

## Role Of Islamic Universities In Enhancing The Right To Education Of Females

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### ABSTRACT

Islam makes the acquisition of knowledge compulsory on all the Muslims, regardless of sex, thereby making education a right of every Muslim. Yet Female education is one of the most neglected areas of educational planning and practice in most predominantly Muslim societies, and hence the Muslim females are denied the right and access to education. Most Islamic universities all over the world have formulated law and policies to promote and encourage female education in line with the objective of Islam and the law. This article used arm chair research method and doctrinal analyses to examine the right of women to education under the Islamic law. The article then examined some contemporary gender policies and proposes the formulation of sound policies to be implemented by the existing Islamic Universities in Nigeria in line with the general Islamic conception of gender as it is practiced and adopted by Islamic universities worldwide. This is with the view to promoting the access of female to education

**KEY WORDS:** Gender, Education, Women, Nigeria, Islamic University

### INTRODUCTION

Education is very important to Muslims. Knowledge which is the end result of education is a factor that raises mankind above all other creation. It is a tool of socio-economic empowerment in an increasingly globalised world economy, hence, the popular axiom that 'knowledge is power'. Education is therefore, imperative for all Muslims in order to attain success in this world and the hereafter. But there are a number of socio-cultural factors inhibiting the females in the Muslims societies from full access to education. There is the extreme view in gender discourse held even by some scholars which advocates for an almost total segregation and exclusion of the female sex from all human endeavors outside the confines of the matrimonial homes thereby giving little or no access to education. There is the other extreme view that completely removes any 'wall of separation' between males and females in the pursuit of worldly achievements. There is also middle course which requires separation of the two sexes as much as it is possible and it prescribed conditions for morally and ethically bound interaction whenever it becomes necessary. The reality today in Nigeria is that the existing educational system, planning and policies do not offer great opportunities in providing female full access to education. This is partly due to the neglect and non recognition of the peculiarity of the female gender in the formulation, planning and implementation of laws and policies relevant to education in the country.

Islamic universities and tertiary institutions of learning have existed for centuries. They were institutions essentially established with the objectives of providing and catering for the spiritual, moral and material wellbeing of the entire members of the society in order to have successful and meaningful lives both here and the hereafter. These have been the central focus and objectives of Islamic Universities both ancient and modern. Thus, the objectives go beyond worldly achievements. Today, like any conventional university, Islamic universities use

modern scientific and empirical methods, structures and super structures to construe and construct their activities. However, not all of them carry these activities through the purview or lens of the basic principles of Islamic morality, philosophies and epistemology. In essence, in terms of structure, programs and courses, Islamic university may not be different from its conventional counterpart. It is however, different in terms of aims and objectives; curricula design; content design and method of analyses and place of emphasis. The study pattern of Islamic university brings to clear and apparent focus the 'Godness' spirituality inherent in all knowledge, research and indeed every discourse.

In concept, morality and spirituality take a frontal stage in Islamic university. In design, the unassailable position of the Almighty Allah as the source of all knowledge, education and achievements either of the individual or the society in general is imperative. In teaching and analysis, Islamic university must not lose focus on the textual provision of the divine injunctions (Al-Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW)) and the pioneering roles and guidance of the early Muslims on each program and discipline. Even in what may apparently appear to be 'secular', an Islamic university provides 'Islamized' justifications for them. This is largely because Islamic university appreciates the universality of learning, education, research and their application to physical development of modern society and the ultimate home or the hereafter. Therefore, the planning and policies of the Islamic universities in Nigeria should imbibe these ideals. Importantly, they should cater for the gender peculiarity of the females in accordance with the Islamic conception of gender to enable them full access to education in the university.

