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# A Survey of Information Resources Required by Ulama to Perform Their Work Roles: A Case Study of Borno State, Nigeria

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## Introduction

The shift in emphasis from the study of Information system to the Individual as the finder and user of information, has over the years received unprecedented attention among librarians and information professionals as indicated by the overwhelming number of researches carried out in the area. Various groups ranging from professionals to unskilled workers have been studied to identify their information needs with a view to providing them the right information in order to contribute their quota to the development of the society. One important professional group which has been playing, and will continue to play influential role in the life of individuals and the society that is not given corresponding attention is the Clergy. A search into the literature shows that between 1973 and 2008 a period of thirty-seven years, only seven major studies (Porcella 1973, Erdel 1978, Allen 1987, Tanner 1992, Phillips 1992, Wicks 1997, and Daniel 2008) were conducted on the information behavior of the clergy in different context. All the studies however were on Christian clergy and with the exception of Allen's which concentrated on developing countries of South America; all others were conducted in the United States and Canada.

Similarly, the paucity of literature in information behavior research in developing countries is further exposed by Dutta (2009). She reviewed studies conducted on information behavior of people in developing countries and lamented that "there are relatively small number of studies done on the information behavior of the citizens of developing countries, and the few studies concentrate on educated individuals and certain geographic areas of the urban population." In Nigeria the few includes Tiamiyu's (1990) study on the use of information sources in government institutions, Haruna and Mabawonku (2001) studied the information needs and seeking behavior of legal practitioners in Lagos State, Momodu (2002) investigated

the information needs and seeking behavior of rural dwellers in Edo State, Nweke (2002) compared the information seeking and use of human and veterinary medical students of University of Maiduguri. Others include Njoku (2004) who examined the information needs and seeking behavior of fishermen in Lagos State, Hassan (2007) studied the information needs and gathering of medical practitioners, and Kamba (2009) investigated the information seeking behavior of school teachers in rural areas of Nigeria.

Despite the increasing interest in the information behavior of professionals as indicated by the large number of researches as illustrated above, Wicks (1997) lamented that the clergy as a professional group has not been adequately covered in terms of their information behavior. The situation is further compounded when viewed from the general perception the society has of the clergy as a conservative group which very little or nothing is known about the kinds of sources they prefer and the purposes for which they put the information to use.

It is in the light of the above that this study investigates the information behavior of Muslim clerics (Ulama) in relation to - What types of information sources they prefer?, and To what purposes do they use the information?, with particular reference to Borno State in Nigeria.

## Borno State

Borno State is the largest of all the 36 States of Nigeria covering an area of 116,589 Square Kilometers and occupying the greater part of the Lake Chad Basin in the extreme North Eastern part of the Country. The State is highly pluralistic in its ethnic composition with Kanuri being the dominant ethnic group, and a rich and diverse cultural heritage. It has a population of 4.3 million, eighty percent (80%) of which are Muslims (Census 2006).

Historically, Kanem Borno was one of the great kingdoms of Central Sudan, otherwise known as *Bilad al Sudan* (the land of blacks) described by historians as the area stretching from Dafur in Sudan to the Lake Chad Region in the east, and the great bend of River Niger and the Western Coast of the Atlantic Ocean on the west. The region as rightly observed by Alkali (1989) is a dividing landmark between the Nile Valley and the Maghrib Al-Aqsa, extending from Egypt in the east to the Kingdom of Morocco in the west. Kanem Borno lies along the famous, stable, and ancient caravan routes which extended from West Africa and other parts of the Continent to Mecca. Numerous scholars (Doi 1984, Clerk 1982, Martin 1969, Smith 1971, and Boahen 1964) have variously stressed the importance of the strategic location of Kanem Borno in the centre of the trans-Saharan trade routes. This enhanced early contact with the Muslim world of Tunisia, in far northwest of Africa and Nubia on the middle Nile and Egypt in the northeast of the continent.

The period between the 16th and 17th centuries was the glorious period of Kanem Borno when its identity as an Islamic state manifested in various regions in the Western Sudan, the Maghrib and the Nile valley. According to Mustafa (1992) it was regarded as one of the four super powers of the then Islamic world; others being Egypt, Turkey, and Baghdad. Till this day, Borno "remained…the one area in the whole of Nigeria which can be accurately described as a Muslim State with an Islamic dynasty and tradition" (Abdurrahman and Canham 1978). As a centre of Islamic scholarship, it attracts many scholars with diverse backgrounds and interests together from all over West Africa to study, and this led to the emergence of a class of intelligentsia called the Malamwa (Ulama).

## The Concept of Ulama

The Arabic word *Ulama* is the plural of *Alim* which refers to 'learned or knowing man'. Ulama therefore literally mean "those who possess knowledge" or

"community of learned men". The Encyclopedia Britannica (2008) defined Ulama as "the learned of Islam, those who possess the quality of *ilm* in its widest sense…….who are versed theoretically and practically in the Muslim Sciences". The term Ulama is used in Islam to mean not only group of men with religious education in the Quran, Sunna and Sharia but also a group of men expressing the true content of Islam towards both the people and the rulers.

