

ESSPIN
Experiences

Integrating the old with the new:
**Islamic education responds
to the demands of modern society**

esspin

Education Sector
Support Programme
in Nigeria



UKaid

from the Department for
International Development

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Islamic schools providing Islamiyya, Qur'anic and Tsangaya Education (IQTE¹) are a significant feature of the education landscape in the northern states of Nigeria. The huge number of IQTE schools and their students are very important to government plans for meeting the Education For All (EFA) targets in northern Nigeria. They cater for the most vulnerable and excluded children with children from the poorest families drawn to Tsangaya schools whilst two thirds of the students in Islamiyya schools are girls. And, being community owned, they draw valuable additional resources towards education.

However, government has failed to fully mobilise the leadership of these schools to impart elements of the modern, state education. The governments of Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa states therefore sought help from ESSPIN to reach out to these schools.

Kano has 5,822 primary to senior secondary state schools and 23,000 IQTE schools

This document tells how ESSPIN responded to this demand.

We present the complex challenges of integrating modern secular and traditional Islamic education in Nigeria. We share the experience and understanding gained from two years of ESSPIN support, highlighting the successes achieved and issues requiring further attention.

Two key lessons emerge from this engagement. First, that with a small stimulus from the state, rural communities can organise themselves to move towards introducing integrated education to IQTE schools and meeting the EFA targets. Secondly, that a development strategy based on dialogue can build trust with religious groups encouraging them to become active actors in implementing those very changes which they have been traditionally inclined to oppose.



Far left and left
Children in Tsangaya schools reciting Qur'anic verses from the slate.

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The potential of the IQTE sector to meet the EFA targets may have been clear to government officials but so were the challenges. The Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa state governments sought help from ESSPIN to build consensus and overcome three main barriers to the integration of IQTE and modern, secular education.

Barriers

Barrier 1: Ideological resistance

The biggest challenge to integrating secular subjects in to the curriculum of IQTE schools is to overcome ideological resistance from the malams and the religious leaders of these schools. In northern Nigeria, modern schools have long been associated with colonial rule and an alien religion and thus viewed as tools of westernisation. This ideological resistance to secular education among many rural families and malams is fully recognised by government officials as making integration of IQTE schools a major challenge.

Barrier 2: Complex landscape

The IQTE system in the three states is very complex presenting three broad streams: Qur'anic, Islamiyya, and Ilimi (See Table and Appendix²), each of which has many variations. There cannot be a one-size fits all solution to integration. As ESSPIN's focus is on basic education, the programme concentrates on Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools which deal with primary and secondary age children. Ilimi schools focus on post-secondary education and are therefore beyond ESSPIN's remit. Given the complexity of the IQTE schools, integration models designed for these different types have to respond to their unique characteristics and specific needs.

Barrier 3: Resource constraints

It was clear to ESSPIN from very early on that even if the first barrier of ideological resistance was overcome, and all IQTE schools became open to teaching of secular subjects, the state simply does not have the resources to provide enough secular subject teachers for these schools. So, the technical design of interventions not only had to be innovative to respond to the special needs of children in different types of IQTE schools, but they also had to be low-cost if they were to stand any chance of replication at the state level.

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For detailed analysis, see ESSPIN IQTE Strategy Paper for Kano (2008), IQTE Strategy Paper for Kaduna (2009) and IQTE Situational Analysis for Jigawa (2009).

Types of IQTE schools

Schools Types	Variations	Further Variations
Qur'anic	Modern Qur'anic/ Day schools	Qur'anic Primary/ Tahfeez Primary
		Qur'anic General/ Tahfeez General
	Tsangaya/ Boarding Schools	Bush
		Suburb
		Town
Islamiyya	Islamiyya Primary	
	Islamiyya General	
Ilimi		

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ESSPIN started its IQTE work in the three northern states by engaging in a consultative process with all the relevant actors within the state, civil society and the religious leadership to develop IQTE strategy papers for Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa. Each state has distinct features, and it became clear that all three require a multi-layered response. Three levels of interventions, ie, three over-arching objectives, were identified if ESSPIN was to help the state overcome the barriers to integration³.

