

WOMEN ELITE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP IN ILORIN EMIRATE, 1960 TO 2023

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Abstract

Ilorin Emirate has long been renowned for its deep-rooted traditions in Islamic and Western education, yet the role of women elite in shaping this intellectual landscape remain underexplored. Existing studies often foreground male scholars, thereby marginalising women's institutional and scholarly contributions. This study examines how women elite transformed education and scholarship in Ilorin Emirate between 1960 and 2023. It draws on oral interviews, archival materials, and relevant secondary sources to interrogate their interventions in both Arabic-Islamic and Western educational systems. The study argues that beyond classroom teaching, these women established schools, mentored generations of scholars, expanded access to female education, and contributed to the economic and institutional growth of the Emirate's educational sector. The study therefore concludes that recognising their roles therefore helps provide a more balanced understanding of the history of education in Ilorin and highlights the lasting impact of women elite in shaping the emirate's educational and social transformation.

Keywords: Arabic-Islamic Arabic Education, Western Education, Educational Transformation, Ilorin Emirate, Scholarship, Women Elite.

Introduction

Education has long remained one of the most enduring instruments of social transformation in Nigeria, particularly within the Islamic Emirates of Northern Nigeria where knowledge has historically been intertwined with religious authority, governance, and social prestige. Within these societies, both Islamic and Western educational traditions have played important roles in shaping intellectual culture and elite formation. Although the history of education in many Northern Nigerian emirates has often focused on the contributions of male scholars and administrators, women have also been significant actors in the transmission of knowledge and the nurturing of scholarly traditions.

Historically, women have played crucial roles in education beginning from the domestic sphere where they transmit moral, cultural, and religious values to children before formal schooling. Beyond this foundational role, women have also participated actively in both Islamic and Western educational traditions. In Islamic history, the intellectual contributions of women are well documented. Notable examples include figures such as Khadijah and Aisha, wives of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. In the West African context, women such as Nana Asma'u and Hafsat, daughters of Shehu Usman dan Fodio, played significant roles in the promotion of Islamic scholarship and the dissemination of knowledge among women.¹ These examples demonstrate that women's participation in scholarship and intellectual life has deep historical roots within Islamic societies.

Similarly, women have contributed significantly to the development of Western education in Nigeria. Prominent figures such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Bolanle Awe exemplify women whose scholarly and institutional engagements advanced education and intellectual discourse in the country. Their contributions illustrate how women have shaped educational development not only as teachers and scholars but also as advocates for women's education and social advancement.

Within the context of Ilorin Emirate, women have equally played important roles in the development of education since the pre-colonial period. Through teaching, school proprietorship, mentorship, and scholarly engagement, they have contributed to the expansion of both Islamic and Western educational systems. Despite these contributions, the roles of women elite in shaping the educational and intellectual landscape of Ilorin Emirate have not received sufficient scholarly attention.

It is against this background that this study examines *Women Elite and the Transformation of Education and Scholarship in Ilorin Emirate, 1960–2023*. The year 1960 marks Nigeria's independence and the beginning of a new phase in educational expansion and elite formation, while 2023 represents a contemporary endpoint marked by renewed attention to women's inclusion in leadership positions within Kwara State, including the appointment of women to key academic leadership roles such as Vice-Chancellor.

The study therefore seeks to address key questions such as: who are the women elite involved in educational development in Ilorin Emirate, and what roles have they played in transforming education and scholarship within the Emirate during this period?

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of elite has been widely discussed in social and political theory. Classical elite theorists such as Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca describe elite as a relatively small group of individuals who possess significant influence and authority within society due to their access to power, resources, and specialized knowledge.² Similarly, C. Wright Mills conceptualizes elite as individuals occupying strategic positions in key institutions that enable them to

shape societal decisions and development.³ Within the context of this study, women elite refers to women who have attained prominence and influence through educational attainment, religious scholarship, professional achievements, leadership positions, or ownership of educational institutions. These women occupy positions that enable them to shape knowledge production, educational development, and intellectual life within their communities.

The concept of transformation refers to significant structural or qualitative changes within a social system. According to Anthony Giddens, social transformation involves processes that reshape institutions, social relations, and patterns of authority over time. In the context of education, transformation often entails the expansion of access, institutional reforms, and the emergence of new actors who influence the production and dissemination of knowledge.⁴ Within Ilorin Emirate, transformation therefore refers to the ways women elites have contributed to reshaping educational structures through activities such as founding schools, promoting female education, mentoring students, and participating in institutional leadership within both Islamic and Western educational systems.

The concepts of education and scholarship in this study refer to processes of knowledge transmission and intellectual engagement within both formal and informal settings. Education broadly refers to the organised process through which knowledge, skills, and values are transmitted across generations through institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities.⁵ Scholarship, on the other hand, refers to the production, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge through teaching, research, religious instruction, and intellectual discourse.⁶ In many Muslim societies, including Ilorin Emirate, education historically evolved through the interaction between Arabic-Islamic learning traditions and Western educational systems, both of which have contributed to the development of intellectual culture and elite formation.⁷ Consequently, this study situates women elite within these intersecting traditions of knowledge production and educational development.

Review of Literature

Scholars have increasingly drawn attention to the role of women in the development of education and scholarship in Nigeria. In *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, Awe⁸ highlights the intellectual legacy of Nana Asma'u, the daughter of Usman dan Fodio, whose writings and teaching activities played an important role in promoting Islamic learning in Northern Nigeria. Nana Asma'u's work demonstrates that women were actively involved in the production and transmission of knowledge within Islamic societies. In another study, Mba and Cheryl⁹ examine the life of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and her contributions to education and social reform in South-Western Nigeria.

Their work highlights how educated women used teaching and activism as tools to promote women's rights and expand access to Western education in Nigeria. Similarly, Aina¹⁰ discusses the academic career of Bolanle Awe, showing how her scholarship helped to advance women's studies and create intellectual spaces for the study of women in Nigerian academia.

