

THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF SHAYKH YŪSUF AKOREDE IN EKITILAND, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study seeks to evaluate the educational achievements of Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede, who made a significant impact on the spread of Islam in Ekitiland. It focuses on his biographical account, educational contribution, *da'wah* activities, his encounter with traditional idol religionists, his scholarly contributions to the development of Islam, as well as his impact on the people of Ekitiland and its environs. In terms of methodology, both field and archival materials were explored. However, the major information was sourced from oral and written sources. The study revealed that Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede contributed immensely to the development of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Ekitiland and its environs. He established his school with the aim of teaching Arabic and Islamic Studies in a modern way, concomitant to the Western system of education, so that the knowledge acquired from the school would be relevant for Islamic propagation and also serve as a means of earning a livelihood, hence awarding certificates after graduation. There were two main broad classes in this school, namely: the lower class, which was equivalent to elementary school (*ibtidā'iyyah*), and the higher class, which was like the advanced school (*i'dādiyyah*). In addition, he preached in all nooks and crannies of Nigeria, particularly in Yorubaland. He was turbaned as Chief Imām of Ado-Ekiti in 1976. He was the person who introduced the translation of Friday sermon (*khuṭbat al-jum'ah*) from Arabic to Yoruba language, for the understanding of the congregation, and the introduction of *tafsīr* during the month of *Ramaḍān* at Ado-Ekiti Central Mosque.

Introduction

The religion of Islam is undoubtedly one of the religions of the world that is not bereft of clerics dedicated to its propagation. Indeed, the religion of Islam has produced clerics of many ideas and ideals. Islam is one of the major religions adhered to by Nigerians. Among these are clerics of repute, who are responsible for its propagation. The activities of these clerics have attracted the attention of several scholars over the years. Indeed, the development of Islam in Yorubaland owes greatly to the activities of these clerics, especially in the areas of preaching, and educational and literary productions.

It must be noted that Islam did not meet a vacuum upon its entrance into Africa. The people of Ekiti, like other Yoruba people, already had some beliefs such as belief in Ifa (Oracle), Ogun (god of Iron), Sango (Thunder), Oya (goddess of River), and Esu (Devil), among others. The new converts, therefore, faced a series of persecutions from the people who were not willing to forego or renounce their age-long traditional beliefs in favour of the new faith. However, in order to propagate the religion of Islam, Muslim converts employed various methods such as open-air *da'wah*, the establishment of Qur'ānic, Arabic and Islamic schools, the discouragement of syncretism, and the production of literary works.

Biographical account of Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede

Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede was born in 1918 to the peasant family of Adeusi and Madam Osamuko, an itinerant trader family at Asa, in Odo-Ado, Ado-Ekiti in Ekitiland.¹ His father, Adeusi, was a leader of a traditional cult known as Eleefa (traditional Police) before he embraced Islam. Upon his conversion, he was given the name Yakub. He later converted his mother to Islam and gave her the name Maryam.²

Shaykh Akorede performed *hajj* in 1960, thus becoming the first person to perform *hajj* safely from Ekitiland. This happened in the sense that those who had left for pilgrimage before him never returned.³ It was for this reason that people considered his performance of *hajj* as a great feat. He was given the title Akorede (a person who brought goodness).⁴ It was strongly believed that his determination and dedication to Islam by giving spiritual nourishment to dying souls converted many people to the religion. In addition, Shaykh Akorede, under whose tutelage many erudite clerics of repute have sprung up, exerted much influence in shaping the lives of countless people.

His education

In his earlier experiences, his exposure to urban life earned him a small opportunity to acquire Western education, which enabled him to read and write the English language.⁵ The teaching of the Qur'ānic texts and the sermons that usually accompanied it were very fascinating and motivated Shaykh Akorede to study the *Qur'ān* and its tenets. He was then under the tutelage of his father's friend, Alfa 'Abdul Salām, at Idolofin in Ado-Ekiti. 'Abdul Salām later advised his father to release him (Akorede) in order to acquire Islamic knowledge.⁶ It was reported that he reached his sixth *hisb*⁷ under him before he left for other scholars such as Alfa 'Abdullāh Akolade⁸ and Alfa Zakariyah in Ibadan.⁹ He showed brilliance in his educational pursuits, as evidenced by his ability to memorize a large part of the Holy *Qur'ān*, from *Sūrat-ul-Fātiḥah* to *Sūrat-ul-Jin*¹⁰. He completed his studies in 1928.¹¹ He was *primus inter pares* among his colleagues during the study of *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis), *ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *as-sīrah*: (the biography of the prophet Muḥammad, p.b.u.h.) and a host of other subjects.

As far as he was concerned, his fervent desire was to become a great scholar of Islamic studies. He later travelled to Ondo town for further studies in Arabic and Islam, spending twenty years under the tutelage of Shaykh 'Abdullāh, the then Chief *Noibi* of Ondo-State.¹² He also studied under Alḥājī Ajanasī of Ilorin, then in Lagos,

until he finally moved to Ilorin to study under the eminent Shaykh Agbarigidoma in 1949.¹³ He thereafter returned to Ado-Ekiti and became the best scholar in Islamic knowledge in Ekitiland during that period.

