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Effects of Governments' Educational Policies on Islamic Education in Ghana: A Historical Study

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Abstract:

This paper examines the nature of Islamic Education in the Gold Coast / Ghana during the pre-colonial period (up to 1850). It also examines the policies that affected Islamic education during the colonial period (1850-1950). It further examines policies that post-independence governments (1957-2010) put in place to promote Islamic education in Ghana. A theoretical framework based on Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Styles has been used to analyse how the educational conflicts were resolved. A content analysis of educational policy documents and interviews were used for the collection of data for the study. The findings of the research revealed that colonial policies that affected the promotion of Islamic education in Ghana included the teaching of Religion in public schools based on Christianity, and the promotion of the study of English Language while preventing the study of Arabic. However, these policies were changed by post-colonial governments in Ghana. The study recommends that political leaders adopt the Collaborative style of conflict management, which was used by post-colonial governments in Ghana, rather than the Competitive style of conflict management adopted by the colonial government, which negatively affected the promotion of Islamic education in Ghana.

Keywords: Islamic education, Educational policies, Colonial education, Education in Ghana

1. Introduction

Islamic education accompanied the spread of Islam. As a result, it has become an issue of major concern to the global world because of its effects on society. Many scholars have written extensively about Islamic education (Hiskett, 1975; Addae, 2001; Abusulayman, 2007; Salleh, 2013; Saman, 2013). These scholars have dealt with the topic (Islamic education) by examining its history, rationale, curriculum and pedagogical practices, among others. Similarly, in Ghana, Islamic education has been dealt with by some scholars as well (Abdusalam, 1990; Addae, 2001; Zagoon, 2002; Sey, 2002; Owusu-Ansah, Iddrisu & Sey, 2012; Olivier & Wodon, 2014). However, identifying the effects of government policies on Islamic education is an issue that has not been adequately dealt with by these scholars in Ghana. This is the gap that I want to use this study to fill. The presentation begins with a theoretical framework for the study based on Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Styles (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) to analyse how colonial and post-colonial government policies affected the promotion of Islamic education in the Gold Coast/Ghana. The rest of the study is organized along four research questions as follows: (i) What was the nature of Islamic education in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) during the pre-colonial period? (ii) What colonial government policies negatively affected Islamic education? (iii) What is the status of Islamic education in contemporary Ghanaian society? and (iv) What challenges are facing Islamic education in Ghana today? Finally, conclusions and recommendations are drawn from the findings of the study.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Styles Theory. Conflicts exist in all human institutions. When a conflict situation arises, it needs to be resolved, and its successful resolution brings a lot of benefits to the parties involved. These include promoting understanding, mutual respect, re-shaping focus and teamwork to ensure the attainment of a common goal. In the 1970s Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles in dealing with conflict. These were Competitive, Collaborative, Compromising, Accommodating and Avoiding. The Competitive Style requires putting one's interest before anyone else's interest. It requires a "win / lose" approach. The Collaborative Style enables people to work together, so that everybody's interest would be catered for. It requires a "win / win" approach. The Compromising Style requires that parties take certain decisions that will satisfy some of their interests. It requires a "win some / lose some" approach to conflict management. The Accommodating Style requires that people put their interests last and let others have what they want. It requires a "lose / win" approach. The Avoiding Style requires that people do not involve themselves in conflict. It requires a "no winners / no losers" approach. This theoretical framework would be used to determine the various conflict management styles that were used by colonial and post-colonial governments in dealing with conflict between western (Christian Mission) education and Islamic education in Ghana.

3. Nature of Islamic Education in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) during the pre-colonial Period

Islam came to the west coast of Africa through international trade. The Arabs migrated to North Africa around 639 and Egypt became the first stronghold of Islam in Africa (Olaniyan, 1982). From Egypt, Islam was extended to the Maghrib region – Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco (Trimingham, 1970). With the collapse of old Ghana Empire, the Malinke kingdom of Mali took over during the middle of the thirteenth century. Within this period, Timbuctu and Jenne became the centres of learning where Islamic Education was provided. Timbuctu was also a trading centre. With the establishment of centres of Islamic learning in Timbuctu and Jenne, Muslim merchants were able to disseminate information about Islamic Religion by sending Islamic literature to different parts of West Africa.

