



Contributions of Sokoto Caliphate in Educating the Public and the Lessons for today

Aliyu Umar Sharu

Department of Islamic Studies, Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto,
 Nigeria. Email: jatauinitiative@gmail.com

Safina Musa Bodinga

Department of Islamic Studies, Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto,
 Nigeria. Email: superoxidedismutase594@gmail.com

The Sokoto Caliphate's educational system, established in the 19th century, made significant contributions to promoting Islamic sciences, literacy, and skills development. The system was characterized by a holistic approach to education, diverse teaching methods, and an emphasis on inclusivity and equity. This study explores the features and challenges of the Sokoto Caliphate's educational system and highlights its lessons for contemporary education, particularly in developing areas of the world. By examining the system's strengths and weaknesses, this research provides insights into the enduring impact of the Sokoto Caliphate's educational legacy and its relevance to modern educational challenges.

Keywords: Sokoto Caliphate, education, curriculum, Usmanu Danfodiyo, Islam, Hausaland, women's right

Introduction

Indeed, before the invasion of the British Colonial forces into the Sokoto Caliphate, there was a functional system following Islamic tenets. A Caliph is a religious figure leading a territory led by caliph (an Islamic leader). The Sokoto Caliphate was versed in Hausaland. The Hausaland was organized, consisting great states such as Gobir, Zazzau, Daura, Kano, Katsina, and many others structured together as entity and sharing many features together.¹



Since, a caliphate in English is a word referring to a land lead by Caliph (an Islamic leader), Sokoto Caliphate is a typical example. Sokoto Caliphate (started to function after the defeat of Alkalawa (the Capital of the then Gobir state) in 1808.² The 1804 jihad led by Usmanu Danfodiyo was a protection move against the forces of the then leaders that aimed to put-off the light of Islamic revival social movement. The then leaders were mixing religion of polytheism and innovations, and any deviance will be stiffly dealt with.³

Additionally, several events occurred, but by the end of 1810, the control of the present day Northern Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and parts of Chad, are in the context of Sokoto caliphate leaders.⁴ The Caliphate is founded by educational intervention, knowledge, and scholarship. Islamic schools of various forms were established across the length and breadth of the Caliphate in order to elicit people to cognitive, behavioral and moral changes. Mostly, teachers write books in Hausa, Arabic, Fulfulde, and other local languages to serve the purpose of educating the public in various areas of knowledge.⁵ Despite the fact that, Sokoto Caliphate was dismantled in 1903 as a result of British invasion, the people within the old Caliphate land are mostly practicing Muslims and adhere to its values.⁶ Therefore, there are also of educational lessons for today. The objective of this paper was to analyze the contributions of Sokoto Caliphate in educating the public and the lessons for today.

Teachers in Sokoto Caliphate

Sokoto Caliphate was blessed by various teachers that contributed to educational development of the area. Many of the teachers in the Caliphate are drawn from different background, albeit some of them are Fulani by tribe. Therein, the teachers in Sokoto Caliphate obtained diverse specializations from different sciences of Islam and worldly sciences (arts, humanities, sociology, technology, sciences and quasi). There are teachers that are rich in many sciences, but some are more inclined to certain sciences, therefore, students are expected to move from one teacher to the other in order to obtained diverse disciplines. The teachers in Sokoto Caliphate dissipate knowledge or education by using three major methods, namely, writing (of books, manuscripts, and other educational documents), teaching or instruction in their houses (rooms meant for lectures and teaching at home), and schools or mosques, and preaching. Muhammad Bello in his famous book described the culture of Shehu while delivering lectures at his

class (teaching hall) segregated at home. He resorted that Shehu perform the following tips:

- Initial greeting is passed to all students
- Teach students with raised voice, so that everyone could hear properly
- Students usually remain silent while he introduces the lecture
- He asked students to rescind from asking questions till the end. But, some may throw questions in the middle of the lecture
- He does not assault students or anyone with his lectures.⁷
- Shehu taught also by being exemplary, instead of relying solely on theoretical aspects
- Shehu alone had written over hundred books serving as guide along with other literatures composed by the contemporary consultants.⁸
- Some books composed by Shehu include the followings; Bayan al-bid'i (encouraging the public to abhor the innovations in religion), Nurul al-Bab (teaching and motivating people to seek for knowledge, and describing the citizens if the then polity), Usul al-adli li Wulat al-umur (teaching the leaders guidance on how to convey justice to the public); Ihya al-sunna Wa Ikhmad al-bid'a (revival of the Sunnah and destruction of innovations).⁹

