which includes Islamic Studies or Arabic, English Language, and any other three (3) relevant arts subjects from any recognized examination agencies including General Certificate of Education (GCE) and Senior Islamic School Certificate (SISC). Also, the students must have passed through UTME (unified

tertiary matriculation examination). The UTME exam is centrally organized for prospective candidates who seek to procure admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria including private Universities. In Islamic Faith Based Universities, aspirants of Islamic Studies must include Islamic Studies or Arabic, English Language subject with a minimum of two (2) other arts subjects. While in Christian Faith Based that have a religious department, the aspirant must include Christian Religious Studies (CRS) or Islamic Religious Studies (IRS), English, and any other two (2) arts subjects while applying for UTME exam.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the requirement that are peculiar to Islamic Faith-Based Universities, an aspirant of Islamic Studies will be admitted if the aspirant possesses two (2) Advanced Level passes which include Islamic Studies or its equivalent subjects for Direct Entry admission. Candidates should also have credits in five (5) SSC subjects including Islamic Studies or Arabic, and any other three (3) credits in relevant subjects with English Language in any other recognized examination agencies in the country including NABTEB, General Certificate of Education (GCE) and Senior Islamic School Certificate (SISC) exam in not more than two sittings.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, these requirements are applicable to Fountain University, Oshogbo and Crescent University, Abeokuta likewise Summit University, Offa and Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin.

In some Christian Faith Based Private Universities, in the South-West Nigeria that are offering Islamic Studies as a combined course, the mode of entrance is similar to what is acceptable in other Islamic Faith based Universities. However, SISC certificate is not accepted for pursuing degree in department of religions. Likewise, the aspirant would either choose CRS (Christian Religious Studies) or IRS (Islamic Religious Studies) plus English Language and any other two (2) humanities subjects while applying for UTME exam.

Glaringly, almost all these Christian faith-based Universities in South-West Nigeria use departments of religions while they have good concentration for Christian Religious Studies (CRS) and they set Islamic Studies as figurative or nominal course in their syllabi.

In all the thirteen private Universities of the study area, there is perhaps, closeness in curricula as designed by Federal Ministry of Education. However, there is addition of courses such as Islamic Banking, Islamic World Today, Islamic Law of Inheritance, Women in Islam, Islamic historiography, Islamic finance, Study of Orientalists and Orientalism among other in some of these Islamic faith-based Universities.

Islamic Studies is taught in the private Universities, after three (3) or four (4) academic sessions, and students would be awarded Bachelor of Arts Degree in Islamic Studies. Meanwhile, at postgraduate level, students would be awarded Master of Arts Degree (M.A) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD/) in Islamic Studies after the course work and theses within two and three academic session respectively.<sup>34</sup>

### **Deprivation Confronting Islamic Studies in South-Western Nigeria Private Universities**

Due to curricular designed by the Christian faith-based universities in the South-West region of Nigeria aspirants are not willing to seek for admission into Islamic studies in these universities. This is also attributed to low attention given to Islamic Studies either as combined course or as single course. Consequently, this has affected enrollment for Islamic Studies in the South-West Private Universities. Another factor that affected the enrollment of students into Islamic Studies is the deficiency of language of instruction. Many of the aspirants of Islamic who wish to be admitted to the private university lack of English Language. This happened to a considerable number of aspirants who had already attended *Ilmya* school, these students are very good in Arabic Language but have a deficiency in English and this made them not to have passed their entrance examination and other arts/humanities courses required at the point of admission.

In addition, the locations of many of these private Universities are not conducive for Islamic learning. Majority of the population are predominantly non-Muslims and are

not supportive to Islamic studies. Thus, this has adversely affected the enrollment of applicants of Islamic Studies.

Another problem confronting Islamic Studies is the recruitment of unqualified lecturers to take core courses of Islamic Studies in some of these private Universities in the South-West. This is justified by the affected Universities based on the fact that the departments in these universities are designated as religion. It was identified in this study that most of the lecturers were not qualified to teach Islamic Studies. This is based on the interaction with some of the lecturers and students in the study area universities<sup>35</sup>.

During this study, inadequacy in instructional materials was also identified. Most of these private universities in the South-West lack basic Islamic texts, journals and other materials that would aid effective teaching and research of Islamic Studies.

Other challenges facing Islamic Studies in the South-Western private Universities include Ahlus-Sunnah bigotry which create intolerance and confinement of students to texts that are related only to their belief; this is common in Islamic faith-based Universities, inadequacy in the design of Islamic Studies curriculum, infusion of religious fellowship in Christian Universities, inadequate funding of the course and inferiority complex.

### **Prospect of Islamic Studies**

Islamic Studies as a course has the prospect of improving the security. This could be explained in another word that there are lots of ethical values embedded in the study of Islamic Studies. Any aspirant of Islamic Studies would have opportunity to develop morally and ethically. This will bar him from involving in societal vices. This shows that with the learning of Islamic Studies there would be a reduction in rate of crimes in the society.

Another prospect of studying Islamic Studies is to bring the fore scientific advancement because the Qur'an and *Hadith* which are the main sources of Islam raised a

lot scientific issues which consequently bring development to the universe. For instance, the development and civilization of the world would not be justifiable in the face of history without acknowledging the roles played by Spanish Muslim scholars. The Spanish Muslim scholars contributed enormously to the advancement of science and technology through the knowledge, skills they acquired in Islamic realms of knowledge particularly the Qur'an, *Hadith*. It worth of noting that there are other scientific discoveries yet to be advanced of which their bases are in the Qur'an and *Hadith* which are the main source, Islam. This shows that with aid of Islamic Studies, all these could be achieved.

Also, there is prospect for peace with Islamic Studies. Islamic Studies being one of the subjects advocating for peace as its name denotes, will enhance the peaceful co-existence of man and other creations of the universe. Equally, the course has the potential of bringing on board good governance that is based on justice and equity. The course has potential of transforming faith-based universities and their scholars into institutions that will be faithful and sincere to knowledge. This would enable these scholars to teach both Islamic Studies and Christian Studies proportionately.

Other areas of opportunities for Islamic Studies students to render services are Islamic banks and other financial institutions, Hajj and Umrah services, and non-governmental organizations.

## **Conclusion**

Attempts have been made in this paper to critically explicate the Islamic Studies and privately owned Universities in the South-West region of Nigeria. The study also x-rays the historical background of the Universities in Nigeria with special reference to the private Universities situated in the South-West region of Nigeria. Problems and predicaments confronting the teaching and research of Islamic Studies in the South-West Nigeria private universities were also identified. It is also observed in the course of the

discussion that Islamic Studies has a significant role to play in positively transforming the lives of Islamic studies students.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the identified challenges, the following recommendations are submitted:

- i. The private University should employ capable hands to teach core Islamic Studies course.
- ii. Adequate instructional materials should be provided to enhance a broad and sharp understanding of the subject. This will also advance research in the field of Islamic Studies.
- iii. There is also a need for attitudinal change within the population surrounding most of these Universities. There is a need to encourage aspirants to enroll in a large number for Islamic Studies because of its societal importance.
- iv. Government should extend its support to privately owned universities in the area of teaching and research related to Islamic Studies as extended to other fields of learning.
- v. The affected private universities should create a distinction between Islamic Studies and Christian Religions Study by creating separate departments for the two programs.

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