It is against this background that the article examines the right of females to education under the Islamic law, explores the best practices of Islamic universities all over the world and recommends policies for implementation by the existing Islamic universities in the country. In essence, the paper makes a case for separating but not isolating all females in Islamic Universities and further suggests the modalities of actualizing this noble cause. It also advances reasons for establishing separate Female Islamic Universities. The article is divided into six sections. Following the introduction is the second section which examines the females' right to education in line with the Islamic conception of gender. Section three explores the best practices and policies which cater for female students in some selected universities in some Muslim countries. The fourth section is on gender policies and programmes recommended for implementation by the existing Islamic universities in the country. It identifies the critical areas of studies and discipline requiring the attention of the female folks. The fifth section makes a case for females Islamic universities and recommends modalities for realization of the noble cause. The sixth section concludes the paper.

### **RIGHT OF FEMALE TO EDUCATION UNDER THE ISLAMIC LAW**

As noted earlier, Islam has made the seeking of knowledge compulsory for every Muslim whether male or female. As far as intellectual status is concerned there is no any prejudicial distinction at all between male and female in Islam. Thus, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was reported to have said: 'Search for knowledge is compulsory upon every Muslim (male or female)' (Karim, A.M.F. (Not Dated), 1(IV):37). Islam recognizes that knowledge is a fundamental instrument which differentiates a fully developed human being from other mammals. It is a tool that is required for the fear of Allah. Thus it is the key to success both in this world and the hereafter. Hence, Allah Almighty made it clear when He said:

*Verily, the only people who truly fear Allah among His servants are the learned ones.  
(Q35:28);*

In another verse Allah said:

*"Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" (Q39:9).*

Ibn Kathir commenting on the first verse of the Qur'an cited above stated that "the more one's knowledge of Allah, the Magnificent, the Great Creator, is perfect, complete and comprehensive, the more he fears Him." He further related that Al Hassan Al-Basri said; "to have faith is to fear (Allah) the most Gracious, unseen, to have desire for what Allah exhorts (people) to do, and to abstain from what Allah stimulate (people) to flee from;" then he recited the above quoted verse, (Q35:28). (Ibn Kathir 2006 )

The question which readily comes to mind at this stage is which type of education is compulsory and which one is a necessity for the Muslim woman to enable her performs the enormous roles in accordance with the provision of Shari'ah? Muslim jurists and scholars have classified education into various groups. Some categories of education are said to be Fard Ain, which every Muslim is under an obligation to pursue. Some of the jurists are of the opinion that this education is the learning of the Qur'an, the Hadith and some other jurists include Fiqh (jurisprudence), while others however held that is to have the knowledge of the fundamental article of faith. Imam Al-Gazali held that learning of a thing is compulsory when that thing is absolutely necessary for us. Thus, it is Fard Ain for every Muslim to know the elementary and basic rules of prayers, fasting, zakaat, and other obligatory rituals. Expert knowledge in these fields is Fard Kifaya. Education, which is Fard Kifaya that must be learnt by some people in the community, includes knowledge of medicine, arithmetic, nursing, surgery and knowledge that is fundamentally useful to the society. Once some members of the society acquire them, then the others are exonerated from liability. Learning Talisman, Magic, Surgery Stars, and to some extent, novel reading is Makruh. Learning of history, poetry, geography, science is Mubah (lawful or permissible). But the reward for acquiring the permissible knowledge depends on how the learner makes use of it. (Karim, A.M.F., 1(IV):261)

Therefore, it is clear from the above discussion that it is obligatory on the Muslim woman and every Muslim for that matter to learn the basic or elementary knowledge of the religion including the article of faith. This is to enable her worship her Lord as required of her. It is important and necessary to acquire the knowledge necessarily required for the performance of her roles in the society. This means that she should acquire the knowledge that could assist her perform her role as a wife, mother, and community developer.

It is also clear from the above that education is the right of every Muslim including the females without any discrimination whatsoever. If certain knowledge is compulsory, then it goes without saying that its acquisition becomes a right. Shari'ah is very explicit about the role of women in the society, and of the society's obligation to provide appropriate education to the Muslim women to enable them perform these roles effectively. The ultimate beneficiary is the society. This was evident in the practice of the Prophet (SAW) and his Companions where the female companions were well versed in the various fields of knowledge.

