

Understanding the Impediments to Effective Teaching and Learning of Arabic Studies in Nigerian Schools

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Abstract

It will be recalled that before the advent of western education in Nigeria, the two noticeable forms of education were the traditional education and Arabic and Islamic education. Arabic Language had played and still capable of playing great role in our educational and intellectual development considering its use and spread. The language remains the most widely spoken "foreign" language in Nigeria probably next to English as not less than 70million Nigerians speak it passively or actively. However, government recognition of this has been very slow. It is noteworthy that many problems have beleaguered the effective teaching and learning of the Arabic language and literature in Nigerian schools. The problems are not peculiar to a particular level or stage of our educational system but to all the levels from primary to tertiary. This paper is aim at identifying some of these problems and offers modest suggestions aimed at overcoming the problems. Some of the problems includes; The Attitude of Muslims and Nigerian Government towards Arabic, Misconception about the Arabic Language, Unavailability of Suitable Textbooks, Lack of Instructional Materials, Location of Departments, Poor Staffing of Arabic Units, Inadequacy of Competent Teachers, Teaching Arabic with English, Environmental Hindrances, Mother-Tongue Interference, The Syllabus/Curriculum, Admission. The methods adopted are historical and analytical. Modest suggestions aimed at overcoming the problems were analysed.

Keyword: Arabic Studies, Effective, Islam, Nigeria, Problems.

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Introduction

Education are of two types; formal and informal. Informal Education is the oldest form. Informal education is when you are not studying in a school and do not use any particular learning method. In this type of education, conscious efforts are not involved. It is neither pre-planned nor deliberate. It may be learned at some marketplace, hotel or at home. However, formal education is the form of education that is received in organized schools. Formal education usually takes place in the premises of the school, where a person may learn basic, academic, or trade skills. This type of education is not indigenous to Nigeria but came with the arrival of foreign religious groups.

As Wikipedia (2016) rightly states: 'Formal learning, normally delivered by trained teachers in a systematic intentional way within a school or any academic environment'

According to Fafunwa (1994), there are two forms of formal education in Nigeria these are Islamic and Western Education. Western Education was introduced by Christian Missionaries and the language of instruction is English. Islam came to Nigeria about three hundred years before Christianity was introduced. When the Muslims came, they introduced schools where the Qur'an could be taught. These schools were known as the Qur'anic Schools and were conducted either in mosques, outside the mosques, under trees or on the veranda of homes. Nowadays, buildings are erected specifically for such schools and the language of instruction has continued to be Arabic.

In this paper, the following items will be discussed on the problem facing the teaching and learning of Arabic studies in Nigeria and solution to the problems:

- The Importance of Arabic Studies to Nigeria
- Inclusion of Arabic Studies in the School Curriculum
- Problem Confronting the Effective Teaching and Learning of Arabic Studies in the Schools, and
- Conclusion is drawn.

The Importance of Arabic Studies to Nigeria

Folorunsho (2001) points out that Arabic is manifested internationally and locally. It is the *lingua franca* of about one hundred million inhabitants of the Middle East, which links three separate continents (Africa, Asia and Europe).

Abdul, (1983) also proves that the importance in the study of Arabic in Nigeria in particular and some other West African countries in general are sufficient to promote Arabic as a language. His argument is based on the considering the religious value, sociological and academic value which are written in Arabic, it also serves as a source of the vocabularies of some African Language and likewise Nigerian, according to him, forty percent of hausa words and expression are from Arabic, in the like manner, a minor percent of Yoruba words also originated from the language.

Lawal (2002) argues that apart from linguistic service, Arabic renders cultural service to Africa at whole. The true records of African history which the Africans themselves can proudly call their own are preserved by the language. Thus, knowledge of the language will enable aspiring scholars to drink deep into the history of Africans contained in the Arabic manuscripts found in our universities, archives and museums.

At contemporary level, Adedimeji (2014) in Adeyemi (2017) observes the importance of Arabic emanates in the very frequent use of the language on the electronic media such as Voice of Nigeria (V. O. N.), Voice of America (V. O. A.), British Broadcasting Corporation (B. B. C.), The Dutch, German, French and Russian Radio Stations. All these stations continually air Arabic versions of their programme regularly over their network. The roles of Aljazeera / High Arabic Version of CNN programme could not be overlooked that it beams news and programmes to the world with this language. The numerous Arabic-satellite transmitting stations beaming various programmes to the world give credence to the continuous rise of Arabic internationally and evidence of its importance and relevant to the society at large.

Bidmos (1991) stated some objectives for studying Arabic in Nigeria have been identified as follows:

- Nigeria belongs to some international organisations such as United Nations Organisation (U.N.O), African Union (A.U), Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (O.P.E.C) and many other world bodies, where Arabic is a working language.
- Nigeria can exchange experiences and ideas and in fact, can benefit tremendously in the area of petro-chemical industry through interaction with the Arab countries which have made great strides in the area.
- Nigerian diplomats in the Arab countries require at least a working language knowledge of Arabic to enable them to interact meaningfully and smoothly in the host countries.

