

Title

Interview Al-Hajj Husan Zakaria Umar Proprietor of the Adad Islamic Mission School, Nima (Accra)

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Description

This interview centered on the nature of Arabic language instruction at Islamic Education Unit schools in Ghana. It also touched on how private praetor schools are adopting the Islamic Education curriculum without having to join the national Ghana Education Council system. The emphasis is on debunking the idea that Islamic schools are anti-secular and therefore pro-anti Western.

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13 July 2005, Interview with Alhajj Husan Zakaria Umar, Proprietor of the Adad Islamic Mission School, Nima (Accra)

Note: Dr. Mark Sey and I arrived at Nima on the day of the interview, shortly before the afternoon prayer that our interviewee was supposed to lead. He therefore was ready for a short interview (about the school and its role in the Muslim community of Nima (Accra).

Q. Please would you introduce yourself for the interview?

A. I am Alhajj Husan Zakaria Umar. I am proprietor of the Adad Islamic Mission School

Q. When was this school established?

A. The school was opened in 1959 but I registered it in 1972.

Q. Why was the school not registered in 1959 but in 1972?

A. That was the beginning [of our enterprise] and we were not financially sound.

Q. Can you tell me a little about the structure of the school in its earlier years (1952-1979)?

A. We had just a shelter that we had. We taught Arabic and English (both together). At that time, the children were not many. We started with about 5 to 10 children. It was in the early 1960s when the number of students increased.

Q. How many students did you have when you registered the school in 1972?

A. We had more than 200 children. We registered with the Ministry of Education as a private sector school Primary School without a Junior Secondary School (JSS) because the idea of having a JSS has not been instituted. [Note that the Ghana JSS is about the same as the Middle School system in the United States].

Q. Now that this is registered with the Ministry of Education, what courses are you teaching?

A. English, Math, Geography, Arabic and the Quranic Studies (religious Studies).

Q. How many teachers do you have?

A. At the moment, we have nearly 30 teachers (both secular and Islamic teachers). The secular teachers instruct the Ghana Education Service secular courses [from the primary school through the JSS].

Q. How many of your teachers are Islamic Studies (Arabic) teachers?

A. About 15 instructors.

Q. What will be the content of Islamic Studies?

A. The content is based on Arabic language, Quranic recitation, (Arabic) writing, and at the same time we teach Arabic grammar, hadith [Prophetic Traditions].

Q. What are the particular books that are used for the Islamic instruction?

A. We advise our students about Religious Book when they come here. They are of the Malikki religious School of thought such as Arabic grammar books. We also get books from Libya, and Saudi Arabia and we use those book in addition to the books we already have in teaching. Especially Saudi Arabian books are so many, they cover subjects as history and geography but we follow the geography up with English texts because of the secular education. But as for math and English are normal [secular curricular]. On the Religious Studies we use the Islamic aspects we do teach them the Muslim aspects. This [system] was up to the Primary Six level [K-through 6]. Since 1972 when we registered [with the Ministry of education] we have followed the same syllabus and now the children have the access [advantage] of seeking to write the Common Entrance Examination [that allows them to go on to the Senior secondary School (SSS) level of education [conducted by the Ghana Education service through the West African Examination Council (WAEC)] after which the successful children are promoted to Secondary School. Thus, the children finish [the Islamic Mission School before writing the Common Entrance Exams].

Q. How many students do you have today [currently]?

A. Now we have close to 500 students [in this school]. Even number lower than before. Before we had more than 1000 students.

Q. How do you explain the reduction in the number of students [from the over a thousand to about 500]?

A. We run shifts in order to accommodate the students. Morning shift goes to about 12 o'clock and by the [second shift] comes about 1 PM. When the number of students decreased we began the normal system of having only one stream--from 7 o'clocks through 3 PM. During that time we do both English and Arabic programs. We do not know [why the number decreased] but for all the services we rendered, some of the parents were unable to pay the school fees. Immediately we raised the fees, the number of enrollment decreased.

Q. What is the fee charged?

A. At the moment, we categorize the fees between 200,000 cedis and the highest is 250,000 cedis at the JSS level per term [semester. This will be equal to about \$25.00 per student].

Q. So you have a Junior secondary School section too?

A. Yes we do and the students, about three months ago, wrote their examination--the Basic Education Examination.

Q. When students finish [their education here at the Islamic Mission School] where do the majority of them go?

A. They go to secondary schools. We have even some of our former students [go on till] graduating from the University of Ghana. We also have former students who are in now [that is current students at the University].

Q. I see that you have boys and girls mixed [in this Islamic Mission School].

A. Yes, we do not separate them. Because we do not have the space to separate them as female and male.

Q. Would you have separated them if the space was available.

A. Surely we would have. In fact, not far from here, I have acquired land for a secondary school so that we can accommodate more students [in the future].

Q. In my conversation with the Islamic Education Unit, they say that said that three year ago they had only 13 proprietors who have given [brought] their schools into the IEU system. Today, they have about 68 Islamic schools [in the Greater Accra Region as part of the secular IEU system]. Why have you not joined them?

A. We are much older than them [the IEU]. Our system is faster when the Islamic Education Unit was about to be formed, I was invited to the meeting. I told them that we were in the system before you so we cannot join you because we are already doing these things. So sometimes they come to observe our work, And whenever they come they find out that we are advanced than the others.

Q. But they [the IEU] provide services that you can use--such as inspection of schools etc. Do you avail yourselves to these services?.

A. We meet the officials of the Ghana Private schools Association [which include both secular and religious schools and are registered with the Ghana Education service]. So we have the standards to follow.

Q. Are there any particular [or perceptions] about Islamic schools that are untrue? Or people may think that if students attend Islamic Schools such as this one, they do not integrate into the larger Ghana community and that these students may think differently [about themselves]?

A. No, no, no!. Our idea is to let the Muslim community to understand their role within Ghana in other for them to join others n the development of the country. That is why we established the school. And moreover they [former students] are now forming the Islamic movement in other to assert themselves to join the others so that they can have a very nice [involvement in national issues] otherwise we will be left aside.

Q. Then where does the idea that Islam is violent come from and also if students attend [exclusively Islamic schools] some people will expect them to be very violent against the political system?

A. Islam is a peaceful religion which orders us to work in any society whatsoever it is. The Quran has been teaching us to work with our neighbors as brothers and sisters. There is a verse in the Quran addresses us that "If one of the non-believers acquires to work with you, then be with him so you will have the chance to propagate Islam to him with goodness, and kindness" so we understand that this enables us to understand that we have to modify our children to see this and to be modern people.

Q. One of the concerns I have noted with many of the Proprietors I have interview is that the West African Examination Council has not formalized exams for Arabic so they think that the government is not serious about the language aspect of the Islamic schools. How have you addressed this problem?

A. Exactly! We experienced this before them and due to this we know how to go about it. Even we know that the government is not going to introduce this Arabic examination but what do we do. We conduct examinations after the final year, our students after they have completed their national examinations in their final years, they do come back to our school and we conduct Arabic language exams and we give them certification as

evidence of having studied Arabic. This will be testimonial from the school that they have studied Arabic. So if the system is so difficult for you then you have to think of a way to deal with it so that the students do not suffer for it.

Thanks you. Now we have to take some pictures--you and the children.