His commitment and dedication, coupled with his vision, purged the Islamic religion in Ado-Ekiti of all forms of pollutions and impurities. He won many people to his side as students. Among them were the incumbent Chief Imām of Ado-Ekiti, in the persons of Alḥājī Jamiu Bello Kewulere, Alḥājī Dauda Agbetola, and the Chief Imām of Sirājuddīn Central Mosque, Ado-Ekiti, Alḥājī Abdul-Rasaq Akorede, an Islamic scholar, preacher and teacher, among several others.¹⁴

He got married to his first wife in 1946. He later married others. The historical sources imply that he had more than four wives at a time¹⁵ because almost everywhere he preached as an itinerant cleric, he was given a wife to marry by his hosts. This raises the question about whether or not his marriages complied with the Islamic principle limiting a man to a maximum of four wives at a time, as Allah has commanded in the Holy Qur’ān:

And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hands possess. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]. (*Qur’ān*, 4:3)

Men are prohibited from marrying more than four wives, as the above verse (*āyah*) decrees. If it were allowed for them to have more than four wives, the *āyah* would have mentioned it. Imām Aḥmad recorded that Salīm said that his father said that Ghīlān bin Salāmah Ath-Thaqafī had ten wives when he became Muslim, and the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said to him, “Choose any four of them (and divorce the rest).” Therefore, had it been allowed for men to marry more than four women at the same time, the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) would have allowed Ghīlān to keep more than four of his wives since they all embraced Islam with him. When the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) commanded him to keep just four of them and divorce the rest, this indicates that men are not allowed to keep more than four wives at a time under any circumstance.¹⁶ But Akorede regarded marrying many wives as a *jihād* because many of his wives were not Muslims by birth. He used to convert them to Islam through marriage and send their children to Muslim schools where they could get access to Arabic and Islamic knowledge as well as Western education. He was not alone on the issue of marriage to more than four wives at a time, in that era. It was the general character of many influential Muslims of the town in the 20th century. Their belief was that through this practice they would get many children, hence a rapid increase in the population of Muslims in the area.

Establishment of Arabic and Islamic School (*Zumurātul Diyau Solihina*)

Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede was a teacher who mainly devoted his life to imparting knowledge to others through school and Islamic *da’wah* activities. He had started teaching since the time he was under his teacher and his mentor, Shaykh Alḥājī Agbarigidoma in Ilorin. When he later came back to Ado-Ekiti in 1966, he founded

an Arabic and Islamic School known as *Zumurātul Diyau Solihina*, where scholars were registered from both Ado-Ekiti districts and beyond. The school produced more than one thousand scholars spreading not only over Ado-Ekiti but also the entire Yorubaland.¹⁷

The arrival of Shaykh Akorede made a turning point not only in the history of Islam, but also the teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies. He had many students, to the extent that a bag of rice or *gari* (cassava flakes) could hardly be sufficient to feed them at once. He produced many students who are now well placed in their various fields of endeavour. Some are still alive and as Allah wants it, some have passed away.¹⁸ Shaykh Akorede even sponsored some of his students to perform *hajj* in Saudi Arabia.

Underlying the success in any program are clearly articulated aims and objectives as guidelines. The aims and objectives of Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede for the establishment of his school were as follows:

- (a) Teaching of Islamic theology to enable the present and future generations to understand the religion of Islam in its true perspective.
- (b) Teaching people the principles and practice of the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h.).
- (c) Inculcating true Islamic culture into the minds of the students, enabling the next generation to know about Islamic civilization.
- (d) Effective teaching of the pupils, enabling them to become qualified teachers and preachers.¹⁹

There were many Arabic and Islamic schools located in the major towns of Ekitiland where the religion had more impact before the arrival of Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede. Prominent among them are listed in Table 1 on the next page, along with their locations and years of establishment.²⁰

In terms of scope, these schools were not different from the Qur'ānic schools founded almost in every village and town in Yorubaland, where there were significant numbers of Muslims. The beginners would commit to memory the rudiments of the Holy Qur'ān inscribed on wooden slates (*wala*). The age of admission of pupils varied from one school to another, though usually from four years and above. The length of the period of training also varied. It depended on the students' performances. Since learning is a continuous process as long as one lives, in line with the tradition of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) that says, "Search for knowledge from the cradle to the grave,"²¹ these clerics devoted a greater part of their life to imparting knowledge and aiding the spiritual development of mankind. These scholars insisted on pursuing the traditional system of Islamic education. They believed that children should be sent to the *madāris* (schools) established by the graduates of their schools. As a disciplinary measure, the teacher (*ustādh*) used a leather whip on his pupils. The completion of Qur'ānic study in these schools was marked by a solemn ceremony (*walīmat*) when the certificates were issued. Usually cows or some other animals were slaughtered, providing plenty of food to feed the people. As a show of brilliance, these graduates would read a portion of the Qur'ān, inscribed on a decorated slate, in the presence of the audience. This was to prove to the audience that they had satisfied their teachers. The graduates and their people would then parade through the streets, singing Arabic and Yoruba lyrics.