From what we have noted above, it would be seen that the attraction for the Arabic Language has been influenced not only by aesthetic and religious appreciation but also by cultural considerations and by a strong historical consciousness. Giving consideration to the stated objectives, it also becomes clear that the relevance of Arabic to our educational system cannot be underestimated.

Inclusion of Arabic Studies in the School Curriculum

Every country has reasons for educating her citizens. One of such reasons is to help younger generations to be useful to themselves and their society later in life. Nigeria has adopted education as instrument for effecting rapid national development and unity. In 1973, the government of Nigeria invited eminent educational experts to design policies on education. The efforts of these experts are the current National Policy on Education currently used in Nigeria today.

On the position of education in Nigeria during the colonial era, Nwanko (1981) and Abdul Kareem (1983) in Adeyemi (2017) regret that early schools under Western Education have suffered a lot and confronted various problems. Among such problems identified at the time is the authoritarian control of the schools while various religious agencies tended to pursue different educational policies. The materials, textbooks, equipment, buildings and other school curricula differ from school to school to reflect English, French, Irish, or Italian background of the church that controlled them. There were social cleavages created among the pupils. The absolute control left for the parents did not give room for contributing to decisions regarding their children's education or to articulate their needs and aspirations on the curriculum objectives.

Adeyemi (1996) also laments that the schools lacked adequate trained teachers. Often, those employed have to combine pastoral duties with teaching with more emphasis on the former than the latter. Many parents believed that their children in their missionary boarding schools were isolated or snatched away from them to learn foreign ideas and ways of living which brought disrespect to the ancestral values, customs and traditions of their society. Islamic Education was not left out in this predicament. Abdulkareem (1990) throws light on the efforts of Muslim scholars on this issue. According to him, when it was discovered that Muslims were not adequately involved in government services due to lack of required qualifications, usually acquired through non-Islamic system of education, they felt a need to acquire western education, but with Islamic orientation and zeal. To achieve this purpose, many Muslim organizations sprang up to face the challenges.

Earlier on, Muslims had mounted pressures on the colonial government to change its one-way posture to educational development by establishing non-Christian schools for their children. This started in early 1930s, which coincided with the period of economic recession all over the world.

In present day Nigeria, most schools operate along the line of Western type of education and put in place religious instructions and seldom Arabic in their curriculum. Federal, State and Local Governments now participate in the planning of the curriculum and running of schools (except Arabic/Islamic oriented schools) to cater for the interest of various groups and citizens irrespective of their religious beliefs and denominations. Arabic language is also included in the curriculum according to National Policy on Education (revised ed. 1981) from primary to tertiary levels of education.

Problems Confronting the Effective Teaching and Learning of Arabic Studies in the Schools

It is noteworthy that many problems have beleaguered the effective teaching and learning of Arabic in Nigerian schools. The problems are not peculiar to a particular level or stage of our educational system but to all the levels, from primary to tertiary. We shall identify some of these problems and offers modest suggestions aimed at overcoming the problems.

(a) *The Attitude of Muslims and Nigerian Government towards Arabic:* It is quite disheartening to note that some Muslims are ignorant of the Arabic language. They regard it as merely spiritual and have been made to believe it as merely spiritual and have been made to believe that all a Muslim needs is to learn to read the Quran without necessarily having to understand its meaning. It is because of this misconception that little or no attention is paid to Arabic in Nigerian educational system.

(b) *Unavailability of Suitable Textbooks:* Another serious problem confronting Arabic learning in Nigerian schools is the Unavailability of Suitable Textbooks. (Abdul 1983) laments that the recommended books for teaching Arabic are mostly foreign (Arabian) authorship written to teach Arabic in the first instance to the native speakers of the language. Such books are published in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and so on. The defect inherent in the use of such book is obvious. They do not take account of the environmental background of the Nigerian learners of Arabic.

A good textbook, therefore, should cover most, if not all, aspects of modern language. Joint authorship would be a ready answer to the production of such suitable textbooks in our Universities or Colleges of Education. Similar things can be done on Arabic language and literature-in-Arabic for Secondary level for enhancement of this discipline. This approach certainly calls for the setting up of a workshop comprising native speakers, linguists, methodologists, test experts, artists, etc. Recently, Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS) at National level has taken steps to achieve this goal. The Federal Government of Nigeria should assist this Association to compliment this effort in cash and kind.

(c) *Lack of Instructional Materials:* The relevance of teaching aids or instructional facilities cannot be underestimated. (Opeloye 1991) mentioned some importance of use of instructional materials which includes:

- The use of instructional materials encourages active learning
- The use of instructional materials saves teacher's time and conserve his energy
- The effective use of audio-visual materials enriches learning by adding variety to it
- The use of visual materials bridges time and space
- For effective teaching and learning, instructional materials must be carefully chosen and used at the appropriate time.

