

Towards Improvement of Learning Arabic in Nigeria

Kamil Adeleke Adeyemi¹ (Ph.D.)

Abstract

Islam as a religion and Arabic as a language have contributed greatly to world civilization and culture. In Nigeria, formal education is either in Western or Islamic in nature. This is the reason why Arabic as a subject is included in the curriculum of many schools in Nigeria. It is true that, to many Nigerians, Arabic is the third or fourth language to be learnt. Like any other language or subject, Arabic has its problems and attractions. As a modern language, it has many advantages like English, French or German. It is a living language in both spoken and written forms. The attraction and needs for this language outweigh the difficulties encountered in studying it. The problems are ephemeral that can be removed if the various hands and authorities concerned with the teaching can cooperate to develop interest and give it the required encouragement. Teachers, governments, individuals as well as Arab countries have great roles to play in the improvement of Arabic Studies in Nigerian schools.

Keywords: Arabic Language, Improvement, Islam, Nigeria, Problems.

1.0 Introduction

There are two types of education; formal and informal. Informal Education is the oldest form. It is known as informal because it does not follow any laid down rules and regulations. It takes place outside the regular school. What is learnt in this system depends on what the society accepts. However, formal education is the form of education that is received in organized schools. 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 how to improve learning Arabic in Nigeria:

- The Importance of Arabic Studies to the Nation
- Inclusion of Arabic Studies in the School Curriculum
- Problem Facing Arabic Studies in the Schools, and
- Conclusion is drawn.

2.0 The Importance of Arabic Studies to the Nation

Abdulraheem (2008) points out that Arabic is, in many respects, the classical language of West Africa. It is studied because it is the language of the Qur'an and therefore, has great spiritual value.

¹ Department Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, Ekiti State University, Nigeria.

Indeed, the history of the teaching of Arabic throughout the Islamic world, and particularly in the Non-Arab world, has been the history of the spread of Islam. This is one of the reasons why the elementary Arabic schools in Nigeria are called Qur'anic schools where both Arabic and Islamic Studies are taught simultaneously.

Abdul, (1983) also proves that the advantage 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 considerable quantity of manuscripts of great culture, sociological and academic values which are written in Arabic language or Arabic letters abound in West Africa and that a good number of the scholars still have to study Arabic in order to be able to grasp these documents.

At contemporary level, Adedimeji (2014) 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.

There are other reasons which underscore the importance of Arabic. Apart from the fact that it is an international language officially of several Arab countries, it is a language of international politics and diplomacy being one of the official languages of the world Assembly, the United Nations (U.N.) and one of the three languages used in African Union (A. U.) and Oil Producing Exporting Countries (OPEC) just to mention a few.

Among the importance of Arabic is that it is a language of great literacy of the past and profound scholarship. It is thus the transmitter of old learning which constituted the foundation of the scientific and technological advancement of the modern times. It has also been a powerful instalment for reducing to writing many languages that have come in contact with it.

2.1 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) 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.

2.2 Problems Facing Arabic Studies in the Schools

Nigerian Muslims have not been fully engaged in educational pursuits as enjoined by their religion. Many talents are wasted in the sense that they have been under-utilized in both public and private services for their lack of western requisite of education. In a nutshell, the problems facing Arabic Studies in the schools at Primary, Secondary, Tertiary as well as the University levels emanate from the following factors: lack of textbooks, problems from the students, parents, teachers, school administrators, Governments (Local, State and Federal) and admission requirement policies in Tertiary Institutions. We shall discuss these points one after another

(a) **Textbooks:** Unavailability of suitable textbooks has hampered the study of Arabic in the schools. Abdul (1983) laments that most of the textbooks recommended in our schools (both secondary and tertiary institutions) are those written for learners in environments other than Nigeria. Thus, the contents of the books are usually not within the students' experience. The expressions are of so high standard that the students get more and more discouraged. In fact, most of the institutions where Arabic language and literature are taught, books rather than the language, are taught. Recommended textbooks should have the background and culture of the learners if they are to mean anything to them.

