



## QUR'ĀNIC RECITATION COMPETITION IN NIGERIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES: A CASE STUDY OF BAUCHI STATE

**Aminu Umar, PhD.**  
[babanwalle@gmail.com](mailto:babanwalle@gmail.com)

**Muhammad Babayo Uba, Fatima Babayo**  
Department of Religious studies  
Faculty of Humanities Management & Social Sciences  
Federal university of Kashere  
P.M.B. 0182 Gombe State

&

**Muhammad Sani Mukhtar (Gwani), PhD**  
Department of Arabic Medium  
School of secondary Education(Languages)  
Jigawa State College of Education Gumel  
+2348065323525; [gwani1978@gmail.com](mailto:gwani1978@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*The importance of the Qur'an to the life of a Muslim cannot be over emphasized because Islam cannot be practiced without the Qur'an, for no prayer (Salat) is valid without reciting the holy Qur'an. This necessitates the learning of correct and good recitation of the Holy Qur'an is encouraged. It is against this background that it has become an established tradition that Muslims try to establish Qur'ānic schools in their settlements and device the idea of a recitation competition (Musābaka) with the aim of inculcating and encouraging Muslims, particularly the younger ones to learn the technicalities and modes of reciting the glorious Qur'an as taught by the prophet (peace be upon him). The first international Qur'ānic recitation competition (Musābaka) was held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1986 while in Nigeria the National Qur'ānic Recitation Competition was initiated by the Centre for Islamic Studies of Usman Dan-Fodio University Sokoto in 1985, where a pilot competition was held in 1986. Since then the event has grown into a full-blown vibrant and splendid National event hosted by various states of the federation in rotation. This paper aims at examining the development and organization of Qur'ānic recitation competition in Nigeria in general and Bauchi state in particular tracing the various success recorded and some of the major challenges bedeviling the project. Finally, the paper proffers some recommendations aimed at improving the scheme.*

**Keywords:** *Qur'an, recitation, competition, Nigeria, Bauchi, prospects, challenges, study.*

### Introduction

The Glorious Qur'an is a divine Book revealed to prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) through Angel Jibril (A.S) which is a completion and perfection of similar Books given to other prophets. The glorious Qur'an was revealed in an appropriate portion spread over a period of twenty-three years in seven variant linguistic dialects of the Arabic language (Bukhari 481, vol.6 No, 513). Angel Jibril was reported to be reciting the Qur'an together with the prophet (peace be upon him) every Ramadan and twice in the prophet's last year on earth (Bukhari 485 No. 519). Through this

way, the Prophet memorized the entire Qur'an. He (S.A.W.) was also reported to have encouraged the learning and recitation of the glorious Qur'an in many of his sayings, for instance in one of his sayings he was reported to have said "the best among you (Muslims) are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it (Bukhari 501-502 No.545). Among the companions of the prophet, there were some who memorized the glorious Qur'an during the life time of the prophet such companions included: Zaid bin Thabit, Ubayyu bin Ka'ab, Mu'az bin Jabal and Abu Zaid among others. (Bukhari 488 No. 525).

It is against this background that it has become an established tradition that Muslims try to establish a school in their settlement, whatever the size of the population, in order to teach people, particularly the young ones, to read and write verses of the glorious Qur'an. Since the recitation of the glorious Qur'an, unlike the reading of other books in any language including Arabic, is based on special criteria, technicalities and modes as revealed by Allah through angel Jibril to the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) the rules have to be learned and applied by all those who read it in order to meet the set requirements. Muslims in Nigeria right from the advent of Islam were and are still conscious of this fact. For instance, Shaykh Abdullahi bin Fudi one of the finest and greatest scholars in the Sokoto caliphate has about three works to his credit on the science of Qur'anic recitation indicating the antiquity of the subject in Nigeria. (Ibrahim 2016)

It is in keeping this age old tradition that in contemporary times many individuals, school's faith-based organizations and government organized the Qur'anic Recitation competition at various levels with the aim of supporting and encouraging Muslims (Males and Females) especially the younger ones to learn the correct recitation of the glorious Qur'an and to memorize it (Shehu 2016).

### **The Legal Basis of Qur'anic Recitation Competition**

Qur'anic recitation competition has attracted the attention of scholars on the legality of the Qur'anic recitation competition. While some scholars regard and consider it as legal and having basis in Islam, others consider it as baseless innovation (*Bid'ah*) that was introduced by later generation of Muslims.