At the local level, some studies have also explored women's involvement in Islamic scholarship and religious leadership. For example, Ogungbile¹¹ examines the leadership role of Alhaja Sheidat Mujidat Adeoye in Osogbo, highlighting her contributions to faith healing, Islamic missionary work, and spiritual transformation. Although his work mainly focuses on religious influence, it still provides an example of female agency within Islamic leadership. In a related study, Jawondo¹² discusses the role of Alhaja Malimatu Rianat Arowolo in the development of Islamic scholarship in Ilorin Emirate. He emphasises her training under Islamic scholars in Accra and Ilorin and links her intellectual growth to the Islamic educational reforms of the twentieth century. However, the study mainly focuses on her personal achievements without examining the wider contributions of other female scholars in the Emirate. Likewise, the work of Aliyu¹³ on the transmission of Islamic learning in modern Ilorin provides a broad historical overview of educational development but only makes brief references to the contributions of women. As a result, the collective role of women elite in transforming education and scholarship in Ilorin Emirate remains insufficiently explored. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining how women elite contributed to the development and transformation of education and scholarship in Ilorin Emirate between 1960 and 2023.

Research Methodology

This study adopts the historical research method and employs a qualitative approach to examine the role of women elite in the transformation of education and scholarship in Ilorin Emirate. The research relies primarily on oral interviews, with a total of fifteen (15) respondents, including scholars, educators, and community members with knowledge of educational development in the Emirate.

These oral testimonies are complemented by archival materials and relevant secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and theses. The combination of these sources allows for cross-checking of information and provides a balanced and reliable historical account.

Women Elite in Islamic Education and Scholarship in Ilorin Emirate before 1960

The development of education in Ilorin Emirate can be traced back to the nineteenth century with the growth of Islamic scholarship and the establishment of Qur'anic learning centres. In the early period, Islamic scholars and migrants

established centres where the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence were taught. The arrival of Sheikh Alimi further strengthened the intellectual foundation of the Emirate and contributed to the consolidation of Islamic learning in the region.¹⁴ Over time, Ilorin developed a reputation as a “citadel of Islamic learning” within Yorubaland, attracting scholars and students from different parts of West Africa.¹⁵ The growth of Islamic education in the Emirate was also influenced by scholars of diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Yoruba, Fulani, Hausa, and Nupe, whose contributions enriched the curriculum and intellectual traditions of learning.¹⁶ Their involvement helped to shape a distinctive educational culture that emphasised the teaching of the Qur'an, Arabic literacy, and Islamic jurisprudence.

During the colonial era, Islamic education in Ilorin underwent notable reforms as scholars sought to adapt traditional learning to changing social conditions. This period witnessed the emergence of more organised systems of Islamic schooling, such as the *Adabiyya* and *Markaziyya* models, which attempted to modernise Qur'anic education through structured curricula, classroom instruction, and organised teaching methods.¹⁷ These reforms gradually transformed traditional Qur'anic learning centres into more organised madrasas and helped sustain Islamic scholarship in Ilorin throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods. The reformist influence of Sheikh Muhammad Kamaldeen Al-Adabiyy was particularly significant in this regard, as his efforts introduced modern teaching techniques and encouraged broader participation in Islamic education, including the formal enrolment of girls.¹⁸ By 1938 and 1939, records indicate that there were about 914 Qur'anic schools in Ilorin Emirate with approximately 10,890 pupils, among whom 2,641 were girls.¹⁹ Although the idea of sending girls to school initially faced resistance due to prevailing cultural and religious attitudes, these reforms gradually encouraged greater acceptance of female education within Islamic learning circles.

The gradual expansion of Islamic education and the increasing acceptance of female enrolment created opportunities for women to participate more actively in religious learning and scholarship. While the teaching and transmission of Islamic knowledge were initially dominated by male scholars, the educational reforms of the colonial period enabled a number of women to acquire advanced Islamic knowledge and emerge as respected teachers and scholars. These women not only complemented the efforts of their male counterparts but also played significant roles in preserving and transmitting Islamic knowledge to subsequent generations. Their contributions laid the foundation for the expansion of women participation in Islamic education and scholarship in the post-independence period.

Indeed, the involvement of women in education and scholarship in Ilorin Emirate dates back to the pre-colonial period. One remarkable figure was Asiya,

the wife of Sheikh Saliu Munabau of Oke-Suna, during that period she worked closely with her husband in teaching of students Islamic principles. Oral traditions recall that she was the only woman who joined the male scholars in the forty day fast breaking each day with forty-one dates as directed by Sheikh Alimi in prayer for Ilorin to become a stronghold of Islam.²⁰ This fact does not only show her spiritual commitment but also demonstrates the active, though often overlooked, role of women in the propagation of Islam and Islamic learning during the formative years of the Emirate.

Also, references must be made to *Al-Akhdri* and Ashmawi who later trained many women and facilitated the emergence of women's Asalat groups in Ilorin Emirate.²¹ Through these groups, they promoted Islamic learning among women, encouraged religious devotion, and expanded opportunities for female participation in Islamic scholarship.²² The activities of the aforementioned women demonstrate that, although women's contributions to Islamic education before 1960 were less visible than those of their male counterparts, they nevertheless played an important role in sustaining the intellectual and religious traditions that later enabled the emergence of a large generation of women Islamic scholars in Ilorin Emirate.

Women Elite and the Transformation of Islamic Education and Scholarship in Ilorin Emirate, 1960-2023

The post-independence period witnessed the emergence of women who attained elite status within Islamic education and scholarship in Ilorin Emirate. Unlike earlier periods when women's participation in formal scholarship was relatively limited, this era saw the rise of female scholars who played significant roles in expanding access to Islamic education and promoting the study and dissemination of religious knowledge. Through teaching, mentorship, and the production of religious texts, these women contributed to the consolidation and growth of Islamic scholarship within the Emirate.