Between October 2009 – March 2010, IQTE interventions were trialled and consolidated in Kano before taking the learning to Kaduna and Jigawa.

Objectives

3

See ESSPIN
IQTE position paper,
May 2009

Objectives of ESSPIN's support to integrated education in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa

1

To provide better research and data on the IQTE sector so as to understand its complexity and the factors shaping the supply and demand for IQTE as opposed to modern secular education;

2

To establish administrative structures, such as an IQTE Board in Kano or an IQTE Agency in Kaduna, to better regulate and monitor this sector and support it in imparting quality education;

3

To learn how an integrated curriculum could be introduced in IQTE schools by piloting innovative community-based approaches.



Left

A Tsangaya student offering a prayer.

Right

A malam of a Tsangaya school with children participating in ESSPIN's programme.



Below

Students at a Tsangaya school reciting from the slate under the supervision of the malam. The traditional Tsangaya school operates in an open court-yard in front of the malam's house.



Understanding the IQTE Sector

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IQTE Survey

In order for the state or donor agencies to help facilitate the integration process in the IQTE schools, ESSPIN conducted a baseline survey in three focus LGAs in Kano to understand the basis of demand for IQTE schools.

This survey of public perceptions about IQTE schools in Kano found⁴:

Informed community

The community is acutely aware of the dramatic deterioration in the quality of state education since the 1970s and considers the poor quality of teaching and political appointment of teachers as the root cause of poor education in state schools. The flight of the elite from state schools is thought to leave little incentive for the elite to reform the state education sector.

Popularity of IQTE schools

There was an overwhelming consensus that the IQTE schools are more in number and are providing better education than state schools. The primary reason for the better performance of IQTE schools is viewed to be the better commitment of the proprietors and teachers compared to their counterparts in state schools.

High demand for education

The discussions also established that there is a very high demand for education in the community and it is not only confined to religious education. All stakeholders, even the malams of IQTE schools, supported gaining secular as well as religious education. Secular education is seen as critical for securing a job (which is highly valued) and religious education is vital for building the students' moral character.

Expectations for state support to IQTE schools

There is strong support for the proposition that the state should move towards an integration process where children can get good quality secular and religious education in one place. This will save parents the trouble of ensuring their children's participation in multiple schools.

Traditional Elders and Religious Leaders as potential drivers of change

Traditional Elders and Religious Leaders are most involved in paying visits to the state and IQTE schools and are very concerned about the poor standards of education. They are potentially drivers of change if they can work with the community to put pressure on the government to check politicisation of the education system.

For detailed analysis, see ESSPIN study, 'Voices from the Community: Baseline Survey of Perceptions of IQTE and State Schools in Kano' (2009).

This baseline survey thus confirmed that the Ministry of Education's decision to move towards engaging with IQTE under a systematic programme is very much in line with the demands of the community. The learning from the survey greatly helped design the pilots and the future IQTE interventions proposed by ESSPIN. Since then, other studies have been conducted including a study of successful schools to learn from them and replicate the lessons in other schools.

IQTE Census

An IQTE census was carried out in the three ESSPIN LGEAs in Kano to improve on the data available from the last census in 2003. The census helped identify schools for piloting the integration models and provides baseline data for monitoring the performance of the pilots and tracing any inter-school migration that might occur because of the pilots. The questionnaire and software designed for the IQTE census is available to any state wanting to replicate the process.

Achievements to date

Baseline survey study completed

Successful school study completed

IQTE census in three LGEAs completed

Almajari study in progress

Female attendance in Islamiyya schools study in progress

Right and below Students at Tsangaya schools writing on and reading from the slate – the traditional method of teaching in Tsangaya schools. The pilot project complements this approach with modern teaching methods.



