

Emmanuel Akyeampong and Mark Sey

Place of Interview: Nima, Accra

Date February 12, 2006

Venue: Fauziya Islamic School

Interview of: Alhaji Abdullah Muhammad

After the usual pleasantries, Emmanuel put the question straight.

Q: Please tell us about yourself and this school.

A: I started this school 20 years ago as a purely Quranic school designed to teach pupils the principles of the religion. We begin by teaching the children the Arabic alphabet which is locally popularly known as ABAJADA. After this, we teach them how to pronounce words and follow it up with the recitation of the Quran in portions or parts. We normally start with the opening chapter of the Quran known as the *Surat-ul-Fatiha*. Then we climb up gradually to chapter 114. Note that for the purposes of study, the Quran is divided into sixty (60) equal parts; each 60th part is called *hirb*. It is after the recitation of the whole Quran by the pupils that we teach them the Arabic language and other Islamic disciplines.

Q: At what point do the pupils enroll here at this [Quranic] school?

A: Pupils enroll here at age 5 and stay close to when they are 7 years of age. This is a primary school in the Islamic sense i.e. *Makaranta*. Pupils come here on Saturdays and Sundays but during the week, they attend public schools for secular education. During the public school vacations, however, they come here from Saturday through Wednesday.

Q: How many pupils do you have in this school?

A: We have 180 (one hundred and eighty) pupils divided into three classes viz:

Age 4-7: pre-school

Age 7-10: Class One

Age 11-13: Class Two

Q: Which books do you use for these classes?

(The Alhaji shows some of the books and photo/pictures were taken by Professor Akyeampong.)

Q: How do you get the books?

A: All these books are from outside the country; sometimes we buy them from local Islamic bookstores. In addition we sometimes receive gifts of books from Islamic Call Society of Libya.

Q: Do you employ other teachers to help you with teaching?

A: Yes I do. There are four other teachers here. [Some of the teachers were seen in the classes. Pictures were taken of teachers and some of the pupils].

Q: Who qualifies to teach in this school?

A: We get the teachers from among the students who pass through the Islamic Research Institute just across the street nearby. The Institute runs a more advanced program and whoever passes through that system is deemed qualified to teach in any Islamic Primary School such as ours.

Q: When does the school day begin?

A: The classes begin at 8:30 AM and ends at 2:00 PM.

Q: Is this school co-educational?

A: Yes, it is. It is a mixed school in which both boys and girls learn together.

Q: What are some of the subjects that you teach here apart from the recitation of the Quran?

A: We teach them the cardinal principles of Islam; we teach them the *sira* that is the life of Muhammad and early Islam. We also teach them basic Islamic jurisprudence. In addition we teach them the *Hadith* or the traditions of the Prophet. We also teach them the devotional duties of Islam such as *salat*, ablution and we teach them about the washing of the lower outlets of the body after the call of nature. Above all, we teach them to be good Muslims.

As regards *salat* or prayers we teach them not only how to pray but how prayer must be observed, that is we teach them the details of *salat* such as what is obligatory (*fard*) and what is optional (*nafla*). Also we write on the chalkboard for pupils to copy.

Q: For lessons in basic jurisprudence which books do you use?

A: For such lessons we use basic works like *al-Akhdari*, *Ashmawi*, and *Risala*, or *Iziyya* according to the level of pupils' intelligence.

Q: What is the benefit of the type of education pupils received from here?

A: It helps them to be good Muslims.

Q: How?

A: We ask parents to report to us pupils who are going wayward at home. For example, if a pupil misbehaves or she/he is negligent of his/her *salat* we preach against such negative practices and pupils consequently change for the better. In short, parents report misbehaving pupils to us and we take corrective measures.

Q: Alhaji, we hear of an Islamic University in Ghana; who is qualified to enter the university?

A: Qualification is the same as the state-owned universities—SSSCE; GCE O Level /A Level etc. As for our school it is a purely Quranic school where pupils learn about their religion.

Q: What is the class size?

A: We have sixty (60) pupils in each class.

Q: What is your relationship with members of other faiths?

A: It is good because we Muslims believe and recognize all the prophets of God. There are some Christians here at Nima who use our premise for their meetings once every month and we have no objection whatsoever.

Q: Do you charge fees for the pupils who come to the school?

A: Yes, we do. We charge 10,000 cedis [about US \$1.10] per month for each pupil. Sometimes there are defaulters but we ask them to go home to collect the money.

Q: Where do pupils come from to attend the school?

A: They come chiefly from Nima but there are some who come from nearby Maamobi and Adabraka.

Q: Would you like to move away from here to a bigger place elsewhere?

A: Yes, I would like to move to a bigger premise Inshallah.

Q: Why do pupils come from far away places to study here?

A: It is the reputation of the teacher (Mallam) that makes the difference. Some parents would prefer their wards to learn under a reputable Mallam no matter where he lives within a reasonable distance.

Dr. Akyeampong: Thanks a million, Alhaji. We hope to visit you again soon and possibly make a donation to your school.

Alhaji Muhammad: It is a pleasure, come again.