

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOSQUE LIBRARY IN NIGERIA: WITH REFERENCE TO ABUJA NATIONAL MOSQUE

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ABSTRACT

This study narrates the history and development of mosque libraries in Nigeria with more focuses on the Abuja National Mosque Library, as well as its values to the Muslim community, challenges being experienced and also provide some recommendations on how to improve the functions and services of the mosque libraries in the country. A case study was employed in which an interview was organized with the Librarian of the Abuja National Mosque library and findings show that most of the big central Mosques in the country, especially in the northern part are attached with a library and collections of religious books but are not always attached with a professional librarian.

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INTRODUCTION

It was said that “Readers are leaders, and the more one reads the more one knows, while the more one knows the more one leaves”, which is among the reasons our beloved prophet Muhammad SAW emphasis to his companions on the importance of always seeking for knowledge, while he himself also teach them things from the revelations regularly.

In our today’s society, it could be noticed that after getting a reliable religion knowledge from the scholars, the next sources one can get more knowledge is from the documented knowledge of the past and current generations. Which are mostly collected, stored and organized books and other related sources in the modern generation.

Mosque libraries, According to (Laugu, 2013), “have been involved in and have contributed to the development of Islamic civilization and scientific

pioneering all over the world". It could be recalled from the past that Mosques have served as a collective repository of on different Knowledge on religion, political, economic and social knowledge. So, what is happening to our mosque collections today? This study narrates the development and contribution of Mosque Libraries to the Muslim communities in Nigeria with more focused on the functions, collections and challenges faced by the Abuja National Mosque Library.

ISLAM IN NIGERIA

To discourse about the emerging of Islam religion in Nigeria, we would will like to elaborate on the definition of the term Islam, as the word implies is an Arabic word which mean peace or submission, which literally means submission to the will of Allah SWT (Muhsin S. Mahdi, Fazlur Rahman & Others, 2019), while Nigeria, officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is a country that is located on the western coast of Africa. The country features 36 states and its Federal Capital Territory, which is known as Abuja. The country of Nigeria features over five hundred different ethnic groups, many different languages, and declared its independence from the United Kingdom on October 1, 1960. As of 2019, the estimated population of the country is over 200.96 million, ranking 7th in the world. (Reuben Kenrick Udo, Anthony Hamilton Millard Kirk-Greene and Others, 2019). According to the world population also, 50% of the Nigerian population are Muslims, 40% are Christians, while the remaining 10% are indigenous religion.

There are divergent views of scholars regarding the exact time Islam reached Nigeria. According to M.A Alhaji, as quoted by Lawal S. Some Scholars viewed that Islam came to Hausa-land (Northern Nigeria) in the first century after Hijra. This was as a result of the migration of some group of companions from Makkah to Ethiopia in Africa and the old trading link between Ethiopia and Western Sudan. Others opined that Islam was introduced to this part of the land in the above stated century by the Muslim army of Uqbah bn Nafi'l who penetrated deeply from North Africa (Egypt) to south across the Sahara desert reaching *kawwar* a town in Kanem-Borno kingdom, from where it came down to Hausa-land through the activities of preachers, scholars and traders.

Another view upheld that Islam was brought to Hausa-land in the early fourteenth century by traders and scholars, that Wangarawa traders are said to be responsible for introducing Islam to Kano during Ali Yaji who ruled Kano 1345-1385. (Malumfashi, 2016). Another milestone in the spread of Islam into northern Nigeria was the jihad of Uthman dan Fodio. Who was a Fulani man, who waged a war for six years (1804-1810) to purify Islam and to eradicate idol worship and purge all forms of distortion and heretical innovation from the religion. He preached the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah and encouraged the Muslims of that time to return to orthodox Islam (Is-haq, 2015).