In Ghana, Islamic Education started with the introduction of the Quranic Schools. These schools gave instructions to the children by teaching them to memorize and recite the Quran. Memorization therefore became a major characteristic of Islamic Education (Wagner, 1991, pp. 265-267). Writing about the learning tradition of the Dyula of West Africa, Ivor Wilks noted that:

- the Quranic School was where students learned to copy the religious passages, and no matter how imperfect students' control of Arabic at this stage, the talented and the well taught pupils will rapidly acquire a command of Arabic, and in his early teens maybe studying grammar and syntax and reading for example, the basic works of Malki Law such as *Risala* of Ibn Abi Zayd (Goody, 1968, p. 166).

These Quranic Schools developed into what became known as the *makaranta* schools. The *makaranta* was a school system that was established to teach Muslims how to read the Quran and to write in the Arabic language. *Makaranta* is a Hausa word derived from “*ma*” meaning “place” and “*karanta*” meaning “reading” or “reciting” (USAID, 2007, p. 23).

One disadvantage of the *makaranta* schools was that it emphasized the teaching of Islamic religion and literacy skills in the Arabic language to the neglect of secular education. Another shortcoming of the *makaranta* school system was its mode of transmission. Children were made to memorize and recite Quranic verses without understanding (Owusu Anseh, 2002). Besides, the *makaranta* system did not have the qualified staff to teach (Braithwaite, 1976, p. 209).

The acquisition of Islamic Education enabled Muslims to occupy prominent positions like Counsellors, Secretaries and Treasurers in the kings' courts (Braithwaite, 1976, p. 203). According to Pobee (1976), in 1799, Opoku Frefre (1760-1826), an Ashanti chief, was reported to have employed a Muslim as Secretary to his court. Another Ashanti king known as Osei Bonsu (1779 -1824) was reported to have brought into his court Muslim literates and sent some of his children to an Islamic School in Kumasi. Osei Kwame (1764-1803), another Ashanti king, was believed to have been closely associated with Islam to the extent that he was going to use the Quranic law (the Shariah) as the civil code for his subjects and this led to his destoolment (Pobee, 1976). Now it would be relevant to examine certain colonial policies which did not promote Islamic Education in the Gold Coast.

4. Colonial Government Policies that Negatively Affected Islamic Education in the Gold Coast

Certain British colonial government policies negatively affected the promotion of Islamic Education in the Gold Coast. The first is the government's policy that sought to discourage the promotion of Arabic as a language in Islamic Schools. For example on the 9th day of June 1948, Imam Abdulai, a cattle dealer at Dunkwa wrote a letter to the Director of Education for the Gold Coast in Accra. The letter was sent through the Provincial Education Officer in Sekondi. It was to request for import license from the Colonial Government to purchase eighty (80) different titles of Arabic books from Egypt. These books were to be used in promoting Islamic Education in the Gold Coast. In his reply to the letter, K. J. Dickens, the Director of Education wrote:

- I refer to your letter No. W.P. 48/ii/4 dated 24 June 1948, and to say that Arabic is not a recognized language of educational institution in the Gold Coast, and I am unable to recommend the issue of import license for Arabic books for educational purposes. No Arabic books are of any educational value in the sense of the term in the Gold Coast, where the media of instruction are the Gold Coast vernaculars and English (PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM. 23/1/3161, 24th June 1948)

This letter gives clear evidence that the Colonial Government was not interested in the promotion of Arabic because the lingua franca was English language. Apart from English language, it was the local Ghanaian languages that were encouraged by the British Colonial Government as the media of instruction in the schools. Making such a demand was contrary to the language policy of the Gold Coast. By so doing, the Colonial Government adopted a Competitive Style approach to conflict management where it considered its interest rather than seeking the interest of Muslims, as far as Islamic education was concerned.