Managing IQTE

IQTE Board and Agency

ESSPIN helped Kano and Kaduna produce a study and report on the feasibility of establishing an IQTE Board or Agency.

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Rationale

The main reasons for establishing a separate co-ordinating body for Islamic education schools include:

the large scale of the IQTE sector;

the need for consolidation of existing state efforts towards supporting IQTE schools;

the need for innovative approaches to facilitating the integration process drawing on lessons from non-formal schools in other country contexts;

the need for establishing clear channels of communication between the IQTE school proprietors and the state.

Functions

The proposed coordinating body for the Islamic schools will be responsible for four core functions:

data gathering and policy and planning for Islamic schools;

improving the quality of education and introducing an integrated curriculum in the Qur'anic, Tsangaya and Islamiyya schools;

introduction of innovative methods to facilitate integration drawing on experiences of non-formal school models in other parts of the world;

networking and fundraising.

Achievements to date

Kano IQTE Board Feasibility Report finalised and ready for submission to the Executive Council.

Kaduna IQTE Agency draft proposal.

SUBEB cannot supervise all the IQTE schools because to address their unique needs, SUBEB would have to fundamentally reorient its approach to engage with non-formal education models. This would distract SUBEB's attention from secular state schools and potentially clash with SUBEB's mandate determined at the federal level.



Left and below

A malam of a Tsangaya school monitoring the students.

ESSPIN will provide technical support to the states to establish the Board or Agency once the Ministry of Education has secured formal approval. The state will bear the core cost of establishment of the Board or Agency but funds will also be requested from the federal Universal Basic Education Board (UBEC).



IQTE Integration Model

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The Tsangaya Cluster Pilot

The Kano Tsangaya Cluster Pilot is one of the three integration models designed by ESSPIN to ensure provision of good quality secular and religious education in IQTE schools. It has been working effectively since March 2010. 28 Tsangaya school clusters each with 30–35 students, are now operating. Over 800 children from 140 Tsangaya schools are benefiting from basic education.

Establishment of community schools

The basic feature of the model is to establish a community school to cater for children from a cluster of five closely located Tsangaya schools (so the children can easily walk to the central community school). In the first year of the school, children from the Tsangaya schools are being taught Maths, Hausa, Social Studies, and English (Science will be introduced in the second year). The government curriculum is being followed in these schools to ensure the eligibility of these children to enter middle and secondary state schools on completion of primary education. The six-year primary education syllabus has been condensed to three and a half years. The model was designed to establish a separate community school instead of providing a teacher to teach inside the Tsangaya school. Such experiments in the past have proven relatively ineffective because the malam does not like external intrusion in his school and not all children in the Tsangaya school are of a suitable age to benefit from such education.

Formation of a cluster

One of the main challenges of the model was to successfully mobilise the malams to agree to form a cluster and to release children of the suitable age group for a certain number of hours each day. Identification of locations where there are five Tsangaya schools close enough to form a cluster was itself a challenge but the IQTE census data helped identify these locations. A team from the Office of the Special Advisor on Tsangaya reforms and members of the Association of the Qur'anic malams mobilised the malams.

Below

Children at the centre
of education in
ESSPIN supported
Tsangaya Cluster
Community Schools.



Achievements to date		
840 children from Tsangaya schools enrolled	28 functional Tsangaya community cluster centre schools	7 shortened training modules for teachers being extended to SUBEB teachers deployed to Qur'anic schools in Kaduna
140 Tsangaya schools involved in these clusters	30 teachers from local communities trained	6 support teachers trained

School site

The model required the community or the LGEA to provide a one-room building to establish the community school close to the cluster. It is a major achievement of the model that most clusters have met this challenge.