Some Scholars have discussed the legal position of the Qur'anic competition without awarding prizes citing evidences for Qur'anic recitation competition from the glorious Qur'an where Allah says

وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ ٢٦

“let those who aspire have aspirations,”

According to Basfar, (n.d) a number of Muslim exegetes opine that the verse refers to competition in seeking reward by engaging in righteous deeds. He therefore submits that competition in the recitation and memorization of the glorious Qur'an would rank among the most important of such righteous deeds. He further asserted that scholars have cited numerous narrations to the effect that the prophet (peace be upon him) held races on feet and allowed the companions to hold race on feet, horse, camel archery etc. Some scholars also argue that there should be no mundane prizes in competition except for arrows, camels, or horses. They cite the saying of the prophet (peace be upon him) that “No stake is acceptable except in archery, racing a camel and racing a horse” (Jāmi'i Tirmidhy 1700 & Sunan Abu Daud 2574)

Scholars who argue for the permissiveness of Qur'anic recitation competition, even if it involves prizes in so far as the prizes are not provided by the participants, draw analogy from the above quoted Hadith and conclude that warriors in war are needed in as much as experts in the study of the glorious Qur'an. (Al-wasewi:2007). Therefore, Qur'anic recitation competition is akin to warriors because it comes under the heading of supporting Islam and making it supreme. In this vein, Ibn Taimiyya (1386) dislikes given money as prizes in competition except in competition that may help in striving in the cause of Allah.

However, there are some scholars who are of the view that the Qur'anic recitation competition has no basis and is not recommendable, in Islam. According to (Kasimu 2008) such scholars give their reasons, among others, that Qur'anic recitation competition was not practiced during the time of the prophet or his companions and also it is a kind of show off (i.e. *Riya*), because the recitation is being done to seek the pleasure of other people other than Allah. And lastly, they consider it as a sort of gambling because the winners would be happy at the end of the competition while the losers would feel



unhappy and is capable of creating enmity among the participants. In any case, the permissibility or otherwise of the Qur'anic recitation competition is a bountiful field for further academic research.

### **Origin of Qur'anic Recitation Competition in Nigeria**

According to Abdul Hamid (2015), the first international Qur'anic recitation competition was held in Mecca, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1986 under the Ministry of Endowment (Awqaf), Islamic Affairs. Muslim countries and Muslim organizations in minority Muslim countries were invited. Competitors for the various categories of the competition are expected to first undergo through a fair, just and objective process in their own countries or communities to select country representative. (Shehu 2017).

In Nigeria, the idea of organizing a Qur'anic competition was conceived by the Centre for Islamic studies Usmanu Dan-fodio University Sokoto in 1985(Ibrahim 2017). However, the Pilot National competition was held in Sokoto in 1986 which coincided with the international recitation competition as mentioned earlier. Since then the competition has grown into a full-blown, colorful and exciting annual event being organized by the center for Islamic Studies, Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto and hosted by various states that rotate the national event among them after due selection. (Abdulhamid 2015 and Shehu 2016). According to Abdulhamid (2015), the competition was introduced with the following objectives;

- i. To encourage Muslim Youths in the recitation and memorization of the Glorious Qur'an;
- ii. To forge unity and Islamic brotherhood among the Muslim Youths and the Ummah in general;
- iii. To make the youths intensify learning the correct recitation of the Holy Qur'an and all its science in the manner it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and

- iv. To enhance the quality of learning *Tajweed* and sciences of the Qur'an in schools and colleges throughout the country (Abdulhamid 2015).

In order to properly achieve these objectives, the Centre introduced rules and regulations on how to conduct the competition successfully. Such rules include those dealing with eligibility of competitions, categories of competition, qualities of and qualifications of judges, moral standards required of all including what is expected of the audience and the criteria for awarding marks to the competitors. (Ibrahim 2017) Apart from these, the Centre also set aside guidelines for nominations of hosting states which include hosting obligations among other things. However, the rules and regulations for the competition were modified from time to time in order to perfect it as a result of emerging situations and circumstances.

Since its inception in 1986, the National Qur'anic recitation competition (Musābaka) has been successfully conducted every year except 1998 and 2008(Shehu;2016). And as explained earlier, the hosting right has been rotating from one state to another. For instance, it was conducted in Sokoto1986, Borno 1987, Kano 1988, Oyo 1989, Bauchi 1990, Plateau1991, Lagos1992, Katsina 1993, Niger1994, Kaduna 1995, Abuja 1996 etc. (Abdulhamid 2015) Also, the country has been participating in the International Qur'anic recitation competition which is being held annually in Makkah and other countries. Hence, the country (Nigeria) once took 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> position respectively among 84 countries of the world. (Abdul-lahi 1994)

### **Organisation and Funding of the Competition**

As discussed earlier, the sole organization of the competition at the National level has been vested to the center for Islamic studies Usmanu Danfodio University Sokoto.