Nevertheless, there are certain characteristics that are supposed to be found in teachers as specified by sokoto Caliphate literature (as in the book of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo) which are meant to serve as ethics and guiding principles to teachers. Some of them are under listed below:

- A teacher should be truthful
- Sit with those that guide him to the right path
- Universality or equity or equality in teaching
- Shunning disturbance (such as noise) while teaching
- Shunning violence or victimization while instruction
- Shunning violence or victimization while instruction
- Use of questioning techniques while teaching
- Use of lecture method while teaching
- Displaying perseverance due to poor learners.¹⁰

Nature of Students in Sokoto Caliphate

Students refers to the learners irrespective of their age, race, affiliation, and the likes. In Sokoto Caliphate, the students received no discrimination pertaining accessibility to learning. The learners or students include the followings:

- Children- The initial learning avenue for children is the mother, father, and other immediate family members. Often at the age of 7 or 12, the children are to be taken to formal school to learn various religious sciences, and they are also supposed to be trained in one or more skills that help them to earn a living. Shehu Abdullahi commented on the beginning of educational journey of Usmanu Danfodiyo as “The Shehu studied the Quran with his father, Muhammad.” He verily learnt various sciences before proceeding to external learning centers or teachers. A major unprecedented milestone established by the Sokoto educational movement was the “women right” especially to education. Shehu’s books and for instance, the reply made by Shehu Abdullahi to the person accusing them of mixing males and females in lecture halls, signifies the emphasis of women’s education in that era. Asma’u, the daughter of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo organized its own all-inclusive educational movement that teaches children and adults alike. The members of the “Yantaru” movement go out to recruit non-married women and girls to the learning center established by Asma’u where they are lectured about religion, lawful things, and the importance of shunning theft, meanness, envy, quarrelling. The Yantaru educational movement is colored with etiquettes, uniform, charity work, and other forms of organizational interventions.¹¹

- Adults- Adults are those males or females that have reached the age of puberty, but they are in different classes. The adults at the onset of puberty are mostly taught at formal schools, mostly in the Qur'anic sciences (reading and writing), and some few theological curricula. Therein, they are taught in ways to earn a living. The older adults can be taught at formal schools about advanced religious and worldly sciences, earning a living, and the likes. They are taught at mosques, preaching avenues (mobile lectures), markets (mobile lectures), and homes (Zaure, halls located for teaching in the houses of professors).

- Gender- Both males and females are given equal and rightful treatment to learning and scholarship. Mostly, the children irrespective of gender are taught at homes, then young ones are taught at schools. But, married or adult females are taught at homes in cluster or colony. However, the old females are taught at mosques, and

preaching gatherings, but there is no mixture of opposite genders, there has to be segregation or demarcation at the preaching (learning) or sites between males and females students.¹²

Educational Methods of Teaching in Sokoto Caliphate

Just after 1903 in the Northern Nigeria alone, it was estimated that, there were about 25,00 Quranic schools educating over 250,00 students. This indicates the remains of the Sokoto Caliphate legacy, and a strong passion and determination to learning. Teaching in Sokoto Caliphate is a holistic approach. This is the summary of teaching methods in Sokoto Caliphate:

- Use of slate (*Allo*), leaflets for writing, teaching, and reading.
- Use of singing, writing, recitation, and memorization, is famous.
- Very young children are taught on personal hygiene, basic spirituality aspects, ablution, prayer, basic life skills, and relations.
- Children are taught on how to write and read Arabic alphabet and numerals to gain the skill of reading and writing. Letters are the first to learn, then verses are learnt. The learning continues till the whole of Qur'an is recited properly. Then a certificate is awarded depending on the learner's ability.
- Adults and old students are mostly taught using books by receiving lectures, discussion, recitations, illustrations, questioning, presented by the teacher (mostly). It is mostly the duty of students to pick the portion he should be taught, so that he can comprehend properly. It is also the right of students to select the science to learn, but teachers give advice due to their long-term experience. Ideally, students that finished learning a given book or discipline are accorded certificate or testimonials to show that they are experts or experienced in what they learnt. Money is not collected from adult students, while the teacher has the right to collect money (salary) from parents of children taught, he can also teach freely.
- Noteworthy, source of funding for children is from the wealthy parents, state-owned copper, and contributory fund (from wealthy people), many teachers obliged to teach children free-of-charge (as a form of charity or endowment). Generally, adults are taught totally freely without cost, but they can voluntarily pay in cash or kind (if the teacher agrees to collect). The system of teaching included day-schooling and boarding school depending on the choice of students and teachers.¹³