Despite this, Muslim nations and societies harbor a lot of cultural practices that unleash unfair and unjust treatment to the Muslim women. One of such practices is the denial of females the right to acquire gainful education granted by the Shari'ah. An added problem is the fact that an average Muslim in the contemporary Muslim Communities can hardly distinguish between the real dictates of Islam and those apocryphal, unwarranted and, at times, harmful cultural practices and notions against women. This is due to the fact that these practices and notions are firmly and deeply entrenched and embedded within the local tradition to the extent that they have been accepted as norms. But are they in tandem with the Islamic notion of gender?

### ISLAMIC CONCEPTION OF GENDER

Unarguably, the 'norms' highlighted above are not in tune with the Islamic concept of gender. Gender, according to Islamic conception, is one of the signs of the wonderful creations of the Almighty Allah. Thus, Allah (SWT) declares:

*And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought (Q30:21).*

Islam recognizes the equality of both male and female in terms of reward and punishment. Thus individuals, males or females, are only judged according to the quality of their efforts, actions and the intentions behind them and not on the basis of their gender differentials. Hence, the Qur'anic pronouncements:

*Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so – for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward. (Q33:35)*

In yet another verse Allah (SWT) says:

*And their Lord responded to them, "Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another (Q3:195).*

The only basis of superiority, according to this Qur'anic conception is piety, that is, fear of God or consciousness in God and good intentions. It should be emphasized here that the gender of an individual has nothing to do with his/her status in the sight of Allah (SWT), hence the Qur'an declares:

*O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you into peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is knowing and acquainted (49:13).*

Therefore, from this Islamic perspective, gender refers not only to the biological constructs of the male and female, as generally understood in some western paradigm, but also relates to the nature, idiosyncrasies, physiological and psychological makeup of the two sexes. Hence, Shari'ah assigns suitably befitting roles for each of the two sexes. To this end Allah (SWT) says:

*And [by] We who created the male and female. Indeed, your efforts are diverse (Q92: 3 - 4).*

Gender also relates to pairing of all creatures. It is from this broad perspective that Islam ascribes gender to everything other than the creator - Allah.

*"Exalted is He who created all pairs – from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know" (Q36:36).*

Appreciating the Islamic conception of gender from the above perspective will enhance our understanding of many Islamic rulings pertaining to the relationships between the two sexes. The tawhidi paradigm emphasizes that the wisdom behind gender differentiation is to provide comfort, tranquility, peace of mind as well as preservation of human race (Q30:21). It is against this backdrop that Allah (SWT) legalizes marriage (Q4:3) and outlawed any other form of intermingling, association or cohabitation of the two sexes outside the confines of matrimony (Q17:32). Islam, therefore, requires the mothers of the faithful to stay in their matrimonial homes.

*“And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance” (Q33:33).*

This requirement is even more essential and necessary in the case of other women who are not up to the status of the wives of the Prophet (RA). A plethora of traditions of the Prophet (SAW) also lent credence to the above position. For instance, when Khateebatun Nisa, Nana Asma' Al – Ansariyya, (RA) asked the Prophet (SAW) why men participate in Jihad and other collective endeavors in Islam to the exclusion of womenfolk, the Prophet (SAW) responded by pointing out that any effort made by a woman towards pleasing her husband (Husnu taba'uli ihda kunna) is equivalent to all that

*Once Asma 'bint Yazid ibn As-Sakan came to the noble Prophet and said, "O Messenger of Allah. I stand for a group of women who are of my opinion. To proceed, Allah the Almighty has sent you to both men and women. Then we believed and followed you. We women are confined to homes, target to men's lusts, and bearers to their children. Yet, men have the privilege to attend Friday prayers, funerals and fight in the cause of Allah. On the other hand, in case of fighting, we keep their property and rear their children. Would we share them in Allah's reward? Then, the Prophet looked to his companions and asked, "Have you ever heard a good question from a woman about religion like that? They replied, "You are right, Messenger of Allah." He said. "Go back Asma' and tell all women you stand for that treating one's husband kindly, seeking his consent and obeying him are equal to all what you have mentioned concerning men"(Khalid, M K & Eliwa, A.H 2003 : 623).*