Similarly, Gordon Guggisberg, one of the Colonial Governors in the Gold Coast (who ruled from 1919-1927) declared his distaste for the spread of Islam. In 1925, he indicated the desire of the colonial administration to help the Christian Missions against the advancement of Islam (PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 56/1/305, 23rd February 1925). I consider this to be very unfortunate for a government of a pluralistic state to identify with one religious group to the neglect of the others. This attitude does not help in nation building.

Another educational policy that negatively affected Islamic Education was the teaching of Religious Education in schools based on the Christian Religion. The British encouraged and assisted the Christian Missionaries from Europe to establish schools in the then Gold Coast. Unfortunately, when Religion was introduced as a subject in the school curriculum, the content was limited to Christianity to the neglect of Islam and African Traditional Religion, which were among the three dominant Religions in the Gold Coast at the time, and Muslims were not happy about it (Braithwaite 1976, p. 205). Even though I consider this situation to be very unfortunate, I still think that there was a justification for the introduction of Christian Religion. My reason is that the Christian Missions played pioneering

role in the provision of western education in the Gold Coast, and the teaching of Christian Religion had been part of their school curriculum.

Iddrisu (1996) identified some policies that posed a challenge to Islamic Education in the Gold Coast during the colonial period. One of such policies was that the Christian Missionaries who established formal education concentrated their activities in the southern part of the Gold Coast to the neglect of the northern sector of the country (Azumah, 2011). I think the Christian Missionaries were prevented from extending their missionary activities to the northern sector because the Colonial Government thought that the northerners would be influenced by the southerners and that would make it difficult for them to be governed.

Another policy was that the British Colonial Government decided to give the sons of some traditional rulers (or chiefs) access to western education, in order to prepare them to become future chiefs. This policy was taken because of the introduction of the "Indirect Rule" system where the Colonial Government ruled the people through their own chiefs. Such a policy was definitely bound to bring conflict. In a way, Ghanaian Muslims should be blamed for their refusal to send their children to the schools established by the Christian Missions and the Colonial Government. My reason is that giving their children western type of education would have enhanced their political, economic and social status in the Ghanaian society. On the other hand, looking at the issue from another perspective, I think that perhaps, the action taken by the Muslims towards their children's education may be justified on the grounds of suspicion that the Christian Missions will use their schools to convert their children to Christianity.

Muslims also suspected the British colonial masters of using the schools to produce Christian political leaders who were to serve the country in future, as confirmed by A.G. Fraser, the Anglican Priest and the first Principal of Achimota College (Pobee 1976, p.127). This hope was realized in some of the products like Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, who described himself as a non-denominational Christian (Nkrumah 1959, p.10). Among the products of Achimota College who became political leaders of Ghana was Kwame Nkrumah. Though he was a Catholic, he described himself as a non-denominational Christian (Nkrumah 1959, p.10). He even attended the Catholic Seminary at Amisano near Cape Coast. K. A Gbedemah who was a product of Achimota and Adisadel Colleges was an Anglican, while Kojo Botsio, a product of Adisadel College was also a Catholic (Pobee 1976, p. 128).

Another policy was that whereas the Muslims had spiritual leaders (or Imams) just like their Christian counterparts, the Europeans decided to use Christian chaplains rather than Muslim Imams to provide spiritual guidance to them in the castles. This was obvious because the Danes were Reformed Christians, and it would have been out of place for them to use Muslims as Chaplains. One can therefore justify the action of the Danes in using Christian Chaplains to support their political administration.

Besides, it was through the efforts of Andreas Riis, one of the Danish Chaplains that Basel Mission Education was introduced to Ghana. It is also reported that when Riis was leaving Christiansborg to settle at Akropong-Akuapem in 1835, he was accompanied by a mulatto interpreter, two house boys and a soldier, all provided by the Danish governor (Pobee 1975, pp. 228-229). This confirmed not only Muslims', but also other non-Muslims' suspicion that the missionaries were agents of Danish political power. It was therefore not surprising that the Muslims developed a negative attitude towards the Basel Mission's western type of secular education in the Gold Coast and for that matter, decided to maintain the *status quo*.