Subjects Taught or Curriculum

All areas of Islamic sciences, and all areas of human sciences, science, and technology are taught in the Sokoto Caliphate educational systems, depending in the preference of student, need of students, level of students, and specialization of teacher. Some of the specific topics or areas or subjects taught in the system of education in Sokoto Caliphate are stated as follows:

- History
- Arabic language
- Behavioral science
- Ethics
- Medicine
- Sociology
- Monotheism
- Literacy
- Literature
- Numeracy
- Quranic sciences (such as recitation, memorization, writing, exegesis)
- Hadith and its sciences
- Agriculture sciences
- Commerce, trade, industry
- Public Health
- Pharmacy
- Botany
- Biology
- Optics
- Nutrition
- Medicine and healthcare
- Metallurgy
- Sewing
- Building
- Security
- Environmental Science
- Printing

- Space science
- Mathematics
- Textile¹⁴

Teaching Aids in Sokoto Caliphate

There is diverse array of teaching aids or materials utilized in the educational systems of Sokoto Caliphate, some of which are highlighted in this section:

- Ink- Made from possibly black materials such as charcoal and is used for writing
- Pen- Made from stick or *Gamba* grass or related grasses
- Mats - Used as seating materials during learning
- Sand and stones - Utilized for illustrations
- Leaflets -Made from plants, hides and skin, for the purpose of writing
- Cane- Used for punishing erring children. Violent caning is disallowed.
- Kettles and water sources - Are used for personal hygiene and illustration or learning
- Public address system - Used for communication in large audience
- Library- Collection of books and learning documents for scholarships
- Mosques, hall (*Zaure*)-Used as venues for learning
- Source of foods and funding are also important, because students need to eat from their provision (as the best source of living) in order to facilitate proper learning.¹⁵

Lessons for Today's Educational System

In the Sokoto Caliphate educational systems there are a lot of lessons that can benefit the current educational imbroglio especially in developing areas of the world. Some of these lessons are quickly stated as follows :

- Clear and simple language utilization in the curriculum

Language serve as vehicle for communication, therefore, Sokoto Caliphate educational system adhered to the use of three popular languages namely, Arabic, Hausa, and Fulfulde. Other languages spoken by other inhabitants are allowed, in fact, every tribe are dealt with using their language. Nowadays, the use of native language in learning is highly important especially in post-colonized countries like Nigeria.

- Relevance

Sokoto Caliphate educational system leverage on the situation of the polity. Therefore, the curriculum was very relevant to the space it was meant for. It was laid to fight

corruption, illiteracy, and wrongdoings, among the prevalent issues then. The issues fought by Sokoto Caliphate educational system were many, including the right to education for women, women right, poor leadership, social malaise, insecurity, and poor education.

- Academic Honesty is a key

Sokoto Caliphate educational curriculum accord much emphasis on academic honesty. Measures to ensure that, including provision of certification for graduates, and maintenance of chain of transmission of knowledge, confirm their moral and certain academic uprightness. Referencing style is a major figure of the curriculum, literature, works of Sokoto Caliphate, therein, every manuscript or student blatantly indicate the source by paraphrasing or quotation from past literatures; and every teacher indicates his/her chain of transmission of academic knowledge delivered.

- Multidisciplinary nature

Sokoto Caliphate furculum delivers multidisciplinary messages, therewith, some books are containing combination of fields, while in rare cases books are written for specific areas¹⁶

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Sokoto Caliphate's educational system offers valuable lessons for contemporary education. Its emphasis on inclusivity, equity, and holistic learning can inform modern approaches to education. By studying the system's strengths and challenges, educators and policymakers can develop more effective and sustainable educational systems that promote intellectual, spiritual, and practical growth. The legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate's educational system continues to inspire and inform educational development, particularly in Muslim communities.