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.

Ogunbiyi (2005) also asserts that the situation on this matter is now changing. Many of these latest Arabic books are published within Nigeria, an indication that the Arabic language in Nigeria is gradually coming of age. This is a welcome development. More efforts are needed to write books on all branches of Arabic Studies in line with Nigeria environment.

(b) **The Students:** The few students of Arabic tend to become frustrated as soon as they are confronted with some of the difficulties encountered with the language itself. They may *either* drop out, which is a very common phenomenon, or become lukewarm in the course. In such a situation, much depend on the teacher. If the teacher is a motivated and devoted one, he employs various tactics to excite and put more effort to develop the interest of the students. But if the teacher is one of the non- motivated ones, he leaves the students with their own problems.

Some of the problems faced by Arabic Studies in schools were pointed out by Ogunbiyi (1983) when he stated that one of the sources of our students' errors is the interference of their mother-tongue, and in some cases, the English language with their learning of the Arabic language. This interference is manifested at various levels; such as sound, pronunciation, vocabulary and structure. An acquaintance with other languages that the students already understood will help us to pay more attention to the aspects of the Arabic language which are likely to be more difficult for them to grasp.

On the other hand, Jimoh (1991) points out that students regard anything that has anything to do with Arabic and Islamic Studies as conservative. As a result, they run away from the subject because they believe that it is a subject, which cannot lead to a lucrative career. Also, lack of good background of Arabic for students scares them away from learning it in schools.

(c) **Parents:** Some parents discourage their children from learning Arabic as a subject because they do not know its importance in the society. Such parents should be encouraged to develop a positive attitude to Arabic Studies. This can be achieved by stimulating the mind-set of the children and providing them with necessary textbooks and other educational materials to make the language easy for them to learn.

(d) **The Teachers:** It is noticed that most of Arabic Teachers' attitude towards the subject is not encouraging. Jimoh (1991) observes that many of the teachers of Arabic are hardly ever supervised. Teachers in many schools, therefore, do not always take the work as seriously as they should. If they are constantly supervised, there must be improvement on their work. Abdul (1993) points out that lack of basic elementary knowledge of linguistics which is a pre-requisite for anyone who wishes to specialize in the teaching of a language is one of the major problems affecting teaching and learning of Arabic. Arabic especially, requires this in addition to motivation. Both the teacher and the student ought to have some sort of motivation. To teach or learn a language outside its native speakers' environment requires motivation and devotion.

To sum up the situation, teachers should endeavour help students in developing and maintaining the positive impact of Arabic Studies in them. They must be interested in the practical teaching of the subject because many of them focus only on the technical aspect of the teaching. They should engage students with practical instruction by using local teaching aids and examples. They should also use simple Arabic as the language of instruction. Arabic should be handled by teachers' equipped with more consistently valuable methods of approach in addition to teaching the subject in order to make the less on more lively and more interesting. Teachers should continue to develop themselves by attending workshops, seminars, induction courses and other in-service trainings. They should always aspire to attain higher academic qualifications in their field.

(e) **School Authorities:** Findings in the study of Jimoh (1991) show among other things, that sufficient resources are not provided for the teaching and learning of Arabic Studies. Arabic as a school subject needs teaching materials for thorough understanding. There is need for school authorities to increase the number of the period on the timetable and equip schools with effective and adequate resources such as procurement of suitable Arabic textbooks in the library, provision of diagrams, films, video tapes and periodic excursions to places in relations to the subject to increase the knowledge of students outside the classroom learning. They should sponsor Arabic teachers to attend seminars, workshops and other social activities that will keep them abreast of what is going on in their environment and the world at large. The counsellor of each school should encourage students to register for Arabic in West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Examinations Council (NECO) or General Certificate Examinations (GCE) Examinations.