School hours

Flexibility in school hours is critical to the model. Children in Tsangaya schools are busy most of the day with their Qur'anic education making it important to identify those hours which the malams consider appropriate to release the children. After consultation, it was found that in most cases it was feasible to plan for two hours of teaching per day for five days in a week, followed by a full teaching day (five hours) on Thursday as IQTE schools close on Thursdays and Fridays. (The exact timings of the school in each cluster may vary). The children in these schools are now getting 15 hours of secular primary education each week.

Teachers from the community

The real key to the success of this model is to be able to develop a cadre of well-trained and highly motivated community-based teachers. Malams forming the cluster were requested to identify a local person in their immediate community who has 10 or 12 years of education (secondary or senior secondary certificate) whom they think will be a good teacher. 30 such people were identified and have been trained and are now running these schools.

Low teachers' salary

Community Teachers are paid an allowance equal to one third of the starting salary of the regular government teachers and they are allowed to pursue other jobs at the same time. Since SUBEB is failing to provide teachers for the Islamiyya and Qur'anic schools due to the heavy cost implications, this is the only way to meet the gap in teacher numbers in the immediate future.

Intensive teacher training

Newly recruited teachers, mostly in their thirties, are offered five weeks of intensive training in multi-grade teaching – three weeks in a workshop format, and two weeks of in-school follow up. Support Teachers visit each school once or twice a month and are required to complete a teacher and school assessment form, which is then submitted to the ESSPIN Kano IQTE State Specialist. All teachers in a given LGEA are also required to attend a monthly meeting with Support Teachers to discuss common problems. The teachers also participate in a monthly three-day training workshop in Kano, with ESSPIN trainers and the Support Teachers, for the first year of their work.

Training of Master Trainers and Supervisors

Such a model also requires good support and refresher training sessions. Two Master Trainers have been trained at each LGEA level. These Master Trainers attended the five weeks training organised for the teachers and are provided with further training to enable them to do follow-up training of teachers. ESSPIN trainers are working with the Support Teachers to further train them. The training will take place over two days each month. The ESSPIN trainers will work with the Support Teachers to guide them in preparing the three-day training workshops to be held for the teachers at the end of each month.

School Support Committee

The community is actively involved in mobilising resources to identify the location of the community school, to help maintain school infrastructure, and, primarily, to monitor teacher and student attendance. School Support Committees (SSCs) have been developed for all the schools. The members consist of malams of the five Tsangaya schools, three parents or local community members (as in some cases the parents might not be in the neighbouring area), two Support Teachers, and the teacher – who also acts as the secretary of the SSC. The teacher is required to take the minutes of the meeting, which are then submitted to the ESSPIN Kano IQTE State Specialist. Additional roles include the mobilisation of resources for school infrastructure and other activities such as feeding.

Hard-working Teachers
and eager malams

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‘Our children need this education. They need religious education to be good humans and responsible citizens, and secular education to secure better jobs. These schools are helping our children combine secular and religious education. We have demand from more malams to join the programme especially if the skill training element is developed’.
Malam of Qur’anic Schools Association, Kombotso, involved in monitoring the cluster schools.

‘Increased salary will help as we are working very long hours even before the school starts to prepare the material. However, I won’t quit just because of low salary because of the good skills I am learning by being part of this programme’.
Abdullahi Ibrahim Faragai, Teacher at Faragai Model School, Albasu noting the personal benefits of being part of this programme during one of the monthly training sessions.



Left
Abdullahi Ibrahim Faragai, a community teacher, making effective use of the blackboard.

Right
Jamilu Lawan from Fagge LGEA, one of the Support Teachers who have shown exceptional enthusiasm and commitment to this programme. Lawan and his colleagues are now training the community teachers recruited to work with female teachers in the Islamiyya Schools pilot.

Support Teachers confident to lead expansion and replication

'We have learnt a lot in this programme. We want this programme to continue. When we go to these schools, we find that children even from local community and not just from the Tsangaya schools want to join these schools, because they see the teacher there and they see the child learning. We have learnt a lot from the training provided to us by ESSPIN and will be happy to act as future trainers if the state agrees to expand this model to other areas'.