Table 1: Arabic and Islamic schools in major towns of Ekitiland

No.	Name of school	Town	Year of establishment
1	Alfa Tījānī Arabic and Islamic School	Otun-Ekiti	1877
2	Alfa Ḥussain Arabic and Islamic School	Awo-Ekiti	1878
3	Alfa Muṣṭafā Arabic and Islamic School	Ado-Ekiti	1890s
4	Alfa Murtalla Arabic and Islamic School	Ikole-Ekiti	1905
5	Alfa Amīnu Arabic and Islamic School	Ado-Ekiti	1910
6	Alfa Tapa Arabic and Islamic School	Ikere-Ekiti	1914
7	Alfa Junaid Arabic and Islamic School	Igbemo-Ekiti	1925
8	Alfa Audu Arabic and Islamic School	Araromi-Ekiti	1926
9	Alfa Ḥussain Balogun Arabic School	Awo-Ekiti	1927
10	Alfa Jimba Arabic and Islamic School	Ido-Ekiti	1928
11	Alfa Zubairu Balogun Arabic School	Igbemo-Ekiti	1930
12	Alfa ‘Uthmān Arabic and Islamic School	Igede-Ekiti	1933
13	Alfa Aderounmu Arabic School	Ilawe-Ekiti	1936
14	Alfa Yīsā Arabic and Islamic School	Iyin-Ekiti	1945
15	Alfa Dandawi Arabic and Islamic School	Ado-Ekiti	1955
16	Alfa Ogbomoso Arabic and Islamic School	Iyin-Ekiti	1956
17	Alfa Ibrāhīm Arabic and Islamic School	Igbemo-Ekiti	1960
18	Alfa Ajagbe Arabic and Islamic School	Igbemo-Ekiti	1960
19	Alfa Ayinla Arabic and Islamic School	Are-Ekiti	1963

Ironically, most of these clerics who established Arabic and Islamic schools condemned Western education. They did not see anything beneficial in the Western system. They strongly maintained and always preached that Western education bred corruption, adultery and fornication, and other vices, and therefore it corrupted the youth. They insisted that children should have the knowledge of only the Qur’ān, or Arabic and Islamic Studies. They maintained that this alone could help Muslims in this world and in the hereafter. In schools and universities, according to these clerics, children were exposed to Western civilization and consequently became nominal Muslims. Should this continue, they maintained, the future of Islam would be doomed. This is why they did not send their children to Western-oriented schools. On this issue they used to sing a song to discourage Western education. The song runs thus:

Kewu loye wa kami ake
 Iyen labosi aye koni lewo
 Abosi aye wowe iwe bayeje
 Eyin omo araye nitori owo
 Eso omo yin nu bi oko
 Omo kawo tan on sasewo.²²

Meaning:

The Qur'ānic knowledge is the best to learn
 It will never be adulterated
 The adulterated Western education spoilt the
 Universe, Oh! People of the universe, because of
 Worldly materials (riches) you cast your
 Children far away like stone
 Graduates are now professional prostitutes.

In contrast to this perspective, Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede established his school with the aim of teaching Arabic and Islamic Studies in a modern way, concurrently with the Western system of education; hence graduates of the school would be able to use the knowledge acquired from the school not only for Islamic propagation but also as a means of earning their living, and certificates were awarded after graduation. The school was organized in the evenings between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. from Monday to Wednesday, and between 8:00 a.m. till dusk on Saturdays and Sundays, excluding Thursdays and Fridays. This arrangement was to afford pupils attending Western schools an opportunity to receive Qur'ānic education in the Arabic and Islamic schools. This type of school had two standard classrooms with desks, benches, and chalkboards. Admission forms were distributed free of charge. There was free tuition in order to encourage good patronage. As a result, many parents enrolled their children in the school.

The largest percentage of the student population was secondary school students, who viewed it as an advantage to learn Arabic and Islamic Studies, making up for the lack of these courses in the regular secondary schools. Students from neighbouring towns also attended the school. Some of them lived with the teacher in his house. The same building was used as both the teacher's residence and the students' hostel. This enabled the teacher to easily supervise the students, effectively teaching them day and night.

There were two broad classes in this school, namely, the lower class that was the equivalent of elementary school (*ibtidā'iyyah*), and the higher class that was like the advanced school (*i'dādiyyah*). The courses of study in the lower class included the Arabic alphabet, memorization and writing. At the end of this course, which lasted between six and eighteen months (depending on the capabilities of the individual pupils), pupils celebrated with pomp and pageantry. The higher class (*i'dādiyyah*) subjects were broken into many parts. For example, the following were studied as components of the Arabic Language: *al-implā'* (dictation), *an-naḥw* (grammar), *aṣ-ṣarf* (morphology), *al-adab* (literature), *ḥisāb* (arithmetic), and *inshā'* (composition). In Islamic Studies, students were taught *al-fiqh* (jurisprudence), *al-tārīkh* (history), *sharī'ah* (Islamic law), *tajwīd* (science of Qur'ānic reading), *maḥfūzah* (memorisation), *qirā'āt* (reading), Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* studies, etc.

Shaykh Akorede invited his friends and colleagues to serve as members of the Governing Board for the school. For the development of the school, the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA), presided by the proprietor of the school, used to meet from time to time, to discuss the progress of the school. The administrative set-up of the school was run by the principal, vice principal and governing council. The principal of the school was responsible for the general administration, while the vice

principal was responsible for its academic activities. There was also a governing council, whose responsibility was to formulate policies concerning the school.