Similarly, although Islam does not prevent women from attending congregational prayers (as the Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said: “Do not prevent the female slaves of Allah (aama'al Lahi) from attending the mosques of Allah (Masajidal - Lahi) (Khan M, 1985 1: 832 & Imam Muslim 1971, 177: 885)], it encourages the womenfolk to observe their obligatory prayers in their homes as it is more rewarding [Abu Daud&Ahmad, kanzul ummal]. However, even when women attend such congregational prayers, strict segregation between the male and the female rows must be observed. Hence the Hadeeth: “The best female rows is the last one” (KarIm, AMF, No Dating,3(xxiv): 351).

In the same token, Shari'ah imposes stringent conditions whenever there is necessity of interactions between the two sexes. In this regard Allah (SWT) says:

*And tell the believing men to reduce (some) of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to reduce (some) of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which (necessarily) appears thereof and to wrap (a portion of) their head covers over their shirt and not expose their adornment (i.e. beauty) except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons,*

*their husband's sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possessed (i.e. slaves,) or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers that you might succeed (Q24: 30 – 31).*

All these provisions are made for a purpose. This purpose is blocking the means that will lead to the spread of any form of immoral acts and vices *fawa'hisha* among the believers. Based on the foregoing analysis, the need for "gender-specific sensitivity" in any human undertaking in the name of Islam cannot be over-emphasized, particularly planning and practices in Islamic universities which are the focus and the purpose of this paper.

### **PRACTICES IN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

There are a number of practices established in the existing Islamic universities around the world in order to encourage and foster the realization of the right of female to education in line with the above dictates of the Shari'ah. We examine some of these practices in some of the Islamic universities here.

#### **International Islamic University, Malaysia**

The practices in the International Islamic University, Malaysia that the Islamic universities in Nigeria need to emulate include the followings:

**Exclusive female hostels:** The female hostels are built far away from the male hostels. Men do not go to or move around the hostel as it is the case in the conventional universities in Nigeria.

**Private Reading Room for Female Students:** There are private reading rooms with all the required facilities and materials, including newspapers, journals, and computers to access the e-resources. In the Library, there are places reserved for females and "sisters only" are clearly inserted. Provision of playing area and facilities for the children of these students that go into the library is equally put in place.

**Lecture Room Arrangement:** Sitting arrangement in the lecture rooms and halls follows the arrangement for prayers in the mosque. The female students sit behind in the class while the male students stay in the front rows. It should be noted that the teaching in this university is such that the person at the last seat has the full access and opportunity to follow the lecture. In other words, the situation is unlike the convention or practice in most of our universities where students are jam-packed and most of them could hardly hear the lecture given or participate in discussions in the class.

**Mosques:** Mini mosques (*musallah*) with female section are built around the university. Robes and clothes for prayers are provided for in the mosque. Facilities for dressing and make up after prayers are equally put in place.

**Dress code:** All female students are required to dress in accordance with Islamic dictates. The non Muslims and the men are equally required to dress decently. All the students are required to adhere strictly to the dress code.

In all facilities such as transport, eateries, places of convenience, the female students' needs are adequately catered for, and separate places are provided for them.

### **Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**

In Prince Sultan University, there is a college of women where courses of immense assistance to women in the performance of their roles in the society are being taught. The courses include English language, law, computer sciences, interior design, business and financial studies and General courses. These are among the critical area identified below as requiring the contributions of the Muslim women.