Jamilu Lawan, LGEA Support Teacher from Fagge.



An enthusiastic parent

I am a farmer and have five children, two of whom go to an Islamiyya school and one in this Tsangaya pilot. Yes, my son Abubakar can now write and read his alphabets and numbers and can even write his name and tell the time. He is doing all these things in less than two months.

I have been around in my years as a nomad and I have seen what people with an education can do. I myself have received Islamic education. I learnt of this programme through the district head. The district head called me to his home and told me of a programme that would combine secular education with Islamic education and how it would help our children in the future. And my son is learning quickly and has begun to like the school. I wish to thank the LGEA and ESSPIN for introducing this very good programme in Albasu.

We should all do the little we can to help this programme grow. You see that mosque over there? It was built by the community from a piece of land someone donated. The same efforts can be applied to this school if the community becomes aware of the benefits of integrating the two types of schooling. For now, I am contributing to this school by keeping other kids away from the windows when school is in session. They distract the children from learning. I also come round when school is not in session to make sure the building is secure. I have no money but I will try to the best of my ability to see that my children get an education. If communities and governments work together, it can be done.

Below

Mohammad Adamu, the father who was keen to share his appreciation of the Tsangaya Cluster Pilot, with his son.



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The model has made an exceptionally good start, primarily because ESSPIN has been fully conscious of the potential challenges involved in implementing a programme of this complexity. The ESSPIN team is constantly seeking solutions to secure the long-term sustainability of the model.

Feeding

Initially, ESSPIN paid for the feeding of the children at each school on every Thursday. The justification for covering the feeding costs in the first months was to allow the malams and the community some time to see the benefits of this school and develop a real appreciation for the education being provided. They would then be encouraged to send the children whether or not there is feeding on Thursday. Funding for feeding has now stopped but, as hoped, it has not negatively impacted student attendance. The ideal option is that the community takes over this role or a local philanthropist steps in to cover the cost.

Introduction of vocational skills

There is continuing demand, especially from malams, to introduce vocational skills in these schools so that the children can learn some income generating skills. The ESSPIN team is exploring ways of addressing this demand.

Long-term government commitment

ESSPIN is currently paying the salaries of the teachers. One of the key challenges in the coming months is to ensure that the programme is embedded within the government system. ESSPIN is hopeful government will take over given the positive engagement by senior officials from the Ministry, SUBEB and the LGEAs.

There are many challenges to making the model sustainable. But, the enthusiasm with which it has been received by the students, teachers and many malams allows the ESSPIN IQTE team to be optimistic about the long-term impact of this work. Above all, however, it is the keenness of the students enrolled in these schools (see following pages), which is critical to ensuring the success of this model.

The initial emphasis of this model has been on providing training and resources. Now that it is running smoothly, the focus is gradually moving to monitoring learning and evaluating outcomes. Tools and processes have been developed to assess Community Teachers' competence, and to gauge children's learning. One application of the teaching skills assessments is to identify teachers who need remedial support, and those few who may have to leave the pilot if their performance remains problematic.

Below
Community Teachers
being trained.



Early indications confirm anecdotal evidence that most teachers are successfully applying the skills they have learnt in training, and that the children are making good progress. The majority have performed well in oral tests of their grade 1 and 2 numeracy and literacy skills, typically scoring in the 65–75% range.

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Early indications confirm anecdotal evidence that most teachers are successfully applying the skills they have learnt in training, and that the children are making good progress. The majority have performed well in oral tests of their Grades 1 and 2 numeracy and literacy skills, typically scoring in the 65–75% range. A formidable challenge for the pilot will be how to meet the continued demand for schooling, as the children complete early grade studies and Community Teachers need to extend towards Grades 3 and 4 material.