Annual Islamic festivals, especially *Mawlid-Naby* and *Laylatul Qadr*, were given priority attention during celebrations. Invitations were usually extended to people from various towns and cities for the celebrations. These occasions were always graced by both the Muslims and the non-Muslims in the town, who came to watch the performances of the students in the arts of drama, speech-making in Arabic, English and Yoruba languages, as well as dancing and singing educational Islamic songs. Invitees who annually attended these Islamic events were always fascinated and developed interest in learning Arabic and Islamic Studies, and became favourably disposed to sending their wards to this school.

The school celebrated its first *walīmat* on the second and third of April, 1976,²³ with 40 male and female graduates. The *walīmat* was celebrated amidst pomp and grandeur. It witnessed a large turnout of attendees, coming from all walks of life. The graduation, being the first of its kind in the town, aroused the interest of more students, who later enrolled in the school. Shaykh Akorede's efforts were appreciated by the entire Muslim community in the town. He was given presents, while many other individuals offered him gifts of foodstuffs and farm produce. Visits were paid him by some natives of Ekitiland living within or outside the community, inquiring about his welfare and about the running of the school. The enabling environment created by the people built confidence in him and boosted his morale to teach the pupils effectively. At the end of each academic session, a graduation ceremony was organized for graduating students. The ceremony, which served as a source of fund-raising for the upkeep of the school, was a moment of joy for graduates, parents and well-wishers, celebrating the admirable achievements of the graduates. This new idea was also welcomed by Yoruba Muslims, and many of them enrolled their children in the tuition-free school. The news about Shaykh Akorede's Islamic activities was heard in other towns in the southwestern part of Nigeria. This made the people from these areas send their children to study under him. Shortly after graduation, those students usually dispersed to their respective towns and villages to teach people and spread the knowledge of Islam. When other people noticed the brilliant performances of Shaykh Akorede's students, they were motivated to send their children to him, understanding his school to be superior to others.

The reactions of other scholars to Shaykh Akorede's Arabic and Islamic School were both positive and negative. Some of them admired the system and they later studied under him to learn his methodology, while others condemned him outright because of his stint in Western education and the introduction of various courses like *naḥw*, *balāghah*, *ṣarf*, etc. This condemnation was also reflected in one of his songs, which goes thus:

Solo	Kewu Alajagbe ni Keu gidi
Chorus	Kewu Alajagbe ni Keu tiwa
Solo	Tiwa yato si ti oni darudapo
Chorus	Kewu Na'wu ko ake damu enu. ²⁴

Meaning:

Solo	Ajagbe's Arabic School is the cogent type
Chorus	Ajagbe's Arabic School is our choice

Solo Ours differ from confusing type
 Chorus It is not the modern type that brings confusion to the lips.

Unfortunately at present, this school is no longer functioning for a number of reasons, among which are nonchalant attitudes of students towards Arabic and Islamic learning, lack of adequate employment opportunities for specialists in Arabic and Islamic Studies, and lack of commitment to Islam by Muslims.

Shaykh Akorede's *da'wah* activities

In addition to his teaching of Arabic and Islamic studies, his other activities were open-air preaching and public lectures. Before the arrival of Akorede, the practice of Islam had become adulterated particularly by the Muslims themselves. Such social vices as drunkenness, secret cult (*Ogboni*) and so on, were largely blamed on people's nonchalant attitude towards Islamic teachings and their lack of readiness to uphold those teachings.

Obviously, there was a dearth of pristine Islamic teachings, which made the arrival and method of Shaykh Akorede's teaching very timely. His arrival was regarded as a great blessing. The zeal and inspiration with which he presented the teachings of Islam earned him a large following. As a result, he was able to endear himself to the people, particularly by solving their social problems through the use of authentic Islamic teachings and practices. He emphasized to the people the need to adhere strictly to the teachings of Islam, to be better educated and well informed about the religion of Islam.²⁵

Shaykh Akorede started his *da'wah* activities and teaching career in a different part of the then Western Region of Nigeria in 1947.²⁶ During his *da'wah* activities and tour of the subregion, he converted many pagans to Islam and inculcated awareness of the Islamic religion in Muslim parents who had hitherto become spiritually dead. His performance was so exceptional that he became popular outside Ekitiland and its environs.²⁷ The eagerness to have a taste of Shaykh Akorede's erudition prompted the Muslim community in Ado-Ekiti and its environs to invite him to Ado-Ekiti. On his arrival at Ado-Ekiti, he converted his father, who was then Olokori, the leader of the Ogboni cult; Shaykh Akorede's father was renamed Yakub, and his mother renamed Maryam.²⁸ Before this incident, he had instructed his father to hand over all the Ogboni paraphernalia kept with him and he even advised the Ogboni people to come and pack them from his father's house.²⁹ After he had converted his parents to Islam, he advised other Ogboni cult members to accept Islam. His popular song reflecting this manner of preaching goes thus:

Geferi to ku esi ma mu ra (2x)
 Ewa wo Olokori o Baba Yūsuf
 Togbo Olohun gbo to gba ta Anabi
 Keferi to ku esi maa mura.³⁰

Meaning:

The other non-Muslim behind should prepare (2x)
 Come and look at Olokori (a leader of Ogboni cult)

The father of (Shaykh) Yūsuf, who believed in God and prophet
The other non-Muslim should be prepared (to accept).