(f) **The Governments:** Abdul (1983) laments that the Federal Ministry of Education as well as the relevant ministries in the states have not shown sufficient interests in the teaching of Arabic as a language and have, therefore, not given any encouragement to its learning and teaching despite the fact that the country expands more and more relations with Arabic - speaking countries. In the inspectorate divisions of the ministry of education, there is an inspector for every subject except Arabic and Islamic Studies. It is the duty of such an inspector to supervise the teaching of the subject in primary and secondary schools. The Government should train qualified teachers of Arabic, to organise of refresher courses for them and to organise workshops and seminars on Arabic regularly. All these would certainly improve the standard of the teaching of the subject and encourage those in the field.

Similarly, the States as well as Local Governments including those in the Northern part of the country have started to develop lukewarm attitude towards the subject. Of course, the demonstration of apathy varies in intensity from government to government. For example, while a few states in the North show keen interest in the subject, others only pay a lip service to it. Many others, especially in the South would even like to see the subject wiped out completely from the school curriculum.

This grows out of their apathy against Islam and the attribution of Arabic to the Religion. Therefore, governments at various levels should make sure that regular supervision is carried out on the teachers of Arabic Studies in the school for efficient work. They should try to employ more qualified teachers to raise the standard of learning while the teachers should be motivated by giving them promotions as at when due. In another development, the Arab countries seem to have misplaced their priorities in the country. If they are aware of the need to encourage the study of Arabic as the France and the British governments do, the situation of Arabic in higher institution of learning in Nigeria would have been much better than it is at present. The donations some of them give to some institutions are meagre that they make no impact on the study of Arabic in the country.

(g) **Admission Requirement:** 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 (*Ma'abid*) 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 College of Education especially in Kwara State. 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.

3.0 Conclusion

From the above discussions, it could be concluded that teaching the Arabic as a subject in Nigerian schools is a step in the right direction. Nigeria is in need of Arabic as a language of diplomacy and a vehicle of civilization and scientific studies. 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.

References

- Abdul, M. O. (1983). The Teaching of Arabic in Nigerian Universities, *Journal of Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS)*, 2, 2, pp. 42-53.
- Abdul Kareem, A. Y. (1983). *School Plant Practice, A case study of Secondary School in Ilorin L.G.A. of Kwara State*. Ilorin, University of Ilorin, p. 47.
- Abdul Kareem, A. Y. (1990). *A Guide on Historical Foundations of Education in Nigeria*. Ilorin, Kewulere Press, pp. 58-59.
- Abdulraheem, H. I. (2008). Arabic as an Alternative Medium of Education in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges. In Zakariyau I. Oseni (ed.). *Fluorescence of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria* (pp. 9-17). Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Plc.
- Adedimeji, A. H. A. A. (2014). The Nigerian National Language Question: Arabic as a Viable Option, *Anyigba Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 6, 2, pp. 41-42.
- Adeyemi K. A. (1996). Influence of Western Education on Arabic/Islamic System of Education in Aiyedaade L.G.A. of Osun State. (Unpublished, P.G.D.E. Dissertation). University of Ilorin, Ilorin. p. 21.
- Davidson, B. (1959). *Old Africa Rediscovered*. London: Goliemez. Pp. 61-62.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1995). *History of Education in Nigeria*. London: George Allen and Unwin, pp. 15-17, 16, 81-85 and 92-186.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981), National Policy on Education (Rev.ed) Lagos NERDC.
- Jimoh, M. A. (1991). A Survey of Factors Influencing Students' Performance in and choice of Islamic Studies in some selected Secondary Schools in Niger State. (Unpublished, P.G.D.E. Dissertation). University of Ilorin, Ilorin, pp. 49 and 53-54.
- Ogunbiyi, I. A. (1983). Improving our Techniques of Teaching Arabic Language by analysis of our students' Errors. *Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS)*, 2, 4, p. 56.
- Ogunbiyi, I. A. (2005). The Whys Wherefores of Arabic Language in Nigeria. *Anyigba Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 2, 1, p.13.
- Wikipedia (2016). En:Wikipedia.org/wiki/fomal_learning, retrieved from internet on 16th March, 2016.