### **Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Sudan**

It is the oldest and largest private university in Sudan and the female-only private university in Africa. The university was founded by Sheikh Babker Badri, a pioneer in the female education as elementary school for girls in 1907 and later grew into and granted full university status in 1995. Students are enrolled in one of the six schools organized along practical professional lines to cater for the needs of women and the society. The schools are: Schools of Health Science, Psychology and Pre-education, Management Studies, Rural Extension, Education and Development (REED), Medicine and Pharmacy. The university also offers graduate programs in Human Nutrition, Gender and Development Studies and Family Science. The university has a number of specialized units to support its academic programs. These include;

The Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women's Studies (BBSAWS)

The Ahfad Family Health Centre

The Centre for Science and Technology (ACST)

The Computer Science Unit (CSU)

The Early Childhood Development Centre

The English Language Teaching Unit

The Institute of Women, Gender & Development Studies (IWGDS)

The Documentation Unit for Women's Studies

The Nutrition Centre for Training & Research (NCTR)

The Talent Development Unit

The Teachers' Research Resources Unit (TRRU) (available at [http:// www.ahfad.org/history.html](http://www.ahfad.org/history.html) access on 24/06/2013)

### **Princess Nora bint Abdul Rahman University, Riyadh**

It is the largest women-only university in the world and offers among other courses medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy and physical therapy in their health and medical education colleges. Other courses are art and design, Arabic language and literature, English language and literature, geography, history, Islamic studies, business and administration, community services, computer and information sciences, education, home economics, kindergarten education, social services, sciences, etc.

([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/princess\\_Nora\\_bint\\_Abdul\\_Rahman\\_university](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/princess_Nora_bint_Abdul_Rahman_university) accessed 24/06/2013)

The programs and policies of the universities and the courses enumerated are designed and directed towards catering for the general and peculiar needs of the females, particularly the Muslim women in order to afford them opportunity to enjoy their rights, discharge their obligations in accordance with the Shari'ah and attain success in this world and in the hereafter. In addition to these, there are a number of best practices and policies in other Islamic and women-only universities similar to those mentioned too numerous to be mentioned here. Such universities include Effat University for Women, Jeddah, Muslim University of Morogoro, Tanzania, Islamic Universities of Minnesota, USA, Islamic universities in Indonesia, Pakistan and other Asian and Middle Eastern countries.

## **GENDER POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES**

From the foregoing discussions, the need for Women Islamic University is indubitable. However, before achieving this feat, there is the urgent need to carry out some salient reforms in the currently existing conventional and even the Islamic universities in Nigeria. These reforms should be carried out within the context of Gender Policy and Programmes according to the Islamic conception of gender. Lessons should be taken from the examples given above. The recommended reforms, within the context of the current conventional system of co-education, are as follows:

**Admission Policy:** Priority should be given to the female candidates in admission into the field of studies listed below. The percentage of female intake should be very high and specified.

**Sitting Arrangement:** Due care should be taken in providing for separate and convenient sitting arrangement for female students in the classrooms, libraries and even restaurants in line with the principles of Shari'ah in order to guard against unnecessary mingling of the opposite sexes as much as possible.

**Lecture Timetable:** There is the need for lecture timetable to take into consideration the specific needs of women. Due consideration should be given to women who are married and have children in the drafting of the lecture timetables. In addition, indiscriminate fixing and shifting of lecture hours from their original times and venues which are rampant in Nigerian universities should be avoided.

**Public Convenience:** Appropriate toilet facilities and praying areas for female students are very crucial but often they are given little attention in the current system of our education. A female common room is equally required to give the female students the opportunity to interact freely with one another. On this note, it is suggested that a female multi-purpose centre where mosque facilities for prayers, restaurant, common room and public conveniences all for females should be provided. Furthermore, small reading rooms, snack shops, school buses and cafeteria should be sensitive to the female gender requirements. Indeed family hostels as practiced in some Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, even Saudi Arabia and Yemen should be introduced in Nigerian universities. The men should not just be prohibited from entering female hostels but they should also be prohibited from loitering around the hostel premises as is usually the case in Nigerian universities.

**Baby Care Centre:** The universities should make effort to provide baby care centers where the student nursing mothers can keep their babies while at school, though it may be for payment of some token amount of money. This enables the mothers the access to breast feed and care for the babies while in school. With the baby in close vicinity will give peace of mind to concentrate in the study, thereby affording her the opportunity to attain better result in education.

