

# Scholarships Granted by the Islamic University to Ethiopian Students (1961-1974)

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**Abstract**—The topic of this paper begins with the establishment of the Islamic University in Madinah in 1961 and ends with the end of the reign of Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia in 1974. The paper deals with the reasons why the Islamic University was interested in granting scholarships to Ethiopian students, the types of these scholarships, terms of admission, the distribution of scholarships, the way the university selects students, the number of successful students, and the establishment of an association between the university and alumni.

The paper depended on various resources such as the unpublished Egyptian documents that are found in the House of Egyptian National Archives. These documents include national archives and the archives of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These are unpublished governmental papers that are available to researchers according to certain rules and instructions. The paper also relied on the unpublished documents of Sheikh Hassanein Mohamed Makhlof who is the former Grand Mufti. He kept the documents and reports of the Islamic University Council as he was one of its members. These were a collection of documents that have never been researched before. The researcher perused them at a library carrying the name of Sheikh Makhlof at his native village, Beny Adi, Asyut Governorate, Upper Egypt.

**Index Terms**—Ethiopia, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, education, scholarships, Islamic University, cultural history.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia was characterized by the diversity of the languages of its people, due to their different races and religious beliefs. Their languages included Semitic, Hamito-Semitic (Afro-Asiatic), Oromo, Nilotic, Somali and the language of Western Somalia. In terms of religion, the majority of the Somali people were either Muslims or Christians. The Orthodox Christians used the Ge'ez language for church<sup>1</sup> [1] and religious rituals. The Muslims used the Arabic language to perform their religious rituals [1].

Despite this racial, linguistic, and religious diversity, the Ethiopian government adopted the containment and Amharization policy with different religious and cultural groups during the reign of Haile Selassie. These groups included the Arabs and Muslims in Western Somalia [2] and Eritrea [3], and the Arab community in Addis Ababa. In 1955 [1], the constitution of the Ethiopian government

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<sup>1</sup>The Ge'ez language is the oldest Semitic language that Ethiopia has ever known. It was once its official language, but after replacing it by the Arabic language, Ge'ez became the language used in the liturgy of Ethiopian Church.

imposed Amharic as the official language. The Amharization policy dominated Ethiopian public schools. Thus the Ethiopian Muslims and Arabs were motivated to establish private institutes and schools at their own expense. At these places, Arabic was used as the language of education and communication in order to preserve the cultural and religious identity of Muslims there [4].

## II. THE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

It is an international educational institution established in 1961 by King Saud Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in Madinah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Its bylaw was instituted in 1965 [5]. The university was directly associated with the King of Saudi Arabia as its supreme president who had the authority to appoint and fire the university president [6].

The Islamic University started with the establishment of the College of Islamic Law in 1961, followed by the Faculty of Islamic Preaching and Theology in 1966 [7]. In 1969, the university established a private institute for foreign languages to be joined by students after they finish college [8]. Then the university established the Faculty of the Holy Quran [9] and the Faculty of the Arabic Language [10] in 1974.

The goal behind the establishment of the Islamic University was to spread Salafi religious teachings among Muslims and Arabs all over the world, especially in the regions which are deprived of educational opportunities for political or economic reasons through granting full scholarships. Ethiopia received special attention in terms of the aids and grants offered by the university.

## III. THE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY'S REASONS FOR GRANTING SCHOLARSHIPS TO ETHIOPIAN STUDENTS

The Ethiopian government willfully neglected the education of its Arab and Muslim students. It is evident in the fact that its overseas delegations did not involve any Muslim [11]. Additionally, Israel granted a large number of scholarships to Ethiopian students to receive their education in Israel [12]. The Islamic University worried about Muslims in Ethiopia because of Christian preaching that took advantage of their poverty and lack of Muslim preachers and imams. Furthermore, the Ethiopian government restricted Arabic and Islamic education in Ethiopia [13].

The university paid attention to Ethiopia because of its environment that was appropriate for the university's activities. Ethiopian Muslim students made serious and persistent efforts to pursue their studies, especially in Eritrea.

The war there continued throughout the period of the study and led to the closure of public and private schools in Eritrean towns and villages. The war also decreased financial resources and imposed difficult procedures for travelling abroad whether to Arab or European countries. Therefore, Othman Saleh Sabbe, head of the Eritrean Liberation Front, attempted to solve the educational problem facing the Resistance Movement schools. He managed to make many Arab countries recognize the certificates awarded by the Resistance Movement schools. Accordingly, he obtained scholarships for Eritrean students in Arab schools and universities [14].