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Government Recognition

**Education Secretaries welcome
expansion**

‘This programme is showing ways to engage with the IQTE schools which are very effective’.
Danlami Garba, Ministry of Education, Kano

‘I think the model is quite viable and given the low salaries structures the government should be able to absorb the teachers. In fact, the model has features in common with the pivotal Teaching Programme, which was very effective in providing low-cost teachers in rural areas but was unfortunately phased out by the government. The cluster programme can be quite a feasible approach to ensuring access to larger number of students’.
Director of Schools, SUBEB, Kano

‘We really like what is happening in these schools. The community members come to the LGEA to appreciate these interventions. We just have one request: do more of this work!’
Hon Haladu B Ishak, Education Secretary, Albasu

**'We will provide the Black Board':
Student's response in
Chiranchi Cluster in Kombotso**

The most inspirational story to date from this model comes from Chiranchi cluster in Kombotso.

It took ESSPIN two weeks after the inception of the schools to supply proper black boards in these schools, which were specially designed to fit the school sites. In the meantime, the teachers were required to use the walls and charts for teaching purposes.

In Chiranchi cluster, children eager to start full teaching, found their own solution. Three children, between the ages of 9–11, working as Alamajris, told their teachers not to worry about a class with no blackboard stating 'we will provide the class with the black board'. Out of their own income they went out to buy the paint and then painted the wall to make the temporary blackboard.

When asked by ESSPIN team why they cared to make that investment, their answer was clear and simple: 'We want to learn. If we have this opportunity to learn, we want to make best use of it'.



Left and below
Traditional
Islamic teaching
continues.



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The positive response of the religious actors in northern Nigeria to ESSPIN's initial interventions has been critical to their success. ESSPIN will continue to support the state and the local communities to expand the portfolio of IQTE activities:

There will be further research to better understand the IQTE sector. Two big studies underway are documenting the complexity of Almajari system, and examining why there are more females in Islamiyya schools.

Two new integration pilots are being implemented: The Model Islamiyya School Pilot is designed to establish the ideal balance between the teaching of secular and religious subjects in Integrated Islamiyya schools. The Female Teachers in Rural Islamiyya Pilot is aimed at improving the quality of secular subject teaching in rural Islamiyya schools by training more female teachers from within the community. This pilot will make an important contribution to providing good quality education to Muslim girls in rural areas of these northern states and will also empower those girls identified and trained to become teachers in these schools.

ESSPIN is in a good position to provide technical support to the states to establish an IQTE Board in Kano and IQTE Agency in Kaduna.

Most importantly, the ESSPIN IQTE strategy includes helping the state governments develop a financial proposal to submit to federal government, especially UBEC, to secure additional resources for expanding the integration process. An IQTE conference will be organised to present the IQTE work and the financial needs to UBEC and other relevant government departments in the medium term. This conference will also act as the platform to share the lessons learnt so far with senior officials of the other northern states.



Above and below
Kano students
receiving a more
modern education.



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ESSPIN's IQTE programme has grown rapidly and while the future is challenging it is also full of promise. With the continued commitment from the state governments, the enthusiastic response of the local communities, and the hard work of the ESSPIN fieldworkers and state specialists, there is the very real possibility of building on the successes to date and bringing the benefits of integrated education to great numbers of the children of northern Nigeria.

Appendix

The IQTE sector in northern Nigeria includes multiple types of schools of which the most prominent are:

Qur'anic schools

The Qur'anic schools are the largest in number of all the IQTE schools and are of two types: Modern Qur'anic and Traditional Qur'anic (Tsangaya or Makratan Aloo). It is a traditional system of instruction in which often both the teachers and the students travel out of their places of origin, and sometimes remain there, for the purpose of learning, mastering and memorising the Qur'an. A Tsangaya can have as few as five students or as many as 500.

The teachers in these schools are not formally paid but are supported by the community through provision of food or cultivatable land that can sustain the malam and the pupils; some malams also maintain other professions on the side such as tailoring. Students live with the malam.