One of such women who navigated to the top through Islamic scholarship was Alhaja Fatimah Ayinla Omo Oloka (1929-1998). She was born in the city of Ilorin around 1929 to the family of Alhaji Abubakar, also known as Daudu Wogiwogi. Alhaji Abubakar was from Balogun Afin compound, Ile-Olomoba, Ita-Amodu, Ilorin, suggesting he was a descendant of the first Emir of Ilorin, Emir Abdulsalam (1831-1842).²³ Therefore, Alhaja Fatimah Omo Oloka was a princess of royal lineage. Her mother's name was, Alhaja Baliqees Ajike Ajasa Saadu Oba. She was a successful businesswoman specializing exclusively in the salt trade.

Alhaja Fatimah Ayinla Omo Oloka never received any form of Western education, but her level of Islamic knowledge was exceptional, thanks to her first husband, Sheikh Sa'adu Deen of Cotonou, Benin Republic. Under his guidance,

Alhaja Omo Oloka learned to read and write in Arabic and gained other forms of knowledge related to Islam.²⁴ Sheikh Sa'adu Deen was a renowned Muslim scholar and a member of the Ansarul-Islam Society, Cotonou branch. After many years of marriage to Alhaja Fatimah Omo Oloka, their lack of children led to their divorce, which eventually prompted her return to Ilorin, where she married Alhaji Ayinla Elege.²⁵ Her marriage to Alhaji Ayinla Elege was a successful one, blessed with children, among whom is Alhaja Suleiman Aishat, the current Malimatu of Centre B.

Alhaja Fatimah Omo Oloka began her teaching career at Ansarul-Islam Women Wings Centre A, where she co-taught many students alongside Alhaja Rihanatu Arowolo. Together, they co-authored several Islamic prayer books, including *Asalatu Talilah*, which was used to praise the Almighty Allah. Alhaja Fatimah also authored other Islamic books independently, such as *Duau Mustajaba*, *Sataru*, a prayer book that is read for three months, concluding at the end of Ramadan, after which a ritual sacrifice, typically of a ram or another animal, is performed. Other works she authored include *Kasul Arisi* and *Baitu Monmuri*, among others.²⁶ To this day, many of these books are still read during *Asalatu* sessions at both Centre A and Centre B. Many of the prayers in the books were sourced from the Quran, Hadith, and the works of Sheikh Abdulqaudri, Sheikh Ibrahim, and others.

Numerous students graduated under her tutelage, and it is noted she rarely collected school fees from many of her students, often teaching them for free. The centre she left behind is presently led by Alhaja Malimatu Suleiman Aishat, a former student of Alhaja Fatimah Ayinla Omo Oloka. Another woman who rose to prominence through the Ansarul-Islam women's wing was Alhaja Malimatu Rihanat Arowolo. She was born in Accra, Ghana, in early 1944 to the family of Alhaji Zunurein Jamiu Jabaje and Alhaja Salamat Jabaje of Oke-Apomu, Ilorin. Her father, Zunurien Jamiu Jabaje (also, Known as Zaynu Deen), was one of the founding members Ansarul-Islam Society of Nigeria and was responsible for organizing the society in Ghana.²⁷ He served as the first national missionary of the Ansarul-Islam Society of Nigeria for many years before Alhaji A.R. Sallah (known as 'Missionary') succeeded him. Alhaji Jimoh Jabaje passed away on June 20, 1965.²⁸

Malimatu Arowolo began her Quranic education in Ghana under the guidance of her father and later attended the school of Alhaji Kamori, a Hausa man in Accra, Ghana. Sometime in 1953, her father brought her and her siblings to Ilorin to further their studies. He then enrolled them in Ansarul-Islam School at Okekere, Ilorin. In 1954, she returned to Ghana, but finally came back to Ilorin in 1959. In the same year she married Alhaji Arowolo.²⁹ While at Ansarul-Islam School, some of her teachers were Sheikh Abdulkadir Sanusi Alomata, Sheikh Abdulraheem Aminullahi popularly known as Oniwasi Agbaye, and many others.³⁰ Alhaja Arowolo first served under Alhaja Asmau Gogo Alawo as a teacher in the old Ilorin Central Mosque

in Idi-Ape before she joined Malimatu Fatimah group at centre Gboro. There, they co-taught the *Asalatu* group as well as students pursuing Islamic education at the centre. It was Alhaja Arowolo's initiative to introduce new ideas, particularly as membership of the *Asalatu* group grew significantly. She was the first to combine both traditional and modern knowledge of the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic sciences, while also merging elements of Nigeria and Ghanaian civilization.³¹ Just like Alhaja Fatimah Omo Oloka, she also graduated many students from the centre and authored numerous Islamic books, which were utilized by both the *Asalatu* group and her students. One remarkable aspect of Malimatu Arowolo's works was her dedication to advancing Islamic beyond the *Asalatu* group, making her knowledge accessible for the public benefit. Notably, she was the first woman invited to deliver a live Islamic sermon on radio in 1996, a practice she continued until the late 1990s, when younger Islamic women scholars took over from her.³²

To nurture young children in Islamic scholarship alongside modern education, she established a nursery and primary school at her father house in Jabaje compound, named Zunurein Jamiu Nursery and primary school, Ilorin.³³ Today, her *Asalatu* group remains one of the most prominent in Ilorin Emirate, with membership exceeding a thousand from all corner of the Emirate. As the Grand Malimatu of the Ansarul-Islam Society, Alhaja Arowolo continues to command immense respect for her spiritual leadership and community service.



Alhaja Malimatu Arowolo and Alhaja Malimatu Fatimah Omo-Oloka displaying some of the literary works they authored.