The Ulama has considerable power in Muslim countries as well as great influence on most Muslims. The status of the Ulama in Kanem Borno was like in any other Islamic society where they were highly respected. They formed the core of the Kanem Borno religious establishment and served as guardians of the high Islamic culture of scholarship and learning. The sphere of influence of the Ulama was not limited to teaching and preaching alone, it encompassed all facets of societal life. As such, the rulers of Kanem Borno patronized, invited and played host to the Ulama, thus bringing them to the forefront of the politics, education and social affairs of the society. In the process, different groups of Ulama emerged conditioned by the circumstances of their time, their depth of learning, affiliations and linkages with the authority. In Borno, three categories of Ulama have been identified by Allamin (1987) and Gazali (2005). They are the Court Ulama, the Visiting Ulama, and the Independent Ulama.

## Methodology

The survey research method was employed for the study. This methodology was chosen because it was found to be most appropriate since the study was mainly quantitative and focused on a large population (Busha and Harter 1980). The population for the study was made up of two hundred and thirty three (233) Ulama spread across the twenty-seven (27) Local Government Areas, recognized and registered by Borno State Ministry for Religious Affairs and Special Education. Thirty-one (31) respondents were randomly drawn to constitute the sample size for the study. A questionnaire largely adopted from Wicks (1997) was used for the study. Since all respondents are literate in Arabic, the instrument was transcribed into Arabic in order to illicit relevant responses and achieve high response rate.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

All the thirty one (31) respondents who participated in the study filled and returned the questionnaire and all are found to be usable. The data gathered is here analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures such as frequency distribution, percentages, figures, tables etc.

### Characteristics of respondents

The characteristics of the respondents presented in Table 1 shows that majority (42%) fall between the ages of 45-54, while those who fall within 65-74 age-bracket constitute the least (6%) percentage of respondents. Twenty-one respondents, representing (68%) percent, acquired their education formally while the remaining ten constituting (32%) had informal or traditional Qur'anic Education.

| Characteristic | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Age | f | % |
| 25-34 | 6 | 19 |
| 45-54 | 13 | 42 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 55-64 | 3 | 10 |
| 65-74 | 2 | 6 |
| | N=31 | 100 |
| Mode of education | | |
| Formal | 21 | 68 |
| Informal | 10 | 32 |
| | N=31 | 100 |
| Years of experience as an Alim | | |
| 1-5 | 8 | 29 |
| 6-10 | 2 | 7 |
| 11-15 | 4 | 7 |
| 16-20 | 5 | 14 |
| 20-25 | 9 | 18 |
| | N=28 | 100 |

Majority (38%) of those who had formal education attained the Bachelor's degree level, six (29%) had Master's, followed by four (19%) with Diploma, two (10%) attained Doctoral level, while only one (5%) respondent had High School Certificate. With regards to years of experience as an Alim, most of the respondents (32%) had been in that position for twenty-five years followed by those with five years representing (29%), while few respondents (7%) with between six and ten years of experience, form part of the test.

Out of the thirty-one (31) respondents, thirty (97%) belong to Maliki Mazhab; one (3%) belongs to Other, while Shafi'i, Hanafi, and Hambali had no representatives. Responding to questions on their sectarian alignments, as shown in Table 2, majority (83%) are Sufis, seven percent (7%) each are of the Sallafiyya and Other sects, while the least percentage (3%) constituted the representatives of the Shi'a sect.

Table 2.Sectarian Affiliation

In order to know the types of resources mostly consulted by the Alim, the researcher came up with a list of seventeen (17) resources from which respondents were asked to choose the resources they need for a specific role. The top five (5) resources were selected and the result is presented in Table 3.

Generally, the most widely required resources are The Qur'an and Hadith. This is not a surprise because they are the most important Books in Islam and to a Muslim. Specifically, they are cited twenty-four (24 times) respectively, as the most

important sources for Preaching followed by Books on Figh, and thirdly a tie between Books on Tafsir and Personal Library. The Preaching role also accounted for the highest number of resources consulted compared to the other roles. This is not unconnected with the fact that preaching is fundamentally about the interpretation of The Qur'an, which consequently requires using Hadith and other books on tafsir, tauhid, Arabic language and literature etc. The Hadith ranked first as the most preferred resource by the Alim when performing both Counseling and Administrative roles with The Qur'an coming second. During the Leadership role however, the Ulama preferred The Qur'an as the major guidance in providing religious leadership.