With regard to funding of the annual event, the rule is that states that are interested in hosting the event are expected to

indicate their interest in writing to the organizers. Once a request is accepted the organizers will issue an approval letter to the hosting state together with the financial hosting obligations which include among other things, provision of accommodation and feeding to all officials and other invited personalities. In addition, the hosting state has to pay the sum of three million five hundred thousand naira to the organizers as hosting obligations. In terms of prizes for the winners and consolation prizes for others, the hosting state gives what it can afford. The hosting state is also charged with the responsibility of providing two separate competition venues for the opening and closing events (Ibrahim 2016).

### **Various Categories of the Competition**

The categories of the competition as outlined by the center are as follows:

1. Category one: This includes memorization of the whole Qur'an, applying rules governing its recitation with exegesis both exoterically and esoterically;
2. Category Two: Here the competitor is required to have memorized the entire glorious Qur'an and to apply all rules governing its recitation;
3. Category Three: The competitor is expected to have memorized forty portions of the glorious Qur'an with the ability to applying fully the rules governing the recitation.
4. Category Four: Under this category, a competitor must have memorized twenty portions of the glorious Qur'an and should be able to recite them applying all rules of the recitation of the Qur'an;
5. Category Five: A competitor under this category must have learnt how to recite the glorious Qur'an applying its rules and regulations but with necessary intonation and
6. Category Six: A candidate in this category must have memorized two consecutive portions of the Qur'an, applying rules governing their recitation.
7. The above categorization is applicable to both male and female competitors

with a modification in categories one and two where female competitors are required to know the exegesis of just a section of the glorious Qur'an unlike their male counterparts who are required to know the exegesis of the whole Qur'an. (Ibrahim 2016).

### **Success Recorded by the Competition**

According to Ibrahim (2016) the National Qur'ānic competition has been able to achieve most of the objectives that are set to be achieved. One of the great impacts and success recorded lies in the wide acceptance it receives within the entire Islamic community in Nigeria and in the establishments of more colleges and institutions for the studies of Qur'ānic sciences. It is a common knowledge in Nigeria today that there is a huge number of Muslims youths who have memorized the entire glorious Qur'an or recite a tangible segment of it accurately. Many Qur'ānic schools have been established across the country for the purpose of memorization of the Qur'an and its recitation. This can be attested by the mammoth turnout of memorizers and reciters from such schools in its hundreds every year for the Qur'anic recitation competition.

As a forum where different groups of Muslims from different localities converge together and focus only on one thing, the glorious Qur'an, and the zeal and spirit of Islamic brotherhood displayed among the participants during the competition without any discrimination or prejudice is another sign that the National recitation competition has succeeded in fostering the bond of brotherhood and unity among the Nigerian Muslims.

Another indicator to the success of the National Qur'ānic recitation competition is the way and manner the event has been accepted by almost all states of Nigeria. In 1986 when the pilot competition was staged in Sokoto, only few states participated. However, according to Ibrahim (2016) as at 2016 not less than twenty-seven out of thirty-six plus the Federal Capital Territory have been participating

in the annual event. Added to this is the way and manner some state governments such as Sokoto, Zamfara, Bauchi, Yobe, Kano and Borno among others have continued to give priority attention in the establishment of institutions for Qur'ānic studies and in making funds available for the improvement of facilities necessary for conducive learning environment as well as the welfare of the scholars and participants. (Ibrahim, 2016 and Gusau, 2012)

At the international level, the Nigerian participants have been participating in the annual Qur'ānic competitions hosted in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Iran, Egypt and some other countries. On several occasions, they have won the first position in the first category among others thus putting the country on the map of high-profile Islamic countries known for their great performance. It is also in recognition of the country's performance that judges of the competition at the national level have at various times been invited to sit on the panel of International judges of the competition in Saudi Arabia (Gusau 2012).