Sources: Photograph taken and selected by the researcher from the photo collection of the Ansarul Islam Women Wing, Centre A, 16/06/2023.



Members of the Ansarul Islam Women's Wing, Centre A, during an Asalat Session, with Alhaja Malimatu Arowolo seated at the centre while leading the gathering. Sources: Field Work, 16/06/2023.

Also worth mentioning was Alhaja Maimunat Idi-Agbede, born around 1930 in Accra, Ghana, to the illustrious family of the late Sheikh Girigisu, a renowned Islamic scholar and founder of Shamsudeen College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Ilorin. Although Alhaja Maimunat did not have any form of western education, her deep Quranic Learning and exceptional leadership shaped her into a formidable force in both religious and secular education.³⁴

Upon inheriting Shamsudeen College from her father in 1979, she revitalized the institution with unwavering dedication, transforming it from a traditional Arabic school into a modern centre of learning that integrated Islamic and Western curricula. Her passion for education was not merely administrative but deeply humanitarian, she built additional classroom blocks in 1985, personally funded the construction and maintenance of school facilities, and regularly provided school uniforms, books, and other learning materials free of charge to students, especially those from less privilege background.³⁵

Under her stewardship, the school achieved a major milestone in 1993 when it became affiliated with Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, through the Kwara State Ministry of Education, elevating it to college status and allowing it to conduct certified examinations.³⁶ Through her vision and sacrifice, Shamsudeen College expanded to multiple branches across Ilorin Emirate and Kwara State, nurturing generations of scholars, professionals, and preachers. Alhaja Maimunat Idi-Agbede, will forever be remembered not only as an educator but as a torchbearer of knowledge, compassion, and faith. She was a woman who bridged the gap between Quranic learning and modern education in Ilorin Emirate.

Women Elite in Western Education and Scholarship in Ilorin Emirate before 1960

Western education was introduced into Ilorin during the colonial period with the establishment of the Provincial School at Okesuna in 1914, which formally began academic activities in 1915.³⁷ At the initial stage, Western education was viewed with suspicion by many Muslims because of its association with Christian missionary activities. Despite this resistance, the system gradually gained acceptance as the socio-economic benefits of Western education became more evident. Over time, Muslim scholars in Ilorin began to adopt aspects of Western educational practices and, in some cases, established schools that combined Islamic and Western forms of learning. As the demand for Western education increased, more schools were established across different parts of the town.

By the late 1930s, there was a noticeable rise in female participation in Western education. For example, records show that the number of girls in Native Administration schools increased from seventy-three to ninety-nine, while mission schools recorded an increase in female enrolment from 416 to 519 pupils.³⁸ In the same year, four girls from Ilorin elementary schools were admitted into the Middle School to acquire sufficient English education to qualify as nurses in hospitals and welfare centres.³⁹ while the first generation of female teachers began to emerge in the 1950s.⁴⁰ Among the earliest generation of professionally trained female teachers in Ilorin Emirate were Alhaja Yusuf Binta Idi-Aro, Alhaja Belawu Ori-Okoh (mother of Alhaja Funmilayo Zainab Ambali, the first female medical doctor from Ilorin Emirate), Alhaja Zainab Akanbi Oniyangi, and Nana Maryam Adeoti Ado Bayero, among others.⁴¹ These pioneering women joined the teaching service at the Ilorin Domestic Centre in the 1950s, at a time when formal education for girls was still gaining acceptance within the Emirate. Their entry into the teaching profession marked a significant turning point in the history of Western education in Ilorin, as they challenged prevailing gender stereotypes and demonstrated that women could make meaningful contributions to the educational development of society.

Among this earliest generation of professionally trained female teachers, the contributions of Alhaja Binta Idi-Aro (1930-1993) deserve particular attention. Alhaja Binta was among the earliest formally educated women in Ilorin Emirate and emerged as a pioneering educationist, and community leader. Born in Ilorin in 1930, she came from a distinguished family with strong educational and administrative pedigree.⁴² Her father, Alhaji Yahyah Madawaki Ori-Okoh, was an educationist and later served as Minister of Health in the Northern Regional Government in 1952.⁴³ Her mother, Alhaja Aminat Iya Alaso, also hailed from Ori-Okoh lineage in Fagba, Ilorin, further grounding her in a heritage of influence and community engagement.

proceeding to the Kano Girls School between 1943 and 1947. Subsequently, she was admitted into the Women Training Centre (WTC), Kano in 1951, where she obtained the Grade III and Grade II Teachers Certificate. Her

admission to the school was facilitated by the Native Education Authority in collaboration with the Emir's Palace.⁴⁴ Alhaja Binta attended this school alongside daughters of influential personalities within the Emirate, they were: Alhaja Belawu Ori-Okoh, Alhaja Zainab Akanbi Oniyangi (her sister), Alhaja Belawu Gobir, Nana Maryam Adeoti and so on.⁴⁵

Upon her graduation in 1954, she joined the service of Ilorin Domestic Centre, Centre Igboro, as a teacher, where she trained women and girls in home economics, etiquette, and domestic science. By the end of 1960s she rose to ranked of head mistress, a position she held with distinction.⁴⁶ Alhaja Binta began her formal education at Pakata Elementary School before This position placed Alhaja Binta in a position of remarkable influence. Not only did she teach directly, but she also impacted generations of learners across Ilorin Emirate and beyond. At that time, it was mandatory for schools across Ilorin to bring their students to the Domestic Centre for practical domestic education, and this arrangement took place weekly. In consequence, numerous students passed through her both indigenes and non-indigenes.

During an interview with one of her daughters, she reflected with pride on the far-reaching impact of her mother's work. She noted that many of the students Alhaja Binta taught went on to become senior academics and accomplished professionals.