He sang this song throughout the town while conducting his *da'wah*. These activities always attracted an audience, including both Muslims and non-Muslims. He even tried as much as possible to convert his relatives to the Islamic fold. He did not limit his *da'wah* activities to the four corners of Ado-Ekiti alone, his zeal for conveying the Islamic message led him to reach out and propagate the inimitable words of Allah. He preached in almost all of the neighbouring towns and villages of Ekitiland, such as Ikere, Agbado, Ise, Omuo and several others. He also preached in towns in other states such as Ayede, Kaba in Kogi State, Ikare and Ogbagi Akoko in Ondo-State, and Ibadan in Oyo-State, among others.³¹ He preached at Urobo, Sapele and Agboh. He used to engage an interpreter who understood the Yoruba language from among the inhabitants of these towns, to interpret his message for better understanding. At times someone would interpret it into the English language for his audience.³² He converted many people to Islam in these places. He also built mosques and established Islamic schools in some of these places. For instance, he built a mosque at Iyamoye, Auchi, Agbo and Omuo-Ekiti, the latter eventually becoming the Omuo-Ekiti Central Mosque of today.³³

The major themes of his *da'wah*

The major themes of Shaykh Akorede's *da'wah* were centred on the Ogboni cult.³⁴ Sometimes he would mention their names publicly, and even expose their secret names in cults. He always invited them to come out if they could do so. But nobody dared come out, because, he had already displayed some of the Ogboni materials that the members should never see to avoid encountering problems.³⁵ Once an Ogboni member vehemently confronted him in public; Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede overpowered him, but later released him because people interceded for his pardon.³⁶ He himself was very versed in incantation, even more than the Ogboni people. Though he was never a member of this cult, he studied their operations in order to know their secrets to be able to fight them.³⁷ Sometimes while preaching to his people in Ado-Ekiti, he would sing the following rhyme (*waka*) to them in order that they accept his message:

Bi Eko tan yin
Bi Ibadan tan yin
Omo ti e bi oni tan yin (2x).³⁸

Meaning:

If Eko people deceive you
And Ibadan people deceive you
Your own child will not deceive you (2x).

This was to confirm the message of other scholars from Lagos and Ibadan who had been coming to Ado-Ekiti to preach the message of Allah.

Shaykh Akorede was also fond of emphasizing the punishment awaiting those on the Day of Judgment who associated partners with Almighty Allah. There were

various types of idol worshipping, which were contrary to the principles of Islamic theology. He usually mentioned the cults, masqueraders and drinkers of alcohol, among others. He used to condemn these bad acts and he was ready to confront any of the unbelievers of Islam who came out to challenge him.

Shaykh Akorede also emphasized the importance of the five daily prayers and the punishments awaiting those who deserted the prayers. He berated Muslims whose only concern was the *jum'at* (Friday) prayers and *ṣubḥ* (morning) prayers. Those who were not concerned about other prayers like *ẓuhr*, *ʿaṣr*, *maghrib* and *ʿishāʾ*, and those who practised the religion only during *Ramaḍān* when they were coming to attend *tarāwīḥ* and *ʿīd* prayers, were usually criticized.

The major themes of his *daʿwah* included condemnation of alcoholism and the drinking of palm wine, which was then very rampant among both Muslims and non-Muslims of Ekiti. It was, however, later reported that the same palm wine was one of the major instruments used to encourage people to accept Islam in Ado-Ekiti in the earlier days.³⁹ On his arrival at Ado-Ekiti he strongly condemned those who were engaging themselves in this act. He declared categorically that whosoever was involved in the business of alcohol by giving out money to buy it, or bought it for someone, or assisted one to buy it, or encouraged one to drink it, or who built houses for it, or the one selling or drinking it, as well as the driver who conveyed the alcohol, would all be condemned to hell fire on the Day of Judgment. He even added that whoever drank alcohol among the Muslims was no longer a Muslim but rather an unbeliever.⁴⁰ This behaviour brought him in conflict with some Muslims and non-Muslims to the extent of open confrontation. For instance, some fellow Muslim leaders who engaged in drinking alcohol—which is prohibited by the Qurʾān—became his avowed enemies. Still, he was of the view that any action which contradicted the teaching of the Holy Qurʾān should never be tolerated.

Also while preaching to the people to worship Allah, as Allah commands in the Holy Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* of Holy Prophet Muḥammed (p.b.u.h.), he sang thus:

Kira kita, Kira kita
Boju ba ti mo,
Baba a fa Ada e yo,
A kiri bo gbo,
Ani nitori kikoko oun ma digbo,
Ati nitori kikoko oun ma digbe,
Koko ti odigbo loju re
Igbe ninbo wada leyin re. (2x)⁴¹

Meaning:

Struggle upon struggle
After the day break
The farmer will set out
To his farm
For fear that his farm will become weedy
For fear that his farm will become bushy
Every effort you are making to keep the farm clean in your life time
Will be in vain after your demise. (2x)