### **Qur'ānic Recitation Competition in Bauchi State**

Memorizers for various categories in the Qur'an from Bauchi State have been participating in the National Qur'ānic competition since its inception in 2006. However, the state started organizing the event at state level from 2007 and since then the competition has been taking place annually. The state government used to appoint an organizing committee which comprises eminent and prominent Islamic scholars under the supervision of the state Ministry of religious affairs. As mentioned earlier, the state government provides adequate funds for the smooth conduct of the event annually. (Shehu, 2007)

### **Organisation and Funding of the Competition**

As mentioned earlier, the Qur'ānic recitation competition in Bauchi state started in

1987 under an organizing committee appointed by the government with late Malam Abba Wābi as the pioneer coordinator (Ado 2016). However, the funding of the event was entirely left in the hands of some individuals and philanthropists (Shehu 2016). According to Shehu (2016), from 1999 the Bauchi state government took over both the organization and sponsorship of the event. And from 2006, the state government has been providing votes for the annual event in its annual budget (Shehu 2017).

### **Successes and Challenges of the Competition**

According to Ado (2018), Bauchi state has recorded a lot of success in the Qur'ānic recitation competition since its inception. This may not be unconnected with the total and unalloyed support of the Bauchi state governments. Some of the success recorded include;

- i. Memorizers of various categories from Bauchi state have participated and won marvelous and impressive prizes both at the national and international arena. For instance, in 2011 Hafiz Ahmad Dahiru Usman Bauchi emerged winner of the National competition. While in the Female section Bauchi State won the first position in 2000, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 (Shehu;2016 and Ado;2017). In the same vein memorizers from Bauchi state represented Nigeria in many countries such as Malaysia 2000, Tanzania 2005, Senegal 2011, Dubai 2012, Tanzania 2013, Kuwait 2017, Malaysia 2017 and Saudi Arabia 2018. (Ado 2018).
- ii. The total and complete sponsorship of the annual event by the Bauchi State Government and its local Government Councils is another reason that leads to the success of the Qur'ānic recitation competition in Bauchi state. As mentioned earlier, since 1999, the state government has been providing votes in its annual budgets for the annual event. This mammoth support

from the government is the backbone that sustained the unbreakable conduct of the event.

- iii. Another success recorded by the state is the massive acceptance received especially from the youths within the state. This is evident from the massive turnout of youths both male and female right from the local government level to the state level and the establishments of more colleges and institutions for the studies of Qur'ānic sciences and its memorization. According to Mus'ab (2019), in Bauchi metropolitan alone, there are not less than twenty Qur'anic memorization schools and the story is the same in other local governments.
- i. Another achievement to be counted success of the event can be seen in the way some participants were able to secure scholarships to study in some foreign universities, one of such participants was Abbas Salisu Zakariyya who represented Nigeria at Senegal in 2011, Dubai in 2012, and Tanzania in 2013 who later secured admission at the international Islamic University Medina where he is still a student. (Ado 2018). Another participant Ibrahim Abubakar who represented Nigeria at Tanzania in 2015 and Amiru Yunusa Guru who represented Nigeria at Algeria in 2017, were able to secure admission at the Bauchi State University Gadau and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria respectively. (Ado, 2018).
- ii. The economic empowerment of participants that excelled was another achievement recorded. According to Yunusa (2018), since 2015 the State Organizing Committee has been distributing 4 vehicles, 4 tricycles 24 motorcycles, 15 sewing machines, 14 bicycles and other consolation prizes annually to the winners and participants of Qur'ānic competition and this has greatly assisted in the economic empowerment of the winners. In this direction, one of the female participants, Zainab Abdullahi who represented Nigeria in Malaysia in 2000 and 2006 was able to

establish Ibn Kathir Qur'anic Memorization School and AMSA Model Academy (Nursery. Primary and secondary school) were she recruited many personnel and produced many Qur'anic memorizers (Ado, 2018)

Finally, the permeating and fusing of unity and brotherhood among participants was another remarkable achievement recorded by the Qur'ānic recitation competition. Various Muslims, regardless of their organizations and or societies, converge and unite together annually under the umbrella of the glorious Qur'an.

### **Challenges of Qur'anic Recitation Competition in Bauchi State**

Although Bauchi state was able to record a lot of success as mentioned above, yet there are some noticeable challenges that are bedeviling the programme. Some of the challenges of the Qur'ānic recitation competition are in the way and manner some Muslim organization see the event as lucrative instead of strictly religious activity aimed at strengthening the religion of Allah. As mentioned earlier, the Bauchi State Government gives the Qur'anic recitation utmost attention by appointing a high-powered committee and sponsoring the whole event. This made some Muslim organizations and groups to opt out and be conducting their separate competition but at the same time solicit for government financial patronage and benefaction.