Othman Saleh Sabbe benefited from the curriculum that was taught at the Eritrean Resistance Movement schools. It was the same as the curriculum of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, along with quotations from the Sudanese curriculum. These schools taught Tigrinya and English in the 2<sup>nd</sup> term. All subjects were taught in Arabic which was the primary language used in teaching, taking into account the application of certain aspects of the Eritrean curriculum [14].

The Islamic University, in turn, took an important step for granting scholarships to Ethiopian students. This step was the equation of the certificates issued by a large number of Islamic institutes and schools in Africa, especially Ethiopia, by the competent equation committee in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus, the university accepted the students' applications for the grants [15].

#### IV. THE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY'S WAY TO SELECT ETHIOPIAN STUDENTS

##### A. *Enrollment System at the University*

The KSA government granted scholarships annually at the university. One fifth of these scholarships were allotted for the citizens of the sponsoring country. The remaining scholarships were distributed among Islamic countries and other countries which have different ratios of Muslims. The scholarships were determined by the University Council in every academic year [7].

##### B. *Types and Terms of Scholarships*

Scholarships varied between scholarships to undergraduate students and others for post-graduate studies, i.e. Master's [16] and Doctorate [17] Degrees. For the second type of scholarships, the university set two conditions. Firstly, it was academic excellence. Secondly, the applicant must have spent five years or more in field work [18]. The university also granted training and research scholarships to Muslim students. These scholarships were called "scientific research support". They lasted for a few months to tour around book cases and prepare theses and dissertations. The beneficiaries of this type of scholarships were allotted higher rewards than the beneficiaries of other ordinary scholarships [19].

The most important type of scholarships granted by the university was the scholarship of complete under-graduate study at colleges. In this type of scholarships, the university afforded the financial costs of bringing students from their countries and their return after finishing the study. The university also paid the costs of a summer visit to their families once a year after passing the second year of college

[20]. Additionally, the university offered 300 Saudi Riyals as a monthly bonus, besides providing free accommodation, transport, medical treatment, medication and textbooks [7].

The university also set conditions for admission to the scholarship. The student age should range from 18 to 30 years old. He should pass the admission test of the sciences that were scheduled for the final year of high school at any secondary Islamic institute. He should sign a written commitment to the system of the university and follow the ordinances of Islam inside and outside the university [21]. He should submit a certificate of good conduct issued by a reliable institution [22]. He should also submit a medical certificate indicating that he is free of any illnesses that may impede him from pursuing his studies [23]. Although the university was keen to granting all scholarships, its tests were very accurate. The university was keen to select students who are well-mannered and willing to gain knowledge [24]. The penalty for those who violate these conditions starts with an admonition, followed by a warning, public reprimand, temporary dismissal from study, and deduction of a part of the monthly salary. Finally those students may be deprived of taking final exams [25].

The university followed a distinctive approach to the selection of eligible students. It sent two agencies abroad, one to Asia and the other to Africa. These agencies investigated the conditions of students who wanted to apply for the university. They also identified the scholars to benefit from their experience in this field. These agencies were authorized to assess the political conditions of these countries and deport students to the Saudi embassies there [24]. After the delegation visited Ethiopia and got acquainted with the real situation there, it suggested that students could travel as pilgrims or visitors. Then the students could stay in the kingdom of Saudi for study. This should be coordinated with the Passport and Nationality Departments in Medina, in order to grant residence to Ethiopian students who were selected by the university [3].

However, the number of acceptable students decreased in 1965. The university tried to face this obstacle by modifying the Advisory Council's decision regarding the selection of the students. Therefore, the students would be selected through the religious institutions across different countries. Two or three scholars would be selected in every country. Their task will be to choose the students. The students would go to the headquarters of the selection committee in their countries at their own expenses [26].

The Administrative Council of the University made a plan on May 4, 1965 for increasing the number of scholarships during the following three years by about 300 scholarships distributed equally to the three years at an annual rate of 130 scholarships [27].

#### V. HOW THE UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS ARE DISTRIBUTED TO ETHIOPIAN STUDENTS

In 1961, the university sent a number of scholarships to the Ethiopian government through the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The university asked the Ethiopian government to send its students to receive their education at the university. The Ethiopian government pretended that it needed adequate time to consider the educational programs

before allowing the Ethiopian students to join the university [24].

Nevertheless, the university took into account the confrontation of such obstacles. According to the university system, when the number of students from some countries was less than the share assigned to them, the difference in the number of scholarships would be distributed to other countries. This would happen at the discretion of the university president after consulting the administration [22]. In 1961, King Faisal Bin Abdulaziz confronted the Ethiopian government's refusal of the scholarships offered by the university. He ordered the university to accept all African students who met the admission requirements, in addition to the study seats previously assigned to them in the annual budget [24]. This increased the number of scholarships granted to Ethiopian students from nine in the previous budget [28] to twelve after the king's decision [29].