Table 3: Resources required (Top five)

| Role Resources consulted Times cited |
| --- |
| Preaching (Wa'az) 1. Qur'an 24 |
| 1. Hadith 24 2. Books on Figh and usul-figh 18 |
| 3. Books on Tafsir and umul al Qur'an 13 |
| 3. Personal Library 13 |
| 4. Books on Tauhid 9 |
| 5. Books on Arabic Lang. and Literature 8 |
| Counseling (Tashar) 1. Hadith 13 |
| 2. Qur'an 12 |
| 3. Books on Figh and usul-figh 10 |
| 4. Personal Library 7 |
| 5. Books on Tafsir and umul-Qur'an 6 |
| Administration (Edara) 1. Hadith 10 |
| 2. Qur'an 9 |
| 3. Books on Tafsir and umul al Qur'an 8 |
| 4. Books on Arabic Lang. and Literature 5 |
| 4. Personal Library 5 |
| 4. Friends and Relatives 5 |
| 5. Books on Figh and usul-figh 4 |
| Leadership (Imara) 1. Qur'an 11 |
| 2. Hadith 10 |
| 3. Books on Tafsir and umul al Qur'an 8 |
| 3. Personal Library 8 |
| 4. Books on Figh and usul-figh 6 |
| 5. Books on Tauhid 5 |
| 5. Public Library 5 |

The Work Roles of the Alim

Table 4: Roles for which resources consulted were used

| Role Number of times indicated |
| --- |
| 1.Preaching(Wa'az) |
| Fatwa 9 Hudba 17 Tafsir 3 2.Counseling (Tashar) |
| Dispute resolution 2 Funeral 4 |
| Marriage/Naming ceremonies 6 |
| Visiting 4 |
| 3. Administration (Edara) |
| Committee membership 2 |
| Personnel 1 |
| Running of tsangaya 11 |
| 4. Leadership (Imara) |
| Inheritance 6 |
| Supervision of Quranic recitation 3 |
| Zakkat disbursement 2 |

Table 4 above clearly indicates the specific occasions for which information is sought and put to use within a specific role played by the Alim. Within the preaching (wa'az) role, Friday sermon (Hudba), constitute the most widely cited (17 times) occasion for which information is used while Tafsir is the least cited. Counseling (Tashar) is another important role performed by the Alim. Attending Marriage and Naming ceremonies is indicated by the Ulama as an important occasion within the counseling role for which information is sought and used. This is closely tailed by Funeral and Visiting which were cited four (4) times respectively. The day to day Running of the Tsangaya formed the major administrative occasion for which the Ulama seek and utilize information with a citation rate of eleven (11 times) while Committee Membership is cited twice as against Personnel Administration. With regards to Leadership role, disbursing the wealth of the dead among heirs (Inheritance) ranked highest among the occasions associated with Zakkat respectively. Table 5 provides at a glance, the total number of sources used and their Mean value according to each role.

Table 5: Total and Mean number of Sources used in each Role

| Role | Total Sources Selected | Mean |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Preaching (Wa'az) | 132 | 4.2 |
| Counseling (Tashar) | 80 | 2.5 |
| Administration (Edara) | 61 | 1.9 |
| Leadership (Imara) | 69 | 2.2 |
| Total | 342 | 11.0 |

## Summary of Findings

From the above analysis of the data, the following revelations are deduced:-

1. The Ulama like any professional group requires information to perform its basic societal responsibilities effectively.

2. The Ulama generally prefer the following resources of information arranged in order of preference- Qur'an, Hadith, Books on figh and usul-figh, Books on tafsir and umul-Qur'an, and Personal libraries.

3. The choice of information resource however differs depending on the role being played by the Alim.

4. The Ulama identified preaching, counseling, administration, and leadership as the major work roles for which they use information.

5. Personal library is found to be the most widely used channel for gathering information by the Ulama.

6. Informal sources such as friends', family members, other Alim, committee of Ulama etc were also consulted as sources of information.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following with a view to enhancing accessibility to information sources and their use by the Ulama:-

1. There is the need to develop a comprehensive Islamic database that will meet the specific information requirements of the Ulama

2. There is also the need to design an Information Retrieval System (IRS) specifically tailored along search terms that are commonly used by the Ulama and in agreement with Islamic search pattern.

3. Establishment of specialized information centers by religious organizations and institutions will encourage the Ulama to explore other channels of information.

4. There is also the need for the Ulama to under-go training on skills development and awareness on ICT to enable them fully exploit the advantages provided by libraries and information centres.

## Conclusion

The Ulama constitute a very influential group in the Muslim world. Understanding their information behavior especially the information resources they mostly consult, and the purposes to which the information is utilized, is invaluable information to the efforts librarians and information professionals are making towards providing relevant and current information with a view to meeting the information needs of the Ulama. While this study provides the basis for such, a lot however needs to be done in the area of Islamic database development, suitable IRS, training and skills development, and establishment of information centers by Islamic organizations and institution to create a conducive environment to attract the Ulama to effective utilize the resources.

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