She recalled a memorable incident during her WAEC examination at Queens's school, Ilorin, when an external supervisor, Professor Ogunsola from the University of Ilorin, noticed her surname Idi-Aro. Curiously, she asked whether she was related to Alhaja Bina Idiaro. Upon confirming that she was her daughter, the professor paused, then spoke passionately in praise of her mother, describing her as “a woman of exceptional teaching standards, discipline, and excellence.”⁴⁷ The moment reaffirmed, in a public and unexpected way, the depth of her mothers' legacy.

She was in the centre until about 1980s, when she retired. Following her retirement, she was made member of board of Kwara Radio and later Kwara Hotel. Apart from teaching, she was also a trailblazer in many things within socio-cultural landscape of Ilorin Emirate.⁴⁸ She introduced Girl Guides Association to Kwara State and Ilorin Emirate, and she served as the state Commissioner of the Girl Guides Association for several years. Her work with organization earned her international exposure through travels and global engagements. In recognition of her service, she received the prestigious Member of the British Empire (MBE) award.⁴⁹ It must be emphasised that the pioneering efforts of Alhaja Binta Idi-Aro and her contemporaries laid the foundation for the emergence of a larger generation of female educationists in Ilorin Emirate in the post-independence era. Thus, the significant accomplishments of Ilorin women in the development of education and scholarship during the post-independence period were not accidental but were built upon the solid foundation laid by these pioneering female teachers during the colonial era.

Women Elite and the Transformation of Western Education and Scholarship in Ilorin Emirate, 1960-2023

The development of Western education in post-independence Ilorin Emirate was the result of the collective efforts of both men and women who contributed to the expansion and consolidation of learning within the Emirate. However, women played particularly significant roles during this period, as several women personalities emerged as influential figures in the promotion of western education and scholarship. Through their involvement as teachers, school proprietors, scholars, and mentors, these women helped to broaden access to education and strengthen the intellectual culture of Ilorin Emirate.

Among the notable women who contributed to the development of Western education in Ilorin Emirate was Alhaja Jamilat Fumilayo Gold. She was a great educationist and an accomplished administrator. Born in the cosmopolitan city of Ilorin on December 10, 1950, to the family of Alhaji Yahaya Kola of Ile-Alikinla compound in the Ita-Ogunbo area. Her father was a renowned community leader, politician, and businessman who majored in the sale of Aso-Oke. Her mother, was Alhaja Raliat of Alasinrin compound, a businesswoman who, though in purdah, sold textile materials. Although father to many, Alhaji Yahaya Kola was the biological father of about 41 children, however, Alhaja Jemilat was the most educated and the first graduate out of all.⁵⁰

She started her primary school education at the Baptist Primary School, Surulere, Ilorin. But due to the death of her father in 1962, she got transferred to Igbaja Native Authority Primary school, Ifelodun Local government area of Kwara State. The idea of her journey down to Igbaja to complete her primary education came as a result of her uncle, Alhaji S.K., who took control of her parental care after the death of her dad. Along with her other siblings, was transferred to Oke-Iya, and Igbaja respectively. On getting there, she was under the guardianship of Alhaji Alkali Olarewaju of Gbodofu compound, who was a magistrate there and Alhaji Oba Adebayo, and the late Professor Shehu Jimoh, both of whom were teachers in Igbaja Native Authority school at that time.⁵¹

Subsequently, she proceeded to Baboko Senior Secondary School from 1965 to 1966 to brush up her foundational education as it was generally called at that time. Afterwards, she went to Ilorin Teachers College from 1966 to 1970. Consequently, she was admitted at the Federal Advanced Teachers College where she was trained as a teacher. Due to her high performance in the school, she was immediately recommended for admission at the University of Zaria where she completed her Bachelor's degree in Physical and health education in the year 1977. Some of her colleagues with whom she attended Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, with include F.N. Oniyangi, Ayinke Oniyangi, Alhaja Zainab Oniyangi, and Dr. Fumilayo Ambali, among others. In mapping out her career as an educationist and administrator, it must be known that Alhaja Jemilat began her teaching career at the Native Authority School, Pakata. She was later transferred to Ilorin Grammar School, where she rose to the position of Vice-Principal (Academic).⁵²

Subsequently, she was placed in charge of the junior secondary section of the school, where she managed about 1,500 students. Due to her outstanding performance, she was transferred to Community Secondary School, Odore, where she served as the pioneer principal. It was an appointment she initially accepted with some reluctance, as the school was located in a remote part of the Ilorin Emirate. Upon arrival, she met only about 28 students.



From right to left: Alhaja Jamilat Funmilayo Gold, Alhaja Funsho Oniyangi, and Dr. Funmilayo Ambali during their undergraduate studies at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in the 1970s.

Sources: Photograph retrieved from the personal photo collection of Alhaja Jamilat Funmilayo Gold, 26/07/2025

However, through her influence and leadership, she began transforming the school, starting with the construction of an access road from Egbejila Junction in Airport to Odore, a distance of about seven Kilometres. This narrow path was converted into a motorable road with the support of her husband, Alhaji Mudi Adebayo, who was, at the time, the Project Manager of the Agricultural Development Project (ADP).⁵³ The improved accessibility attracted the attention of Colonel Latinwo, the then governor of the state, pay a courtesy visit to the school. Alhaja Jemila, already known to the governor, due to her good past record, she leveraged the visit to request 24 classrooms, physics, chemistry, agriculture, and biology laboratories, a physical education unit, and a football field. All these were approved by the governor.⁵⁴ The development was executed on the school permanent site, and the successful completion can be credited to Alhaja Jemilat, who was widely known for pioneering and rehabilitating schools and institutions where she served as head.