It is of interest to note that in Ashanti, the traditional political leadership was making use of Muslim religious leaders and clerics in the royal palaces, which served as the seat of traditional government. Ashanti kings like Opopo Frefre (1799), Osei Bonsu (1800-1824) and Osei Kwame (1781-1789) were reported to have followed this tradition long before the colonial political leaders of the Gold Coast began to employ the services of Christian Chaplains at the castles and forts (Pobee, 1976). Muslims therefore saw the creation of chaplaincies at the European forts and castles as a clear indication of Christianity serving the interest of the colonial government. For this reason, it became difficult for Muslims to accept an educational system, which had been introduced by the Basel Mission or other missionaries.

5. The Current Status of Islamic Education in Ghana

The Accelerated Development Plan policy which was introduced in 1951 allowed the Makaranta Schools to be streamlined to provide both religious and secular education. In the 1950's, Arabic-Islamic Schools were established, while the Makaranta Schools continued to exist. The ADP, 1951 enabled government to establish secular public schools in towns like Tamale, Bimbila, Walewale and Sandema. In the 1972/1973 academic year, some of the existing Islamic schools wrote to the Ghana Education Service to help them introduce secular subjects into their curriculum. Government responded by posting non-Muslim teachers into the schools to teach the secular subjects (Sey, 2002). By 1976, some Makaranta Schools and Arabic-English Schools agreed to join the Islamic School system. An Islamic Education Unit (IEU) was established in Ghana in March 1987, and placed directly under the Ghana Education Service. Currently, an Ahmadiyya Education Unit (AEU) has also been established, because of doctrinal differences (Fisher, 1963).

Currently, Islamic Education has been integrated into the Ghanaian Educational system. This has been done through the establishment of the Islamic Education Unit under the Ghana Education Service of the Ministry of Education. Secondly, Islamic Education has been integrated into subjects like Religious & Moral Education through the design of the Basic School Curriculum. At the tertiary level, Islam has been integrated into the University and Seminary curriculum. Students take courses in Islam, irrespective of their religious affiliation. Similarly, at the tertiary level of Education in Ghana, the study of different Religions has compelled University departments to change their names. For example, the University of Ghana introduced the teaching of Islam into the curriculum in 1962 and changed the name of the department from the "Department of Divinity" to the "Department for the Study of Religions". The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi has the title "Department of Religious Studies". The University of Cape Coast has the title "Department of Religion and Human Values" (Asare-Danso, 2012).

6. The Challenges Facing Islamic Education in Ghana Today

Like all other human institutions, Islamic Education is faced with some challenges. These include:

1. Inadequate government grants to support the educational units.
2. Lack of infrastructure like classrooms for teaching.
3. Making Arabic Studies an examinable subject at the Basic Education Certificate Examination.
4. Creation of two educational units for Muslims, namely: the Islamic Education Unit (IEU) and the Ahmadiyya Education Unit (AEU), because of doctrinal differences.

7. Conclusions

The study has revealed that Islamic Education in Ghana started as “Makaranta” Schools, focusing on reading of the Holy Quran and writing in Arabic. However, this policy changed with the introduction of secular subjects, and this helped to produce people who worked as Secretaries, Counsellors and Administrators.

In dealing with the conflict which was associated with Islamic education in Ghana, the colonial governments used the Competitive Style approach which satisfied only one party (the government). Among the policies which the colonial governments introduced were the teaching of Religion based on Christianity and the promotion of the study of English Language to the neglect of Arabic. On the other hand, the post-independent governments of Ghana used the Collaborative Style approach to manage the conflict between Christian (Mission) Education and Islamic Education. This helped to resolve the educational conflict between government and Muslims. The challenges facing Islamic Education in Ghana today are many, and they are financial, political and administrative in nature.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Islamic education should aim at equipping learners with knowledge, skills and competencies required to make them functional in society.
2. Islamic Education curriculum should be designed by curriculum experts in such a way that it will respond to the needs of contemporary society.
3. Governments should recognize religious groups as partners in development and formulate educational policies that will promote very good relations between religious bodies and the state, using the Collaborative (win/win) Approach.
4. Arabic is an international language and Arabic Studies is an academic discipline. It is therefore recommended that because of globalization, governments should promote Arabic Studies, not only in Islamic Schools, but also in secular educational institutions as well.

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