### **Critical Fields/Areas/Disciplines of Study**

The Islamic law has saddled women with special and specific responsibilities in the society. The Qur'an, therefore, in several verses recognizes and speaks of special and specific responsibilities of women which include, but not limited to, rearing children, taking care of homestead, nursing the sick, among other responsibility. The Qur'an also alludes to the care, love and affection that should be specifically showered on the women – be they daughters, wives or mothers. The Prophet (SAW) and his companions (RA) equally recognized the special needs and responsibilities of the women folk. The practices of the Prophet (SAW) and his companions (RA) indicated that women are needed to specialize in some fields of study. In fact,



our present society is in critical need of women in some specific areas. The academic structure and spread of disciplines in the proposed Islamic university for women should cater for these critical areas of needs. For instance, Allah in the verse below specifically gave the woman (mother) the responsibility of child rearing in term of suckling, while the father is saddled with the responsibility of maintaining both the mother and her child. Allah (SWT) says:

*The mother should suckle their children for two years, (that is) for those (parents) who desire to complete the terms of suckling, but the father of the child shall bear the cost of the mother's food and clothing on reasonable basis. No father shall have a burden laid on him greater than he can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child, nor father on account of his child... (Q2: 233).*

The following traditions of the prophet are also good examples of the recognition of the special needs and specific responsibility of women:

*Narrated Aisha, the mother of the faithfuls, 'I requested the prophet to permit me to participate in jihad, but he said; "Your jihad is the performance of Hajj" (Khan, 1985, 4:27, 84).*

Narrated by Abdullah bin Umar that Allah's Apostle said, "Surely! Everyone of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges: the Imam (ruler) of the people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects; a man is the guardian of his family (household) and is responsible for his subjects; a woman is the guardian of her husband's home and of his children and is responsible for them; and the slave of a man is a guardian of his master's property and is responsible for it. Surely, every one of you is a guardian and responsible for his charges" (Khan, M, 1985, 9:252, 163).

Though female education is required in all aspects of human endeavors, experience and indeed a cursory look at the roles of women in the society in view of their physiology and the critical need of the present Muslim societies generally show that some fields of study require the attention of women more than the others. This is even more critical and urgent if the womenfolk are to play important roles and take their appropriate position and status in the society. According to Islamic conception as provided in textual authorities from both the Qur'an and Sunnah as mentioned above, Muslim women require specialized training and education in specialized feminine environment to properly prepare them for the challenging and burdensome responsibility awaiting them in the political economy of our contemporary society.

The following, though not exhaustive, are the critical areas in which women contribution is highly needed:

- Medicine, more particularly Gynecology and pediatrics, Radiography, radiology, pharmacy and pharmacology, medical laboratory
- Technology, particularly Computer Science/Information Science/Multimedia
- Nursing and Midwifery
- Education
- Catering and Home management
- Biological Sciences
- Islamic Sciences and Law
- Women Study; covering women's role in the society, her rights and obligations.
- Languages

## Food Technology Household Art, design and Craft.

The gender dimension and the critical requirement of Muslim women in the above fields and disciplines should be obvious to all; hence it need not be belabored here. Take, for instance, gynaecology and paediatrics and other medically related fields mentioned above. These areas cater for the specific needs of women particularly regarding their privacy and those of their children respectively. Similarly, regarding Computer science/Information Technology, multimedia sciences and economics, apart from enabling women to do businesses at both the micro and macro level through electronically empowered means from the confines of their homes or private enclosure, they further assist them in da'awah (Islamic propagation) activities without unnecessarily intermingling with the men. The importance of Nursing and Midwifery for women specialization is so overwhelmingly glaring and therefore requires no further elucidation here. Women, by their nature, do better than their male counterparts in the area of education, particularly children's education, because of their patience, perseverance and attachment to the children. Specializing in education will enhance their God-endowed talents in teaching. This lends credence to the saying: "if you educate a man you educate a person, but if you educate a woman you educate a Nation." Catering, Home Management, Food Technology and other household Arts and Crafts equip women with necessary skills for their primary roles at home which help in the stability of any given nation. According to the popular tradition of the Prophet (SAW) cited above (Khan, M, 1985, 9.252, 163) women shall be accountable on the Day of Judgment on the management of their homes. Similarly the study of law gives women the chance to know their rights, obligations and status in the society and act accordingly.