Due to the administrative success, she recorded at Odore Community Secondary School, she was appointed as the secretary of the Asa Zonal Education

Board in 1987, replacing one E.A. Adewunmi.⁵⁵ It must be emphasized that she was the first woman to hold such post not only in Ilorin Emirate but the whole of Kwara State. She was later transferred to Kwara State Agency for Mass Education as Director for finance. It should be noted, that she was among those who helped put the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education into shape. At the time of her assumption of office, the agency had no proper facilities, no office furniture, no table, no chairs and office which was located opposite Bekadims in Tanke, have to operate under the tree there. Through her efforts, alongside other leaders of the agency, they eventually secured support from the World Health Organization (WHO), which later financed their operations and donated about 16 buses, one for each of the 16 local government areas in Kwara State.⁵⁶ It was from here that she transferred her service to the Federal Civil Service and was appointed Principal of Federal Government Girls College, Omu-Aran and later of Federal Government Girls College, Bwari.⁵⁷ That of Omu-Aran was between 1995 and to 2003 and that of Abuja was between 2005 and to 2007. It must be emphasized that Alhaja Jemilat was the pioneer principal for FGGC, Omu-Aran, her contributions to the development of the school cannot be overemphasized, and she was the one who secured finances for the construction of the school library and the successful graduation of the first set who numbered up to 114 students, all sciences.

Their performance in the external exams of both West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) and Joint Admission Matriculation Examination (JAMB) was resounding.⁵⁸

Such earned the school awards from the both examination bodies. At Bwari, she impacted positively as she Rehabilitated and put the school back into shape. Alhaja Jemilat was also, the secretary of the Forum of Principals of Federal Government Colleges in the North Central States right from her days at FGGC Omu-Aran.⁵⁹ In 2007 she was transferred to the Federal Ministry of Education after a successful tenure as a principal at the FGGC, Bwari. At the Ministry she put under inspectorate division now quality assurance division. She retired from the ministry on the 7th of July, 2009, after 35 years of active service. Alhaja Jemilat was a pathfinder, trailblazer, reformer, and a very vocal person, well known among the elite class in the community for rehabilitating and pioneering leadership in schools and various departments which she headed. It must be said that she excelled in these roles. This quality likely influenced the numerous appointments she received throughout her career as an educationist and administrator. Most of her achievements in this field are unparalleled, and she made significant contributions to the Ilorin Emirate, Kwara State, and Nigeria at Large.

Also worth mentioning was Alhaja Halimah Ajoke Yusuf, she was among the finest educationist and administrator that Ilorin Emirate produced in the 20th century. She started her teaching career at Okesuna Primary School in the year 1963. So was among the earlier educationist in Ilorin. She was born to the family

of one Mallam Hassan Bello of Ile Magaji Alfa Iwo on the 19th of September, 1942.⁶⁰ Mallam Shuaib was an ex-serviceman and a Muslim scholar by all standards. The mother of Hajia Halimah was Hajia Maimunah of Ile Alangua in Ipata area of Ilorin. She was a popular kolanut seller in Pake market now Ipata market. Hajia Halimah started her primary school at Okesuna Primary School, she left the school when she reached primary three. Afterwards, she continued her education at St. Philip's School in Ile-Ife.⁶¹ She was there because her paternal grandmother was one of the daughters of a former Ooni of Ife. Upon the grandmother's death, her inheritance, a very large cocoa farm, was divided between her two sons, one of whom was Hajia Halimah's father. Consequently, she relocated with her father to Ile-Ife to help manage the cocoa farm. After about three years, the father returned to Ilorin, and Hajia Halimah resumed her education at United School, Ilorin, where she completed her primary education from the year 1955 to 1956.⁶²

She later proceeded to Kabba Teachers College, where she was trained and awarded a certificate in Grade III Teacher's Certificate. It was after now that she started to teach but because of the limitation involved as a result of her Grade 3 certificate, she proceeded to Ilorin Teachers College from 1970 to 1971. After she graduated in the College, she proceeded to teach in many Native Authority Primary School, including Karuma, Agbeyangi and so on. In Karuma for instance, her husband, Alhaji Abdullahi Afolabi was the headmaster and they were both transferred to Agbeyanji together where he was also a headmaster.⁶³

In no time, she proceeded to the Advanced Teachers College, Zaria, where she earned her Certificate in Education (Now NCE) in Home Economics. Immediately after, she advanced to Ahmadu Bello University, where she obtained her bachelor's degree in Home Economics in 1983. It is worth emphasizing that after her husband served for a few years as Headmasters in Agbeyanji, he joined the Immigration Service and was subsequently posted as Immigration Attache to the United States of America around 1984. Consequently, his wife, Hajia Halimah, joined him in the U.S.⁶⁴

Seizing this opportunity, Hajia Halimah enrolled at San Francisco State University, California, where she earned a Master's degree in Educational Administration with a specialization in School Supervision. Prior to her departure for the United States, she had served as a primary School Supervisor alongside notable women such as Alhaja Raliat Elelu.⁶⁵ Upon her return to Nigeria around 1989, she was first posted to Iponrin in Ilorin East Local Government. She was later transferred to the Adult Education office as secretary in the Kwara State Ministry of Education. Between 1989 and 1991, she served as Acting Secretary of the Asa Local Government Education Authority, replacing Hajia Jemilat Funmilayo Gold, who had held the position in 1987.⁶⁶

In 1993, she was granted voluntary retirement, alongside others who had served for up to 30 years. However, in recognition of her exceptional track record, she was appointed Executive Chairman of Ilorin East Local Government, a position she held until October 1995. Thereafter, she was appointed commissioner for Education in the Kwara State Executive Council by the then Military Executive Administrator, Captain Adam Iyam, becoming the first woman from Ilorin Emirate to hold that position. She served in this capacity until

the end of the military era in 1999, as she also served under Colonel P.A.M. Ogar and Lt Colonel Rasheed Alade Sekoni.⁶⁷

In 2004, Hajia Halimah was among the distinguished personalities conferred with the national honour of officer of the order of the Niger (OON) by then President Olusegun Obasanjo.⁶⁸ It must be said that Hajia Halimah was one of the finest educationist and administrator who left an indelible mark on the sands of time. Her contributions to the development of the Ilorin Emirate in general and to the women in particular cannot be overstated. She was a pathfinder who achieved many “firsts” during her active years in public service.



