

# The Challenges Faced by Muslim Female Education and the Way Forward

Shamsudden Umar Ilyas <sup>+</sup>

Department of Religious Studies, Gombe State University, Nigeria

**Abstract.** There has been growing concern on female education particularly in the Muslim Society. Their education remains the most challenging problem in our society because they lack even the rules and understanding of Islamic jurisprudence. International conferences organized on female education yield no result because of its provoked controversy in the Islamic world. Although Muslim Women are absent in contributing immensely to Islam in particular and our society in general; their Christian counterpart was even involved in spreading Christianity at their working places. This paper is an attempt to analyses the Challenges facing the Muslim Women education and the way forward. It is the Women who lay the foundation of ethic, virtues for a peaceful and educated society from the divine document (Quran and Sunna) the Prophet (S.A.W) said: “Women are the sisters of men” for these reason Islamic reformers, educator thinkers have all shown a keen interest in female education. It is a duty of all and sundry to take a collective effort in female education so as to build a prosperous, optimistic and peaceful society.

**Keywords:** Female Education, Muslim Society, Islamic World.

## 1. Introduction

Muslim-a male or female- must seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave as spelled out by our beloved prophet (PBUH). Our prophet also emphasise the rewards for those who teach their children. More emphasis is also made on education in Islam specifically, and no distinction is made between men and women.

Although the right and importance of education in Islam is clarified, some biased people who are guided by personal interest on the one hand, and that of envy to the religion of Islam on the other, propagate that Islam has forced the woman to be imprisoned at home and not to go out except to the grave.

Capitalizing on such allegations the right of education of the Muslim female is severely blown in the present Islamic world. This paper deals with the problems and challenges facing Muslim female education and the importance of Muslim female education.

## 2. Importance of Education in Islam

Islam has made the acquisition of education compulsory for every man and woman. The prophet (PBUH) said:

" طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم (ومسلمة)"

“The acquisition of education is compulsory for every Muslim men as well as women”.

The first verse of the Noble Qur’an which was revealed to the prophet (P.B.U.H) was all about education and its importance.

Allah Almighty says:

" إقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق. خلق الإنسان من علق. إقرأ وربك الأكرم. الذي علم بالقلم علم الإنسان مالم يعلم."

“Read! In the name of your Lord who has created (all that exists). He has created man from clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the most generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not.”

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<sup>+</sup> Corresponding author. Tel.: +2348064984713; fax: +2348099827063.  
E-mail address: sumar882@gmail.com.

Similarly there are many verses that explain the importance of education to Muslims both male and female, the following verses are clear examples: 62:2, 2:151, 96:1 to 5, 24: 30-31 etc.

An authentic tradition (Alhadith) of the prophet (PBUH) also clarifies the importance and significance of acquiring education. The prophet (PBUH) said:

(من سلك طريقا يلتمس فيه علما سهل الله له به طريقا إلى الجنة)

“Whosoever follows a path to seek knowledge there in, Allah will make easy for him/her a path to paradise”.

Therefore, there is no doubt that acquisition of education is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman.

### **2.1 Role of Muslim women in promoting education.**

Muslims women played a vital role in promoting and contributing immensely to education in general and Islamic knowledge in particular. Aisha the mother of believers (may Allah be pleased with her) is probably the best role model for all the Muslim women she was a scholar, Hadith narrator, Islamic Jurist. She was considered, to be the most knowledgeable Muslim Woman in sacred law. She narrated over 2,210 Ahadith from the prophet. After the death of the prophet (P.B.U.H), leading figures of the companions came and ask her for legal opinions and rulings.

Historically Muslim female established schools and colleges and examples of such were princess Fatima Al-fihiri who established the first degree granting university of Qairawan in Morocco in 859CE. Another famous princess Dafiya Khatoun built Zawiya (Sufi order School) and colleges in Damascus and Aleppo-present day Syria.

### **2.2 Education in Islam is not restricted to men**

Seeking knowledge has not been restricted by Allah to men. The following verses of the Noble Qur’an and prophetic traditions (Alhadith) are clear clarification for that. Allah the Almighty says:

"إنما يخشى الله من عباده العلماء"

“It is only those who have knowledge among his slaves that fear Allah”.

"قل هل يستوي الذين يعلمون والذين لا يعلمون"

“Say: Are those who know equal to those who know not?”

None of the above verses specify that only men receive admonishing or that only men who have knowledge fear Allah. The prophet (P.B.U.H.) said that acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims (both men and women without any discrimination).

It is reported from Abu said Al-khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) that: “A woman came to the messenger of Allah(P.B.U.H.) and said: “The men have monopolised all your Traditions, therefore, assign a day for us in which we will come to you so that you teach us some of what Allah Has taught you”. He said: “gather on such and such day”. They then used to gather on a day and the prophet came to them and taught them of what Allah Has taught him, advise them and educate them about Islamic commandments and rulings.

The Muslim women's modesty did not prevent them from asking in order to benefit and acquire good understanding of Islam. They used to ask question on every minor or major issue that affected them. This is how the Muslim woman should be, having concern about her religious affairs every time and everywhere.

## **3. Challenges Faced by Muslim Female Education**

Muslim women face many challenges in accessing education. The challenges may differ from one place to another. Some of these challenges faced by Muslim female education may be economical in nature as in the case of our country Nigeria, more especially in North-Eastern states which are considered in the country as the backward states and remote areas. Girls are forced into early marriage and denied basic education.

Other factors were related to poverty and shortage of schools. Female Muslims are taught that their role is that of a wife, mother and are therefore discouraged from seeking knowledge.

The misused of some Qur'an terms or its misinterpretation is another challenge to Muslim female Education, an example of such is the term "Qiwama" which is totally misused in hindering some female Muslims from acquiring education. The notion that men are guardians of Muslim women does not mean restriction of Muslim women to be kept at home and hinder them from seeking knowledge. If their role is that of wife and mother, that doesn't mean denying them their right of education and seeking knowledge!

Another misnomer is the view that women are only allowed to gain knowledge from their female counterpart, and that instruction from men is prohibited. There is no stipulation in Islam that only woman can teach women and male can teach men. If Islamic rules on 'Hijab' are thoroughly observed, then man can teach female students and women can teach male students respectively. This is also apparent from the Hadith where our beloved prophet (P.B.U.H.) himself made arrangement for educating and training Muslim women where one day was particularly specified for women in the prophet mosque. Therefore quoting the verse, from the Noble Qur'an regarding 'Hijab' as an argument against women education is severely misguided.

Other challenges include the Christianization of the Muslim Umma by Christian female missionaries which is widely used in our country Nigeria, especially in the North-Eastern states. Christian female workers capitalize on the poverty, ignorance, sickness and other misfortunes of our male and female to convert them into Christianity.

In order to put a stop for such unfortunate practices, Muslims in Nigeria should encourage and support Muslim female education so that our Muslim sisters would assist in teaching spreading and defending Islam in their working place.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Muslim female education is regarded as one of the pivotal factors for political, social and economic development of a society. If women who make up half of the society are neglected, maltreated and denied basic education, then our future would not be optimistic. We should therefore not allow, particularly our dear religion of Islam which promote peace and education, to be cited as stumbling block for female education. Islam as a religion gave women the right to pursue basic education which would allow them train their children assist their husbands in decision making, contribute immensely to their society and help convey the message of Islam to non Muslims so that beauty of "Islam" will be noticed and appreciated.

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