Another challenge of the Qur'ānic recitation according to Gokaru (20019) lays in the way and manner some Muslim politicians used the event or occasion as a political tool to realize or achieve their goals. This can be seen clearly in the appointment of members of organizing committee of the competition. Whenever there is a change in the political leadership of the state, party affiliation or inclination are considered in the appointment of the committee members in place of strict Islamic credentials. There was even a time when a chairman of the organizing committee was allegedly removed on a bogus allegation

by some politicians that he was not loyal to their political party.

Another challenge according to Yusuf and Mus'ab (2019) is the way and manner some of the participants falsify their ages and local government of origin all in their attempt to see that they get through the event. There was even a time when a certain participant allegedly forged his State of Origin and even Nationality in order to participate in an International Qur'anic recitation event.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The Qur'anic recitation competition in Nigeria has brought many good things not only to the Muslims but also to the whole nation. To the Muslims, it has widened the scope of their knowledge of the Qur'an, encouraged many Muslim youths, particularly the females among them to memorize and properly recite the glorious Qur'an, something that was uncommon previously. The competition had also brought hitherto inconceivable unity in Qur'anic recitation and stronger Islamic brotherhood among Muslims in Nigeria. Although there are a lot of challenges as pointed out earlier in this paper, they are however fathomable if all Muslims can join hands with utmost sincerity and conscientiously, as taught in Islam. In order to sustain and improve on the gains and successes recorded so far by the organizers of the Qur'anic recitation both at the national and Bauchi State levels, this study wish to make the following recommendations;

- I. There is a need for stakeholders to evolve other ways of giving material prizes to the participants to other unwavering awards such as offerings full scholarship or sponsorship to further their education at all levels or pay for their training in professional university and non-university courses. Through this, they can be empowered educationally and economically.
- II. The Bauchi State government should seek and sign a memorandum of understanding (M.O.U.) with some of the international Islamic universities

in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Niger and other countries towards providing opportunities to indigenes of the State that excel in the Qur'anic competition to further their education.

- III. Government should as much as possible de-politicize the appointments of officials to handle the affairs of the *Musābaka* by choosing and appointing capable and competent Islamic scholars since this is strictly an Islamic affair.
- IV. The Bauchi state Qur'anic recitation committee should evolve a method of screening candidates where participants must be certified by a prominent traditional ruler or Islamic scholars as regards their ages and identity in order to curtail the cases of forgery and falsification of ages.
- V. Islamic organizations and societies should join hands with both local and state government in funding the event rather than living the whole funding in the hands of the government. This will reduce the intrusion and hijacking of the event by politicians.

### References

- Abdullahi Muhammad Zayyanu "Speech delivered at the opening ceremony of the 9<sup>th</sup> National Qur'anic Recitation, held in Minna, Niger State, 1994".
- Ado, Yunusa (2018) *Development of Qur'anic Recitation Competition and Memorization: The Achievement of Bauchi State Recitation Committee from 2015-2018* Bauchi Book of Essays on Qur'anic Studies, Vol.1 No. 2
- Abdulhamid, Rafatu (2015) *Impact and Challenges of Qur'anic Recitation Competition in the Federal Capital Territory (Fct) Abuja* Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture December Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 153-161 American Research Institute for Policy Development



- Basfar, Abdullah (n.d) *Khattatul-Musabaqat wa al-Dawrat al-Qur'aniyyah*. Jeddah: Rabitah
- Bukhari, Imam Isma'il. *Sahih al Bukhari Arabic-English*, M.M. Khan (trans.) Beirut: Dar al-Arabia, n.d, 9 vols.
- Gusau, Ahmad Muhammad (2012) *The Effect of Qur'anic Recitation Competition to the Contemporary Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria* Proceedings: The 2nd Annual International Qur'anic Conference Centre of Quranic Research University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Ibn Taimiyyah, Ahmad ibn Abdulhalim (1386) *Al-Fatāwa al kubra*, Beirut: Dar al-Marifa,
- Kasimu, A. (2008) Memorization of the Glorious Qur'an (Tahfiz Al-Qur'an): A Guide for Beginners. Si-fawa Press, Sokoto, Nigeria. PP.8-37 and PP.81-88.
- Shehu, Salisu (2006) *History of the Bauchi State Qur'anic Recitation Competition* Bauchi Journal of Qur'anic Studies, Vol.1 No. 1.
- Ibrahim, Y.Y. (2006) *History of Nigerian National Qur'anic Recitation Competition* Bauchi Journal of Qur'anic Studies, Vol.1 No. 1 2006.
- Interview with Mus'ab Yusuf and Sa-fiyanu Gokaru two young scholars who are conversant and participants of Qur'anic recitation competition on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019 at Kashere.