His emergence as Chief Imām

Shaykh Akorede was at Agbado-Ekiti when he was invited to become the Chief Imām of Ado-Ekiti in 1976. At first he refused the invitation, according to Omoyajowo, because he preferred *da'wah* activities to being the Chief Imām.⁴² The knowledge of Islamic and Arabic Studies possessed by late Chief Imām Akorede was, for this period, unequalled throughout Ado-Ekiti and its environs. This great knowledge was usually displayed through his itinerant preaching in all areas of Ekitiland. However, following the death of the late Chief Imām Jamiu Ayeni (1934-1973) there was a vacuum in the Islamic leadership of Ado-Ekiti.⁴³ The Muslim community had to provide another competent person to replace the late Chief Imām. The vacant post led to controversy over who should be the new Chief Imām and from where he should come, because Ado-Ekiti was basically divided into two zones, Odo-Ado and Oke-Ewi.⁴⁴ The controversy was later resolved by the king, Ewi Amodu Adewumi Agunsoye who held that two kings should not come from the same area.⁴⁵ He believed that the Chief Imām of the town was also regarded as a King. While the King, as the political head of the town came from Oke-Ewi, then the king of the Muslims (Chief Imām) should be come from the Odo-Ado district. This ruling of the King could not be disputed by anyone. It automatically halted any animosity or further quarrelling among the Muslim community. The decision of the King favoured the selection of the Chief Imām from the Odo-Ado zone. Since then and until today, Odo-Ado has been producing the Chief Imāms of Ado-Ekiti.

Another quarrel also arose among the Odo-Ado zone as to who should present the new Chief Imām. Odo-Ado has six streets, all wishing to present the new Chief Imām. Therefore, a primary election was conducted for two candidates, out of whom the late Shaykh Akorede emerged as the winner.⁴⁶ His selection as Chief Imām was done according to *sharī'ah* law, which states that the one most knowledgeable in Islamic law and most trustworthy should be selected as the Chief Imām. His selection as the Chief Imām was well accepted by the people, to the extent that a large crowd sang and danced at his residence. The turbanning ceremony took place on July 30, 1976. The ceremony, which attracted Imāms and *Alfas* (Islamic scholars) in Ekitiland, was performed by one of his teachers, Shaykh Alḥājī Agbarigidoma.⁴⁷

Upon his turbanning, Shaykh Akorede made it a point of duty to organize Muslims under one platform. The Muslim elite had weekly meetings where the propagation of Islam, as well as the development of Ado-Ekiti was discussed. A large number of non-Muslims were converted to Islam during the short tenure of Shaykh Akorede.⁴⁸ He organized public sermons in which prominent members of the elite featured. Being the Chief Imām, he organized special prayers to meet the needs of the town's people, such as the prayer for rain, the prayer for the development of the town, and the prayer for Ewi, the King of Ado-Ekiti. He also set up the *tafsīr* committee to enhance the understanding of the Holy Qur'ān among Muslims.⁴⁹

This is an achievement of which many Muslim preachers and scholars could be proud. His extensive education and large number of students, both within and outside the town, led to a high level of cooperation during his tenure. His contacts with other Muslim scholars outside the town led to an influx of many Muslim scholars, many of whom preferred to stay in Ado-Ekiti. These clerics engaged in the teaching of Qur'ānic education, as well as preaching, developments which later enhanced the progress of Muslims in Ado-Ekiti. Shaykh Akorede had laid a good

example for all Muslims during his tenure.⁵⁰ His encounters with non-Muslims, especially the Ogboni cult members, often resulted in open attacks physically and verbally, but he always came out victorious, resulting in more conversions to Islam.⁵¹

A large number of Ado people embraced Islam because of his good character. He engaged in regular fasting throughout his life and used three days for breaking the fast. The three days were *ʿīdul-fīṭrī* (the end of *Ramaḍān* celebration), *ʿīdul-aḍḥā* (the feast of sacrifice) and *Kayo-Kayo* day (the 9th and 10th days of *Muḥarram*). He sometimes spent one month or forty days in the house in spiritual communion without attending to anyone. He also organized monthly prayers for all Muslims in Ado. He was famous for the use of the following Qurʾānic verses in his sermon:

This is an admonition: whosoever will, let him take a (straight) Path to his Lord. But ye will not, except as Allah wills; for Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom. (*Qurʾān*, 76:29 & 30)

Shaykh Akorede spent his money to propagate Islam. He was very amiable and very outspoken. He was also known for his constant use of the following Qurʾānic verse:

Oh ye who believe! Turn to Allah in sincere repentance; in the hope that your Lord will remove from you your evil deeds, and admit you to gardens beneath which rivers flow, the day that Allah will not permit to be humiliated the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their light shall run forward before them and by their right hands, while they say, "Our Lord perfect our light for us, and grant us forgiveness: for Thou hast power over all things. (*Qurʾān*, 66:8)

Shaykh Akorede was known to always start and close his public sermons with these verses. Much of his preaching was also directed at the members of the Ogboni cult, many of whom were accused of being responsible for social cult vices common at the time.⁵²

Among the contemporary scholars of Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede were Shaykh Jamiu Dandawi and Shaykh Ajijola. These other scholars intensified their efforts towards the realization of the advancement of Islam in Ado-Ekiti and other areas. This could be vividly ascertained by the way they conducted their open-air preaching of Islam to the people. However, they recorded little success in converting and reforming people back to the ideal practices of Islam. This was largely due to the lukewarm attitude of the people towards them and Islam. But the coming of Shaykh Akorede at that pressing period reversed the situation.