Alhaja Halimah Ajoke Yusuf with the researcher, seated beside a glass showcase on the wall displaying some of the awards she has received for her contributions to education.

Sources: Photograph taken by the researcher during fieldwork at the residence of Alhaja Halimah Ajoke Yusuf, 01/12/2025

Ilorin Women also prevail in the academia; one such example is Professor Medinat Folorunso Salman of Kusi Compound in Pakata area of Ilorin Emirate. She was born to the family of Alhaji Atiku Bello and Alhaja Rabiya Atiku Bello in the year 1958. Professor Medinat began her educational journey at St. Joseph Catholic LGEA Primary School in Ayangba, Kogi State. She proceeded to St. Clare's Grammar School, Offa, where she completed her secondary education in 1976.⁶⁹

between 1976 and 1977, she trained as a teacher at the Ilorin Teachers College, Ilorin, earning her Grade II teacher's Certificate. She furthered her studies at the Federal Advanced Teacher College, Pankshin, in Plateau State, where obtained her NCE in Mathematics and Chemistry in 1981. She then earned a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics Education from Ahmadu Bello University in 1985. By 1990, she had completed a master's degree in Mathematics Education at the University of Ilorin, and in 1998, she crowned her academic career with Ph.D.

in Mathematics. Professor has taught in different school before she joined the services of the University of Ilorin in 1999.⁷⁰ Some of the schools were: Pakata Primary School, 1978-1979, Government Secondary School Afon; Government Secondary Malete; Government High School Ilorin among others. At the university level, she held several key positions including the Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin in 2018. She was the first female Professor in Ilorin Emirate; she rose to the position in the year 2012.⁷¹

Her contribution to scholarship cannot be overemphasized, as a lecturer at the university; she has over 70 publications in local, national and international reputable journals. Her research focused primarily on Mathematics Education, addressing critical areas such as gender issues and innovative teaching methodologies. She is widely recognized for her commitment to enhancing educational practices and has presented her findings at various conferences. In addition to her scholastic responsibilities, Professor Salman has supervised and mentored over 56 Master's theses and 19 Ph.d. dissertations. On the September, 24, 2024, she was appointed as the first Vice-Chancellor of Kwara State University of Education, making her the first female indigene of Ilorin to attain this feat.⁷²

Conclusion

The development of education and scholarship in Ilorin Emirate has often been told through the achievements of male scholars and administrators. Yet, the evidence presented in this study shows that women elite also played important roles in shaping the educational landscape of the Emirate. Through their involvement in Islamic scholarship as well as Western education, these women emerged as teachers, mentors, authors of religious texts, school proprietors, and respected community figures. In these capacities, they not only contributed to the growth of education but also created opportunities for other women to gain access to learning. In the process, many of them navigated social and cultural limitations that historically restricted women's advancement. By doing so, they gradually carved out meaningful spaces for women within Ilorin intellectual and scholarly tradition. Their efforts strengthened women's visibility in education and contributed to broader social development within the Emirate. Recognizing their roles therefore helps provide a more balanced understanding of the history of education in Ilorin and highlights the lasting impact of women elite in shaping the Emirate's educational and social transformation.

Notes and References

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2. Mustapha Delican, *Elite Theories of Pareto, Mosca and Michels*. p. 323.

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 18. L.A.K. Jimoh, *Ilorin Journey so far*. Malet: Kwara State University Press, 2022. pp. 502-512.
 19. National Archives, Ibadan (NAI). *Ilorin Province Annual Report, 1938-1939*. F. de. F. Daniel, Esq., Resident, Ilorin Province. File 12687, Vol. III, CSO 26/2.
 20. Alabi, A.S. *Transmission of Learning in Modern Ilorin: A History of Islamic Education 1897-2012*203. Sheikh Saliu Munabau of Oke-Suna (also referred to in some sources as Oke-Okuta) was a prominent Islamic scholar in nineteenth century Ilorin. He belonged to the scholarly circle of Sheikh Ojibara, who served as *Ajanasi* to Sheikh Sanni, the first Chief Imam of Ilorin. Sheikh Saliu Munabau also held the title of *Ajanasi*, and his mosque, popularly known as the Munabau Mosque, was at one time used as the central Jumu'ah mosque of the city. For further details, see L.A.K. Jimoh's comments on H.O. Danmole's lecture paper presented at the Centre for Ilorin Studies, University of Ilorin, 2012, p. 43.
 21. Alabi, A.S. *Transmission of Learning in Modern Ilorin: A History of Islamic Education 1897-2012*205.
 22. Alabi, A.S. *Transmission of Learning in Modern Ilorin: A History of Islamic Education 1897-2012*205.
 23. Oral interview with Alhaja Suleiman Aishat, Present Malimatu of Ansarul-Islam Women Wing Centre B, aged, 70+, 25th October, 2024.
 24. Oral interview with Alhaja Suleiman Aishat.
 25. Oral interview with Ismail Ibrahim, aged 61+, Mualim of Ansarul-Islam Women Wing Centre B, 25th of October, 2024.
 26. Oral Interview with Alfa Olosun, aged 51, one of the Mualim of Ansarul-Islam Women Wing Centre B, 25th of October, 2024.
 27. Oral Interview with Rihanat Arowolo, Malimatu Ansarul-Islam Women Wing Centre A, aged 90+, June 6, 2023.
 28. Oral Interview with Rihanat Arowolo.
 29. Oral Interview with Rihanat Arowolo.
 30. Oral interview with Alhaji Gani Tepamese, aged, 68+, Ansarul-Islam Women Wing Centre A Mualim, Ilorin, 6th June, 2023.
 31. Oral interview with Alhaji Gani Tepamese.
 32. Oral interview with Alhaji Gani Tepamese.