MUSLIMS ORGANIZATIONS IN NIGERIA

Organization as the word implies from a dictionary meaning is an organized group of people with a particular purpose, such as a business, government department or religion. Even though it will be difficult to list down all the Muslim sects and organizations in Nigeria today, majority of the Muslims are Sunni by practice While the highest body that is known by the Nigeria government that represents the entire Nigerian Muslims, is the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) which was established in the year 1973, and formally took off in the year 1974, it is currently being head by the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'd Abubakar III, (Abdulazeez, 2018). The current national secretary of this organization, Prof. Is-haq O. Oloyede, said in his Keynote Address Presented at the International Conference of Islam in Nigeria (COIN) to mark the 30th Anniversary of the Islamic Welfare Foundation(IWF), that "all Muslim organizations in Nigeria that have contributed to the advancement of Islam in the past 100 years can be categorized into six major types", from which he mentioned three as the root organizations, these are Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Nigeria, Jamaatu Nasril Islam (JNI) and Muslim Students Society of Nigeria. These three organizations are pioneers which directly led to the establishments of other Islamic associations. (Is-haq, 2015).

THE BUILDING OF MOSQUES IN NIGERIA

Mosque, also known as *Masjeed* or *Musolla* in Arabic means to bow down in worship to Allah SWT, technical meaning of the word mosque in today's context can be seen as a special building(hall)/place for bowing in worshipping Allah SWT. Tracing down the history of these early Muslims' organizations in Nigeria, there have always been a meeting point in which most of the religious, administrative and other relevant activities of the organizations are being carried out from, and these meeting point has always been a Mosque place and most of the time they have offices attached to the mosque or around the environment for their executives and other related activities.

MOSQUE LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

The word Library, has been generally defined as a building/room/place with organized collections of mostly books and other similar information resources, while mosque library was defined by (Hizan, Ismail, Ispawi, Campus, & Selangor, 2017) as a specific library that focused on the Islamic collection with priority for the people who live nearest to the mosque. Triani Rahmawati, (2012) also defined mosque library as a room part of a mosque which contains the sources information in the form of books and other materials are intended for guidance and educational development of religious communities.

Even though no literature was cited on the topic of Mosque libraries in Nigeria, it was found out through investigation and visitation, that most of the National Mosques in the big cities in Nigeria, especially in the Northern part of the country are attached with a collections of Islamic

books and sometimes with a library buildings to cater for the development of the Muslim community in respect to their religion. For example, the Abuja National Mosque Library, Islamic Trust of Nigeria (ITN) Mosque Library, Zaria Kaduna State and Ilorin Central Mosque Library, Kwara State.

VALUES OF MOSQUE LIBRARIES IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The first revelation to the prophet Muhammad SAW was to read or seek for knowledge (Qur'an Chapter 96), with reference to this, the prophet SAW has always gathered with his companions in the mosque for several activities, among which is sharing knowledge and not only as a praying ground. Mosque libraries have been involved in and have contributed to the development of Islamic civilization and scientific pioneering all over the world (Laugu, 2013).

Some of the well-known functions of a Mosque Libraries are as follows;

- Providing sources of information mostly on religion issues for the community.
- Organizing information sources and arranging them so they can be stored and retrieved with less effort.
- Borrowing library materials to beneficiaries and provide places for reading.
- Answering questions and inquiries received by the community, whether they are Muslims or not.
- Contribute to developing and supporting the Muslim scholars in the community.
- Contribute to serving the local community by organizing lectures and seminars both within the mosque and outside.

THE ABUJA NATIONAL MOSQUE LIBRARY



Figure 1 Abuja National Mosque, Nigeria

Abuja also is known as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), is the federal capital city of Nigeria. During the regime of His Excellency, President Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari in the year 1980, they decided to move the capital city from Lagos to Abuja where it is located today.