Moreover, at the end of the first academic year of the university, the Administrative Council suggested increasing the number of scholarships allotted for some countries [24] (pp. 3). Accordingly, the number of scholarships allotted for Ethiopia increased in the following year, i.e. 1962, from twelve to twenty scholarships [28].

TABLE I: THE NUMBERS OF SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED BY THE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY TO SOME AFRICAN COUNTRIES<sup>2</sup>

Year	Ethiopian Students			Nigerian Students
	Eritrean Students	Ethiopian Students	Total	
1961	--	12	12	14
1962	--	20	20	20
1963	--	--	--	--
1964	--	11	11	7
1965	--	--	--	--
1966	1	2	3	--
1967	1	3	4	--
1968	--	--	--	--
1969	2	3	5	7
1970	2	3	5	4
1971	4	5	9	10
1972	3	4	7	10
1973	2	17	19	10
1974	6	3	9	7

The above Table I shows that the number of scholarships offered to Ethiopia, including Eritrea, during the period under study, was 104 scholarships. While Nigeria, the largest Muslim country in Africa, was granted 97 scholarships. This clearly contradicts the policy of the university which links the number of scholarships offered to a certain country to the number of Muslims in that country. It is clear that the Muslims of Nigeria outnumber those of Ethiopia. This probably reflects the Saudi government's great concern about missionary activity in Ethiopia and the Ethiopian government's attitude that fights private and Arabic education there, especially in Eritrea.

The table indicates that the number of scholarships offered by the university to Eritrea alone was twenty-one, while the number of scholarships offered to Ethiopia as a whole was eighty-three. This means that Eritrea got about 25% of the total number of scholarships offered to Ethiopia.

However, the Muslims in Eritrea comprise less than one fourth of the number of Muslims in Ethiopia. Additionally the condition of education in Eritrea was better and more advanced than the private education offered to Ethiopia itself. Perhaps the university was interested to support the Public Resistance Movement in Eritrea by offering a large number of scholarships. It aimed to encourage the development of the Armed Resistance Movement that opposed the Ethiopian regime.

As shown in the above table, the number of students indicates that the Islamic University's recommendations of increasing the number of scholarships to Ethiopia were not carried out during the period from September 4, 1964 to November 11, 1964. In 1965, the year following the delegation, no scholarships were offered to Ethiopian students. The Administrative Council of the university, on May 4, 1965, called for increasing the number of scholarships offered to Ethiopian students over three years. However, in the next years and until the end of the period under study, there was a decline in the number of scholarships which Ethiopian students benefited by, compared with the number of scholarships in 1962. The number increased relatively in 1973.

The decline in the number of scholarships offered to Ethiopian students was perhaps due to the increase in the number of countries to which the university offered scholarships. Additionally, the policy of Ethiopian government was strict regarding the travel of its Muslim and Arab citizens, particularly with the outbreak of the revolution in Western Somalia. This is clear from the increase in the number of scholarships in 1973, and then its decline in 1974. Perhaps the reason for this decline was the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Saudi government was committed to support the front-line countries. This negatively affected its support for the university.

The table shows that the Islamic University has started to allot scholarships for Eritrea since 1966. The university didn't allot scholarships for Eritrea before that date because of the outbreak of the Eritrean Revolution. The Ethiopian government prevented its students from attending the university.

TABLE II: STUDENTS WHO SUCCEEDED IN SOME YEARS<sup>3</sup>

Student's Name	Faculty	Academic Years	Grade	Nationality
Mohamed Said Aafa	Islamic Law	1970-1973	Very Good	Ethiopian
Mahmoud Hamed	Islamic Law	1970-1973	Very Good	Ethiopian
Abdulhamid Omar Abdullah	Islamic Law	1970-1973	Pass	Ethiopian
Zakaria Adam Ali	Islamic Law (2 <sup>nd</sup> Session)	1970-1973	Pass	Ethiopian
Abdulkader Hamza Makboul	Islamic Law (2 <sup>nd</sup> Session)	1970-1973	Pass	Ethiopian
Said Hassan Shifaa	Islamic Law	1971-1974	Excellent	Ethiopian
Adam Mohamed	Islamic Law	1971-1974	Good	Ethiopian

<sup>2</sup> The table is prepared by the researcher after perusing a number of the unpublished papers of the Islamic University.

<sup>3</sup> The table is prepared by the researcher after perusing a number of the unpublished papers of the Islamic University.