Despite the crucial need of women education especially in the above disciplines, to enable them carry out their responsibilities in the society, the female education is one of the neglected areas of educational planning and practices in the conventional and even in the existing Islamic Universities in Nigeria. The needs of women in education have not actually been taken good care of in the scheme of affairs. Islam and indeed the Shari'ah are very explicit about the role of women in the society and of the society's obligation to provide the appropriate education to them. Hence, there is the need for gender policies and programmes in line with the provision of Shari'ah for implementation not only in Islamic Universities but also in the Conventional Universities to alleviate the women's ordeal in their quest for higher education.

### **A CASE FOR FEMALE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES**

As we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, the Shari'ah abhors unnecessary intermingling between males and females; it is therefore, logical that Islamic Law has prescribed separate arrangement for the two sexes in virtually everything including Education. Thus, the Prophet (SAW) set aside a day for the women lectures on which he used to go with Bilal who collects charity from the women during the lessons. Coming closer home, Sheik Uthman Bn Fodio also set aside separate lesson sessions for women only, to the extent that he was challenged by some Ulama' from Kanem Borno (Adam Ilorin & Suleiman, I., 1986). The Muslim women who are naturally modest feel freer and perform even better in a feminine environment than in a gender-mixed environment. The university system that fails to cater for the psychological and emotional needs of the women is certainly not conducive for any serious and effective learning activities capable of bringing out the desired talents of the womenfolk. Such failure denies and deprives the womenfolk of the opportunity of actualizing their full potentials. Among the women those who manage to excel in their area of study in this system of education may find it difficult to properly fix themselves in the socio-political economy of the society, and hence struggling to balance between the dual roles they have to play at their homes and outside the

homes. The role conflict is intense. This, therefore, heightened the tension and underscored the need for the establishment of an Islamic university exclusively for female students. An Islamic University with only female students will fall in line with the practice of our noble prophet Muhammad (SAW) and righteous predecessors (Salafus – Saleh). The all females Islamic University should also work towards exclusive female staffing.

Recent studies in the area of women education have clearly shown the negative impact of the existing system of co-education in Pakistan, United States of America and United Kingdom (Ahmad, A 1983: 13 & Kilson, M. 1976, 935-943). Towards this end, Kilson painfully lamented concerning the United States' Educational System thus:

*The demise of women's colleges has negative implications not only for professional women's occupational opportunities, but for women students' educational development (Kilson, M, 1976, 936).*

If the above lamentation of Kilson regarding United States of America's Educational System is agonizing about the demise of exclusive women colleges in USA, then it is even more appropriate and apposite to state, here, that the present co-education system in Nigeria is hardly conducive for the Muslim women. The co-education system being operated in Nigeria is responsible not only for denying education to a large number of girls eager to seek further education, but also educational misadventure of those Muslim women who manage to avail themselves of the existing educational facilities. This is because such Muslim ladies are exposed to an educational environment that is prejudicial and inimical to their proper development as Muslim women. Thus, in some cases, after attaining the degrees such Muslim women find the education they acquired of little use in their real life struggle. On the other hand, some of the Muslim women who graduated from this system of education end up becoming thoroughly and completely westernized and, therefore, lose touch with their position and their status in the society as Muslim women. This is basically due to the fact that the specific educational needs of the Muslim women and the development facilities that will prepare them for their proper role in an ideal Islamic society have not been properly addressed in the government's policies on education. This gives room for the educational institutions and organizations responsible for that to completely neglect the needs of female Muslim students. Women's Islamic University is, therefore, needed to develop and impart educational programmes in keeping with the needs of the Muslim women in the society. The function of this female Islamic University would not be confined to simply operating the existing syllabi and curricula obtainable in the current co-education system and institutions but it would also be charged with the responsibility of making serious effort to develop educational programmes suitably befitting the needs of the Muslim women in our society (Ahmad, A., 1983: 2-3).