The Tsangaya system has seen a serious drop in standards leading to the problem of Almajiri. Initially referencing the movement of the Tsangaya students in search of knowledge, the term today has become synonymous with begging. Many of the students within the Tsangaya system beg for survival, having moved on to the cities.

These children then become vulnerable to crime and other hazards of life on the streets. The deteriorating urban socio-economic conditions have increased these vulnerabilities. The increasing numbers of street children growing up to be poor, unemployed, homeless and disillusioned young adults is a serious social problem. Kano alone is estimated to have 2 million Almajari.

The modern Qur'anic schools, introduced in the 1960s, are, on the other hand, housed in proper buildings and run like regular schools though with a focus on Qur'anic teachings. Most of the children in these schools are day scholars. The modern Qur'anic schools are further divided into two categories: Tahfeez Primary and Tahfeez General. Tahfeez General schools focus exclusively on Qur'anic education while Tahfeez Primary schools choose to register with the government and are required to include government approved secular subjects in the curriculum.

Islamiyya Schools

The Islamiyya schools are a more recent invention than the Tsangaya system and were introduced in the 1960s. Whereas Qur'anic schools deal only with recitation and memorisation of the Qur'an, Islamiyya schools deal with other Islamic subjects.

When an Islamiyya school registers with the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) it is recognised as an Islamiyya Primary (informally referred to as Integrated Islamiyya) and is required to teach the state-approved integrated curriculum consisting of 50 percent secular and 50 percent religious subjects. In return the state extends support to these schools through the provision of teachers for secular subjects, textbooks and other teaching materials.

Islamiyya General schools are like Islamiyya Primary but they are not registered with SUBEB and deal purely with Islamic subjects. Many Islamiyya General schools run up to three shifts: morning, afternoon, and evening. The schools are normally established with the support of the community and operate across Kano, Kaduna, Jigawa and other northern states.

Best of Both Worlds – Integrating Traditional Islamic and Modern Secular Education in Northern Nigeria

‘I come to this school for life success’, says twelve year old Nura at the recently established Faragia Model School in Kano State, Northern Nigeria. Nura and his classmates crowd the small classroom provided by the local community, all eager to share in a basic education that provides literacy and numeracy, Hausa (the local language) and Social Studies. This is a first for Nura, who has never attended a government primary school.

For most of the week Nura and his friends attend a Tsangaya school, one of the 23,000 schools in Kano State (over 75% of all schools) that provide an Islamic education. Students in the Tsangaya schools traditionally move away from home to study the holy Qur’an with a Malam (religious leader). ‘I like to learn religion’, says Nura. But many malams and traditional rulers across the North are also conscious of the benefits of a modern, secular education – especially in the job market. They also recognise that with even basic literacy and numeracy a child is more likely to thrive and contribute to society. ‘I want to learn so I can help my parents and my village and the country’, declares Nura.

UKaid’s Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) is working with government and communities to integrate modern secular and traditional Islamic education in northern Nigeria. Ideological resistance to ‘westernisation’ is being reconsidered as a result of an innovative approach that combines thorough analysis with dialogue and growing mutual trust.

Under this experimental engagement, Faragia Model School and Daho Community School are two of 28 schools each set up to offer part-time modern basic education to children from four or five local Tsangaya schools – nearly 1,000 children in all. ESSPIN supports the training of the community teachers and supervisory and support teachers, and provided initial resources to establish the schools.

Empowering communities with the choice of an education system that best meets their needs has brought support for changes to which they may have been traditionally opposed. It has also brought extra resources with the classroom and new teachers provided by the community and funds found for maintenance. Malams, teachers, parents and community members form School Support Committees to monitor progress and performance.

Work with Islamic schools is only part of our education sector work in Nigeria. The ESSPIN programme in Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kwara, Enugu and Lagos states is improving teaching and management skills in schools and the governance of education at State and Federal level.

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