Also, the Yorubas, amongst other tribes, were generally known for their belief and quest for spiritual power and their use of traditional medicine to solve various problems afflicting them. Such people sought solutions from spiritualists of diverse religious persuasions whom they believed could help them out. Before the advent of Islam in Ekitiland, only traditional herbalists were being patronized. The oracles would be consulted to reveal both the cause of such problems and the necessary solutions for them. Numerous incantations would be chanted and sacrifices made. This method of finding solutions to problems persisted even after the advent of Islam. Paradoxically, Muslims also indulged in this fetish practice, in spite of Islam's aversion to it. Because of this, Islam was adulterated.⁵³

As expected, this new preacher, with his spiritual ability, was regarded as extraordinary by the people. The Muslims now saw him as a pride of their religion; hence Islam became a religion of which they were proud. Many Muslims who had been patronizing the traditional herbalists now turned to him for prayer and spiritual guidance. He often organized special prayers where the whole of the Holy Qur'ān would be recited, after which money and other materials would be given in charity to the poor. This authentic authority and power, with which he was endowed, made him reputable within and outside Ekiti, as many people far and near came to him for prayers. It is also necessary to note here that he always made his guests realize that it was Allah Who had the absolute power over all things. He charged little or no money for his services. This he did to draw people towards Islam and to make the wavering Muslims remain steadfast in Islam. However, he received gifts brought to him for showing appreciation. Because of the influence he possessed and his love for people, they held him in high regard.⁵⁴ Surprisingly, unlike many people who become arrogant after having acquired power, wealth, or position, he remained humble.

Aware of the limitations of Islamic awareness in Ekitiland, he made it a duty to rotate his open-air *da'wah* among different areas and zones of the town. Eventually people appreciated his preaching and gathered wherever he appeared for a lecture. For his erudition and wisdom, people would not leave the scene until he either finished or they were able to absorb something substantial from his lecture. He presented his lectures in an attractive manner, as reflected in the Qur'ānic injunction:

Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His path, and who received guidance. (Qur'ān, *An-nahl*:125)

The Impact of his work on the people of Ekitiland and its environs

It should be noted that Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede contributed in no small way to the growth and development of Islam in Ekitiland in particular and in Nigeria as a whole. This is evident in the various ways in which he distinguished himself as an outstanding Islamic propagator and dedicated teacher of Arabic and Islamic Studies. He was independently engaged in *da'wah* and teaching orthodox Islam through endurance, perseverance, steadfastness and good intention. He carried the banner of Islam to every nook and cranny of the old western region of Nigeria. He was able to convert numerous non-Muslims into the fold of Islam and his preaching corrected many social vices.

The contribution of his Qur'ānic school to Islam in Ekitiland in particular and Nigeria in general cannot be underestimated. The school had opened the eyes of many Muslims who would have been swimming in the ocean of ignorance. Apart from the fact that the school has provided knowledge to those who were thirsty for it, it has also reshaped the lives of many Nigerians from the abyss of lawlessness, hooliganism, indecency, and other anti-social behaviours. This school has been one of the recognized Arabic and Islamic centers that have produced many graduate clerics, who in turn have contributed immensely to the spread of Islam to all parts of Ekitiland and its districts.

A major impact of Shaykh Akorede's *da'wah* activities was the establishment of the 'ṭd prayer, popularly known as *Adua Odun*. This practice was established with the hope that the prayer of Prophet Ibrāhīm (p.b.u.h.) in the Qur'ān would be recited in Ekiti, so that progress would come to the land, especially for the Muslims in Ekitiland.⁵⁵ Another impact of his *da'wah* activities was the establishment of the Arabic and Islamic school. The school had contributed greatly to the development of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Ekitiland and its environs. Many students who passed from the school have been employed to teach Arabic and Islamic Studies in many primary schools in Ekitiland. Some have become Imāms in various mosques and organizations. Examples of such are the Chief Imām of Ado-Ekiti in the persons of Alhājī Jamiu Bello Kewulere, Alhājī Dauda Agbetola, and Chief Imām of Sirājuddīn Central Mosque of Ado-Ekiti, among several others. As a result of his establishing this school, many other local and standard Arabic and Islamic institutions are now flourishing in the area, where Arabic and Islamic teachings are being imparted to young and old Muslims.

Shaykh Akorede also authored a book entitled, *Itan asiri Ologboni* (Exposing the Secrets of the Ogboni Cult) in 1975.⁵⁶ The impact of his *da'wah*, among other factors, led to his being turbaned as the Chief Imām. He also made a significant impact on the upliftment of Islam in Ado-Ekiti and its environs during his time as the Chief Imām. Though his tenure was very short, the period was prosperous for all, especially among the Muslims.