Closely related to the provision of adequate instructional materials is the provision of a well equipped language laboratory. There are certain letters in the Arabic alphabet which create problems for both teacher and the learner. Difficulties occur at the phonological level where certain Arabic sounds are not found in Nigerian languages.

This issue should be properly addressed in Nigerian schools by the provision of adequate facilities taking the linguistic implications of the problem.

(d) *Location of Departments:* Arabic is combined with French to form the Department of Foreign Languages in some of the Nigerian Colleges of Education. This combination affects the two languages as it gives no room for efficiency and thoroughness. It affects the department financially as the same amount sanctioned by the authorities for the department of English which offers a single discipline is to be sanctioned for running the Foreign Languages Department, which offers two separate disciplines.

(e) *Poor Staffing of Arabic Units:* Acute dearth of Arabic teachers is observable in our primary and secondary schools, especially in the Southern Nigeria. Findings in the study of Folorunsho (2009) shows among other things that there are some colleges where only two permanent lecturers are employed to teach a total of 22 courses of 48 hours per week, these include 5 courses in the Pre-NCE section, 6 courses in parts I and II respectively and 5 courses in Part III. Lecturers in this type of situation are not only over-burdened but frustrated.

A lots needs to be done for staffing the Arabic sections in Nigerian colleges of education. The authorities concerned should not only provide an adequate number of lecturers but should ensure that the competent ones with sound linguistic background are employed.

(f) The Syllabus/Curriculum: Lawal (2002) sees the reason to facilitate the easiness of the teaching and learning of Arabic in our schools; the curriculum must be made simple and meaningful. The learners stand to gain nothing from a curriculum which gives no consideration to their social and linguistic backgrounds.

(g) Admission Requirements: Among the problems facing the study of the subject is the mode of admission requirements for students to higher institutions in Nigeria. Many Universities as well as Colleges of Education, especially those in the Southern parts of the country, request for a credit in English at the ordinary level examination as a prerequisite for admission into Arabic programme.

In the first instance, there are very few secondary schools in the country offering Arabic at senior level and a few students manage to take it at WEAC/NECO Examinations either in May/June or Nov/Dec. But there are many religious institutions (Mahāhid) though not recognized by the Ministry of Education, which teach Arabic to such a standard that would compare well with what obtains in the secondary school or advanced levels. Many of such candidates are likely to lack the required credit in English language. Candidates who concentrate very well on Arabic in their local Arabic schools but cannot satisfy English requirement, would fail to gain admission, while those who study Arabic in Government secondary schools and are able to have credit grade in English language even with poor standard in Arabic, succeed in gaining admissions. Two results emerge from this; first, the University does not always fill the specific quota for Arabic Studies, a quota that, in itself, is quite inadequate. Secondly, the standard of many of those admitted is below the standard attained in other subjects taught at the University or College of Education level. As a result, teachers have to bend back to be able to bring such students to the standard level.

In order to fill this gap in the College of Education and University levels, two steps can be taken. The first is to establish proficiency courses in English for those who have attained a high standard in Arabic but are deficient in English. Certificate or Diploma course in Arabic can be reintroduced to provide opportunities for admitting students as it was done in some Universities in the North and West (before) and Colleges of Education. Another way to uplift Arabic Studies from its present predicament in the schools is to evaluate and approve the certificates of well-organized Arabic schools by the Ministry of Education to use them for admission into higher institutions. Induction course can also be introduced by Colleges of Education for Local Arabic teachers in order to make them familiar with the modern methods of teaching and learning the subject.

Conclusion

It is remarkable that many problems have beleaguered the effective teaching and learning of Arabic Studies in Nigerian schools. Considering the importance of Arabic language not only as the language which has made an immense contribution to the early history and civilization of West Africa but also taking cognisance of its position as one of the most important world language of international politics and diplomacy. In this wise, we have to look into ways of improving the present state of teaching and learning the language. To achieve these laudable objectives, the following steps have to be taken. At primary school levels, it is unfortunate that most of recommended textbooks on Arabic are advanced than the pupils' level. This makes it difficult for learners to understand them because these books are cultured according to the environment of their authors. Therefore, professional bodies in the field such as Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS), Nigerian Association of Arabic Language and Literature (NATALL) e. t. c; should be asked to work on the curriculum for Arabic Studies both in primary and secondary school levels in the country with a view to making it relevant to our environment and the standard of the students. Also it is imperative to include Arabic as a separate subject in the curriculum for Universal Basic Education (UBE) so as to endear it to students from the grassroots. At -the Tertiary Institution, lecturers should make the subject easy for the students as much as they can by providing enabling environment for the subject and writing books relevant to the syllabus on Arabic Studies. In addition, workshops, seminars, e. t. c, should be organised on the curriculum of Arabic Studies for both primary and secondary school teachers in the country to enhance their knowledge.

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