Abdullah				
Mohamed Omar Al-Haaj Mohamed	Islamic Law	1971-1974	Good	Ethiopian
Ali Sheikh Dawoud Mohamed	Islamic Law	1971-1974	Good	Ethiopian
Mohamed ----	Islamic Law	1971-1974	Pass	Ethiopian
Omar Al-Din Saleh	Islamic Law (2 <sup>nd</sup> Session)	1971-1974	Pass	Eritrean
Mohamed Bashir Ali	Islamic Preaching and Theology	1971-1974	Good	Ethiopian
Ibrahim Hamza Arousi	Islamic Preaching and Theology	1971-1974	Good	Ethiopian
Adam Mohamed Ali	Islamic Law	1972-1975	Very Good	Ethiopian
Ahmed Younis Hussein Al-Harari	Islamic Law	1972-1975	Good	Ethiopian
Mahmoud Omar Mahmoud Edris	Islamic Law	1972-1975	Good	Ethiopian
Adam Saleh Mousa	Islamic Law (2 <sup>nd</sup> Session)	1972-1975	Pass	Ethiopian
Mohamed Aman Adam	Islamic Preaching and Theology	1972-1975	Pass	Ethiopian

Comparing the number of admitted students with the number of students who successfully graduated, we can conclude the following. The number of students who succeeded in 1973 and 1974 corresponds with the number of scholarships granted to Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1970 and 1971. This indicates that all students successfully passed their examinations. This correspondence differed in 1975. Two students failed their exams. This shows the poor level of students in general. This is confirmed by the success ratio of these students. Out of nineteen students, four students succeeded in the second session. It is also confirmed by the grades of these students. Eight students succeeded with a general grade of "pass", six students with a general grade of "good", four students with a general grade of "very good", and only one student with a general grade of "excellent".

This poor educational level of the students is probably attributed to the poor academic achievement of these students. They were not well educated at the pre-university educational stages because of the Ethiopian government's policy of fighting private education. These students reflected the level of the schools and institutes in their country. Also the strict control over imams in Ethiopia prevented them from nominating the outstanding students who were eligible for the scholarships.

It can be noticed from the above table II that the names of some students end with the names of the regions from which they came such as Harar and Arous. The name "Eritrean" occurred only once, while the name "Ethiopia" occurred eighteen times. Eritrea's share of the scholarships was nine while that of Ethiopia was twelve.

The table shows that the College of Islamic Law was preferred by Ethiopian and Eritrean students. Sixteen students joined this college. Only three students joined the Faculty of Islamic Preaching and Theology. This is attributed to several reasons. The College of Islamic Law was the first college to be established at the university, while the Faculty of Islamic Preaching and Theology was not established until 1966. This may also reflect students' interest in studying their religion and the sciences related to it. They wanted to confront the missionary activity and the government's stringent attitude towards Muslim imams in Ethiopia.

#### VI. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS ALUMNI

The Saudi government ordered all graduate students to travel back to their home countries which need their knowledge. Faculty members of the Islamic University pointed out to the students that they are not employees seeking higher salaries. Those students have a sublime mission to spread knowledge and learning in their countries [30].

In this context and to encourage students to go back to their home countries, Dar Al-Iftaa in Saudi Arabia contracted with some of them to work in the field of education and guidance in the countries of East, West, South and Central Africa. The graduates of the university worked in more than twenty countries. All students who completed their study at the university took their places in religious positions. Some of them worked in the field of Arab and Islamic education as judges and teachers. The university used to communicate with them and receive reports on their work. The university's continuous help enhanced their activity and performance [15]. Their work in African countries was praised and approved by the members of the university council [9].

The Saudi government also approved to the Islamic University's proposal to establish the Africa Muslim Agency. The task of the agency was to consider the enhancement and promotion of Islamic education and the teaching of the Arabic language in Africa. The agency consisted of representatives from: Dar Al-Iftaa, Supervision of Religious Affairs in the kingdom, the Islamic University, Muslim World League, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Saudi Ministry of Education [27].

#### VII. CONCLUSION

This paper reveals the attempt of the Saudi government to use the academic educational aspect to influence the cultural structure of Ethiopian Muslims. The government aimed to support the Arabic language in Ethiopia and spread Salafi Islamic thought there. The government supported private education financially, sent Arabic and religious books, allotted a number of scholarships for students to pursue their university education in the kingdom, and provided financial and moral support for its graduates during their work in their home countries. The government encouraged the graduates to inculcate the religious and cultural ideas which

they learned during their study in the kingdom. The paper reveals also that the Islamic university focused on the Eritrean students more than the Ethiopian students and students of Western Somalia.

For recommendations, the researcher suggests the necessity to study the obstacles and problems facing the education of Arabs and Muslims in Ethiopia, especially education in Arabic language.

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