The history of the National Mosque can also be traced to the relocation of the capital city. In 1981, some prominent Muslims from all over the country suggested that the Muslim community should solicit for and collect contributions from both domestic and foreign sources to erect a mosque edifice as a place of worship which would be the national mosque that will serve as a national institution and a symbol of unity for the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah*. The idea was widely accepted and supported by Nigerian Muslims. To pursue this noble goal and objective, a council known as the Abuja National Mosque Council was inaugurated under the distinguished chairmanship of late Sultan Abubakar III, GCON, the 17th Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) to initiate action for the construction of the mosque (Mosque, 2019). When constructing the mosque, among other facilities attached to the Mosque was the library building, today the Abuja National Mosque Library is referred to as one of the big Mosque libraries in the country. The library building is located in the second floor of the administrative block of the mosque compound, with a well-furnished reading environment with modern chairs and tables, bookshelves, air-conditions and CCTV cameras, the library is equipped with a sitting capacity of about 256 users, with separate reading rooms for the male and female counterparts.

RESOURCES AND SERVICES OF THE LIBRARY

Even though the library has no written or documented guide and policy on how it operates, the librarian was able to mention some of the resources and services provided by the library as follows; most of the collections of about 5000 conventional Islamic books are in Arabic language, which consists of Holy Quran collections, Tafseer of the Quran (Translation),

collections of different Hadith of the prophet Muhammad (SAW), Seerah (History), and other related disciplines. While only a few of these collections are in English language and indigenous languages. Among services provide by the library are; Provision of sources of information mostly on religion issues for the entire community, Organizing these information sources and arranging them so they can be stored and retrieved with less effort for the users, Provide a conducive reading environment for the users, Answering questions and inquiries received by the user community, whether they are Muslims or not and also contribute in developing and supporting the Muslim scholars in the community.

STAFF AND MANAGEMENT OF THE LIBRARY

The Abuja National Mosque Library is managed under the supervision of the mosque executive secretary. Though, the library is being managed by a male professional librarian with a master degree in library and information science, and attached with other two assisting staff, one of which is a female to assist the female users who visit the library and the other one who is the security from among the mosque security personnel, to look after both users belongings and the library's. Users are not charged any fee while registering to use the library and the library is opened to the general public from the entire country either being a Muslim or not, the library is opened for the public only within the five 5 working days in a week (Monday - Friday) from 10:00am in the morning to 5:00pm in the afternoon daily.

CHALLENGES FACED BY MOSQUE LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

While collecting data for this report, some of the challenges being noticed about mosque libraries in the country and some being mentioned are listed and explained as follows;

Low user patronage, users hardly visit the library, it was noticed from the record in the library visitors book that the library hardly manage to get up to ten 10 users a week, while this can be attributed to the low reading culture in the country and sometimes language barriers in the side of the users and the collections in the libraries.

Financial challenges, even though the management of the mosque itself manage to pay the staff, the libraries mostly complained of not getting any allowance for their daily up keeping and other related activities in the library.

Promotional challenges, another challenge faced by the mosque library is how to promote the collections and services of the library to the community to attract more users.

Management and professional challenges; even though the library has three 3 attached staff, users sometimes complained about visiting the library on working hours and find the library looked or the staff they meet are not able to attend to their needs.

Information organizational challenges, it was also noticed that most of the collections in the library are not properly organized professionally and the library has no any bibliographical records for the collections in the library or any retrieval point (catalog or OPAC). Among others.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Due to all listed challenges, which also applied to all other mosque libraries in the country. It is suggested for the top Muslim officials in the country to try and contribute to supporting mosque libraries in the country. Secondly, parents and religious leaders in the country should encourage Muslim youths and the entire Ummah to seek for knowledge and always visit the library for more references. The libraries should also try to collect religion sources in some local languages and the most preferred languages for people to read. Thirdly, the library should also initiate other means to generate funds for the up keeping of the libraries either by the registration fee, exhibitions and solicitations from the community. And lastly, the libraries should also initiate means to promote the collections in the libraries and encourage users to use the libraries by being friendly to the users and also ask for their contributions in promoting the libraries.

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