There is, therefore, a strong need for Nigerian Muslim community to start thinking and indeed putting structures and modalities in place towards establishing a specialized university for the female segment of the society. The beauty and benefit of this university is that women can pursue and seek for a meaningful livelihood and can serve the community without coming into too much contact with the opposite sex. Such a university, when established will encourage a number of women to get themselves educated thereby redressing the present low percentage of educated women. It will also give assurance to the male parents, guardian, and husbands who deny their daughters, wards and wives respectively, the opportunity to acquire education for 'religious' considerations and other fears, and will be encouraged to send them to such universities.

### **Modalities for Establishing the Women Islamic University**

It is the strong recommendation of this paper that the leaders of the Muslim community should set up a committee to commence work towards establishing an Islamic Women University. The committee should be charged, among other things, with the following responsibilities:

1. Coming up with a feasibility study on the viability of establishing a Women Islamic University.
2. Outlining the modalities for Establishment and identifying Financiers and Sponsors, such as Shari'ah Implementing states, individuals, local Islamic NGOs in collaboration with international organizations such as International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Donor agencies, contribution from the general public among the Muslim community.
3. Identification of the critical areas where women are needed, and thereby producing the academic structure and spread of discipline in line with the findings.
4. Preparing the required documents for establishing the university, including legal and administrative documents, master plan, laws and statutes, academic brief, etc.
5. Registering Foundations and Islamic Trusts with Corporate Affairs Commission that will be responsible for the funding and management of the university
6. Identifying the appropriate site for the University and the take off of the construction work for the needed structures.
7. Registration with the NUC and the Committee should appropriately deal with the law, politics, lobby and other things required for such exercise.

### **CONCLUSION**

The article attempted to examine the general position of knowledge in Islam and the right of every Muslims, particularly the female Muslims. The article also made a modest attempt to contextualize Islamic perspective on gender and gender issues within the general contemporary gender discourse as it relates to female education. It examines some policies and practices that some of the Universities around the world have formulated in line with the Islamic conception of gender. The study found that Islamic law requires separation of the two sexes as much as it is possible and it prescribed conditions for morally and ethically bound interaction whenever it becomes necessary. It is the finding of this study too that if Islamic gender conception should be used in formulating gender policies for implementation in the existing Islamic Universities in this country, the education of women will greatly be enhanced and low percentage of enrolment of women in schools in the Muslim societies may be greatly improved. However, the article posits that the establishment of separate all female Islamic University which will take care of the emotional, psychological and physiological needs of women and indeed address their roles and status in the society will give the females more access to education thereby enhancing the realization of their right to education. It will give the parent, husband and guardian of the females and the indeed the female students the assurance that they are keeping to the limit ordained by Allah thereby encouraging them to enroll their daughters, wives, ward and themselves respectively in such universities. Taking stock of the currently existing co-education system obtainable now in the conventional university system and even the existing Islamic Universities in the country, the equation is far from being balanced. The pendulum certainly swings against women education. This explains the decimally low participation of the Muslim sisters in the current University education system. The existing Islamic University do not help matters in this regard, hence the necessity for the call to establish a separate all female Islamic University as canvassed by this paper. The technical requirements for establishing such an all female Islamic University could be conveniently handled by committee of experts that has been recommended to be set up.

It is also the conclusion of the paper that unless this task of setting up an all female Islamic University is seriously pursued and the formulation and implementation of the policies and program enumerated is put in place by the existing Islamic universities in the country, the female segment of the ummah amounting to more than sixty percent of the population of our society will continue to be marginalized and excluded from taking part fully in the University education. Suffice to say that Muslim females' right to education can only be realized when the society fully recognizes the peculiarities of the females.

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