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34. Oral Interview with Rihanat Arowolo.
35. Oral Interview with Alhaja Maimunah Mustaphe Idi-Agbede, Adewole, Ilorin Ilorin. aged, 90+, 30, November, 2025.
36. Oral Interview with Alhaji Muhammad Tunde Balogun, Adewole, Ilorin, aged, 70+, 30, November, 2025.
37. Alhaja with Suleiman Shukurallahi Modupe, Adewole, Ilorin, aged 60, 30, November, 2025.
38. L.A.K. Jimoh, *Ilorin Journey so far*. Malete: Kwara State University Press, 2022. p. 560.
39. National Archives, Ibadan (NAI). *Ilorin Province Annual Report, 1938-1939*. F. de. F. Daniel, Esq., Resident, Ilorin Province. File 12687, Vol. III, CSO 26/2. See also, National Archives Kaduna (NAK), Ilorin Province File No. 3812: Supplementary Annual Report, Education Department, Ilorin Province (January-March 1939), 1939.
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41. Hajo, Sani. Maryam Ado Bayero: A Woman of Royal Virtue. 2023. p.91.
42. Oral interview with Alhaja Funmilay Zainab Ambali, Fate, Ilorin, aged, 70+, 27th July, 2025; Oral Interview with Kale Idiario, Adewole, Ilorin, aged, 70+ 03 June, 2024; Oral interview with Alhaja Zainab Iyabo Oniyangi, aged 90, Agba-Dam, Ilorin, 5th July, 2024. See also Hajo, Sani. Maryam Ado Bayero: A Woman of Royal Virtue. 177.
43. Oral Interview with Alhaja Sidikat Abdulhamid Idiario, Telephone Interview, aged, 50+, 02 June, 2024.
 Alhaji Yahaya Madawaki was born in 1907 to Mallam Abdulkadir Popoola from Erin-Ile. He was among the first crops of educated men in Ilorin emirate; he was a teacher and later a Politician. In 1937, Yahaya Madawaki was decorated with the coronation medal for meritorious service to commemorate the coronation of king George VI of England which took place that year. In 1948 he was promoted to the grade of education officer. He thereby became the first African to hold that position in Ilorin province and one of the first two to do so in the whole of Northern Nigeria, in 1955 he was conferred with the title of Madawaki of Ilorin, Ilorin by Emir, Oba Abdulkadir, in the same year he was conferred

with the order of the British Empire (OBE), in 1972, he was appointed commissioner for works in Kwara State by colonel David Bamigboye, the then military Governor of Kwara State. Also, he was decorated with the member of the federal Republic (M.F.R.) in 1980 and in 1982, the University of Ilorin conferred on him, the honorary degree of doctors of letters(D.Litt) in appreciation and recognition of his contributions towards the development of education in Nigeria. see, Jimoh L.A.K.

44. Oral Interview with Sikirat Ahmed, Eyekorin, Ilorin, aged, 60+, 01 June, 2024
45. Oral Interview with Kale IdiARO, Adewole, Ilorin, aged, 70+ 03 June, 2024
46. Oral Interview with Kale IdiARO.
47. Oral Interview with Alhaja Sidikat Abdulhamid IdiARO.
48. Oral Interview with Sikirat Ahmed.
49. Oral Interview with Kale IdiARO. Alhaji Kale Idi-Aro stated that they were contacted by the British Embassy in Nigeria, which requested the presentation of their mother's MBE award and offered a sum of about 5,000 pounds in return. He further explained that despite an extensive search, the award could not be found, although he affirmed that their mother was indeed a recipient of the MBE honour.
50. Oral Interview with Alhaja Jamilat Funmilayo Gold, G.R.A. Opposite Herald newspaper, aged, 70+, 26, July, 2025.
51. Oral Interview with Alhaja Jamilat Funmilayo Gold.
52. Oral Interview with Alhaja Jamilat Funmilayo Gold.
53. Oral Interview with Alhaja Jamilat Funmilayo Gold.
54. Oral Interview with Alhaji Mudi Adebayo Gold, G.R.A. Herald Newspaper, 90+, 26, July, 2025.
55. Oral Interview with Alhaji Mudi Adebayo Gold.
56. Oral Interview with Alhaji Mudi Adebayo Gold.
57. L.A.K. Jimoh, *Ilorin Journey so far*, p.578
58. Oral Interview with Alhaja Jamilat Funmilayo Gold.
59. Abubakar, "Ilorin Emirate's frontliners". Ilorin: Unilorin Press, 2022. p.167.
60. Oral Interview with Alhaja Halimah Yusuf, aged, Oke-Suna, Ilorin, 70+, 01, December, 2025.
61. Oral Interview with Alhaja Halimah Yusuf.
62. Oral Interview with Alhaja Halimah Yusuf.
63. Oral Interview with Alhaja Halimah Yusuf.
64. Oral Interview with Alhaji Abdullahi Afolabi, Oke-Suna, Ilorin, aged, 80+, 01 December, 2025.
65. Oral Interview with Alhaji Abdullahi Afolabi.
66. Oral Interview with Alhaji Abdullahi Afolabi.

67. Oral Interview with Alhaji Abdullahi Afolabi.
68. Oral Interview with Alhaja Halimah Yusuf.
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70. Abubakar, "Ilorin Emirate's frontliners". p. 242.
71. *Our illustrious Icons, A biography of selected prominent people of Pakata area, Ilorin: 1831-2015*. pp. 307-308.
72. See www.Ilorin.info/fullnews.24/09/2024.