In order to ensure religious harmony, he brought together all the Rātībī Imāms and enjoined very cordial and improved relationships among them. Prior to his being turbaned as Chief Imām, there was no specific general meeting among Muslims involving all Rātībī Imāms. He, in order to foster unity and understanding, on his ascendance as the fifth Chief Imām, laid the precedent by organizing general meetings for the other Imāms during which important issues that concerned the progress of Islam and Muslims were discussed. It was during such meetings that special all-day prayers were agreed to be offered, to bring large numbers of converts to Islam.⁵⁷ The meeting excluded the Islamic elite and *Alfas*, whose scheduled meetings differed. Chief Imām Akorede held other special meetings with them, purposely to bring the *Alfas* together for good administration. At one of the meetings of the *Alfas* during this period, it was agreed that the renovation of the central mosque be made. However, Akorede did not witness that renovation because he died before this happened. The subsequent Chief Imām implemented it.⁵⁸

Another area where the impact of Akorede was felt was that he was the first Chief Imām who started the translation of the *khuṭbah* (sermon) from Arabic language into Yoruba language during *jum'ah* prayers and 'ṭd days.⁵⁹ Since the time of this introduction and until today, the idea is still in practice. He observed that the recitation of the *khuṭbah* (sermon) only in the Arabic language would not allow proper understanding of the sermon because the majority of the Muslims did not understand the Arabic language. The introduction of the Yoruba interpretation elicited good responses from the Muslim populace; many conversions were recorded at that time because people could understand clearly what the Chief Imām preached, more so than the sermons that had taken place at *jum'at* before by a different scholar. A very significant landmark recorded by the late Akorede was the institution of the Mission Board.⁶⁰

It should be noted that before his ascendancy, there was no standard location for sessions of *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis). Before, teaching was done at different places. During the regime of Chief Imām Ayeni, Alḥājī A. B. Muḥammed, popularly known as Bābā Guguru, was appointed as the Chief *mufasssīr* (Qur'ānic exegete). During Akorede's time, *tafsīr* sessions were organized throughout the month of *Ramaḍān*. He expressed his intention to appoint a *mufasssīr* for better understanding of the Qur'ān and Islam.⁶¹ When the *Ramaḍān* fast was to begin, on Friday, August 28, 1976, the committee met and agreed on the introduction of *tafsīr* classes. Alḥājī Zakariyau Hārūna was appointed as Chief Mufasssīr during the regime of Oba Aladesanmi II, the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti. He was personally present at the ceremony. The *tafsīr* is still in practice till today. The subsequent Chief Imām Alḥājī Jamiu Kewulere Bello has even introduced some modernization to it. Question time has been provided and answers are given by learned *Alfas* to divergent issues. The commendation for *tafsīr* sitting goes to Alḥājī Akorede, who pioneered its organization.

Shaykh Akorede's other qualities included his contentment, especially in the issue of monthly salary. The late Akorede did not take any monthly salary throughout his tenure. He was quoted to have said that he was working for Almighty Allah who knew well how to compensate him. He (Akorede) worked to bring a big change to Islam in Ado-Ekiti.

Making a general comparison between the standard of Islam before and after the advent of Shaykh Akorede in the area revealed that much had been done by him to enhance the understanding of the people of their practice of Islam. Muslims are now clearly recognized and distinguished from the non-Muslims. He successfully managed to improve the interest of the nominal Muslims and won their hearts for pure Islamic faith; Muslims now recognize such festivals as *ʿĪd al-kabīr*, *ʿĪd al-fiṭr*, *Laylatul-Qadr* and *Mawḥud an-Nabī* as the only festivals recommended for them by Islam, and hence drastically reduced their partaking in other non-Islamic festivals such as Christmas, Easter, Ogun and others.⁶²

As regards pilgrimage, previously Muslims from Shaykh Akorede's area had refused to perform *ḥajj* as a result of frequent deaths in the Holy Land. He successfully convinced them of the possibility of successful pilgrimage through his ability to perform a safe *ḥajj*. He was reported to have prayed for the avoidance of death of subsequent pilgrims from Ado-Ekiti during his pilgrimage; to date, there are no reports of deaths among Ado-Ekiti pilgrims in the Holy Land. After his coming back from *ḥajj*, Shaykh Akorede aroused the enthusiasm of Muslims for it by adopting two methods:

1. By teaching them the essence of pilgrimage, including why and how it should be performed and the reward awaiting any pilgrim in the hereafter.
2. By organizing a farewell party whereby prayers would be said and donations in cash would be made to assist the intending pilgrims to support their families back home.⁶³

As a result of these methods and with himself setting the example, when he performed the *ḥajj* rites in 1960, a large number of Muslims have performed the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, while thousands are still aspiring to perform it regardless of increasing fares and expenses.

The death of Yūsuf Akorede occurred on Friday, Oct. 11, 1976, after a sickness that lasted about two weeks.⁶⁴

Conclusion

In this paper, it was found that Shaykh Yūsuf Akorede contributed immensely to the development of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Ekitiland and its environs. He established his school with the aim of teaching Arabic and Islamic Studies in a modern way, which would make it attractive to the population; by accommodating and incorporating components of the Western system of education and issuing certificates upon graduation, graduates of the school would be able to use the knowledge acquired from the school, not only for Islamic propagation but also as a means of earning their living. In addition, Shaykh Akorede preached in all areas of Nigeria, particularly in Yorubaland. He was selected as the Chief Imām of Ado-Ekiti in 1976. He was the first person to introduce the translation of Friday sermons from Arabic to the Yoruba language and to introduce the teaching of *tafsīr* during the month of *Ramaḍān* at the Ado-Ekiti central mosque. Finally, Shaykh Akorede contributed to the advancement of Islam through his published work, *Itan asiri Ologboni* in 1976.

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