¹ Abba, A., Jumare, I.M., & Aliyu, S.S. (2017). Sultans of Sokoto. A biographical history since

² Kaura, J.M. (2009). Sokoto Caliphate literature in the context of the 19th century jihad in Hausaland: A reflection on the contemporary relevance and challenges. Being the text of the 9th Inaugural Lecture of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto

³ Ayama, B.M. (2018). Takaitaccen tarihin Masarautar Gwadamawa. Sokoto: Kalenjeni Printing Press Sokoto.

Bashar, T.A. (2025). An appraisal of the role of Qur'an and Madrasa education in the Sokoto Caliphate. *Global Academic Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 7(1),10-13.

-
- ⁴ Abba, A., Jumare, I.M., & Aliyu, S.S. (2017). Sultans of Sokoto. A biographical history since 1804. Kaduna, Nigeria: Arewa House Center for Historical Documentation and Research, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- ⁵ Bashar, T.A. (2025). An appraisal of the role of Qur'an and Madrasa education in the Sokoto Caliphate. *Global Academic Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 7(1),10-13.
- ⁶ Muhammad Shareef, F.(1998). The revival of the sunna and destruction of innovation by Shehu Uthman Dan Fuduye.www.siiasi.org.
- ⁷ Muhammad Shareef, F.(1998). The revival of the sunna and destruction of innovation by Shehu Uthman Dan Fuduye.www.siiasi.org
- ⁸ Yusuf, T.S., Abubakar, T., & Tsoho, A.A. (2021). Sokoto jihadist writings as a blueprint towards socio-religious transformation in Norther Nigeria. *Al-Hikmah Journal of Education*, 8(1), 1-18.
- ⁹ Adam, A.I. (2023). The intellectual legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate and it's contemporary significance. *International Journal of Advances in Engineering and Management*, 5(3),1332-1337.
- ¹⁰ Mafara, M.I.T.(2009). *Littafin Lubabul Madhkal na Mlama Abdullahi Danfodiyo*. Nadabo Print Production Kaduna, Nigeria.
- ¹¹ Boyd, J. & Last, M.C.(1985). The role of women as "Agents Religieux" in Sokoto. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 19(2),283-300.
- ¹² Inda, A.& Qasim M.T. (2015). An appraisal of the nature, level and forms of Da'awah activities in Taraba state Nigeria. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*,20(12),100-105.
- ¹³ Maccido, S.M. (2011). Assessment of the contributions of women islamiyya schools to the development of education in Kaduna state. An MA thesis submitted at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.
- Maihula, J.S.(2025). The scope of Hadith Studies in Sokoto state. *Middle East Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*, 5(1),104-109.
- Boyd, J. & Last, M.C.(1985). The role of women as "Agents Religieux" in Sokoto. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 19(2),283-300.
- Dogon Daji, Z.M. (2022). The role of some Sokoto caliphate leaders in spreading and development of Maliki school of Law in Northern Nigeria. *Global Journal of Research in Education and Literature*, 2940, 113-119.
- ¹⁴ Dan Fuduye SU.(1998). The revival of the Sunna and destruction of innovation by Shehu Uthman dan Fuduye. Translated by Abu Alfa Umar Muhammad bin farid.www.siiasi.sankore.org.

Dan Fuduye, S.U.(1998). The revival of the Sunna and destruction of innovation by Shehu Uthman dan Fuduye. Translated by Abu Alfa Umar Muhammad bin farid. www.siiasi.sankore.org.

Islahi, AZ.(2011). Islamic economic thinking in the 12th AH/18th century with similar reference to Shah Wali-Allah Al-Dihlaw. <http://spe.kau.edu.sa>

Islahi A. (2012). Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio and his economic ideas. MPRA paper no. 40916. <http://mpra.ub.un-muenchen.de/40916/>

¹⁵ Chafe, 1992; Dan Fuduye, 1998; Mafara, 2009; Abba et al., 2017; Ayama, 2018; Bunza & Karim, 2021; Adam, 2023; Maihula, 2025.

¹⁶ Ayama, B.M. (2018). Takaitaccen tarihin Masarautar Gwadabawa. Sokoto: Kalenjeni Printing Press Sokoto.

Kuna, M.J. (1998). The Sokoto Caliphate, colonialism, and the formation of identities: The construction of “Northern Nigeria” *Annals of the Social Science Council of Nigeria*, 10, 69-109.