

NEW PARADIGMS

IN ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES IN NIGERIA:

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
PROFESSOR MUSLIH 'TAYO YAHYA

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CHAPTER TWO

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE HISTORY OF ARABIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to give a detailed account of change & continuity on how Arabic came to Nigeria, specifically, how was it learnt, the period of Arabic education, centers for Arabic education, position of Arabic educator, institution that offers Arabic Education and the features of Arabic Educators. The research method is historical, longitudinal of the survey type. It is so because it gives a detailed and comprehensive explanation on how the language came to Nigeria, coupled with periodization of how it came and sequence of challenges that follow the language (problem). over the years, there have been no much detailed history of how Arabic language came to Nigeria of which the researcher see as a gap to fill. In conclusion, it is high time to teach and learn the language in line with new strategies and methods of teaching foreign languages using video assisted instructional method and others. Arabic status be elevated from elective to compulsory especially for the Muslims among us.

Introduction

Today, Arabic is a living language that gallantly stood out among the sematic language in the world. It is used as medium of instruction in Arabian countries, also used for economic, political, for religious purposes and Muslims and matters relating to international relations. It is also used as a medium with which Muslims all over the world communicate with their lord (God) in Islamic religion. It is studied and learnt in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and other places as a field of study (discipline) where some of those who are committed to the language have obtained degree of different kinds e.g. Doctor of Philosophy, Masters in Arabic Arts or Education, Bachelors in Arabic Arts or Education. Nigeria Certificate in Education, e.t.c.

Despite the importance of the language, Arabic is not given proper attention and was rated as elective subject in National Policy on Education (NPE, 2008). The language must be promoted by Nigerians on account of its international, political, economic and religious relevance. In support of the above claim, Kachru (1982) and Lawal (1995), cited in Olajide (2004) argues that Arabic language deserves proper attention in Nigeria because the world is witnessing information explosion, requiring the citizens of every serious nation to be proficient in several international languages.

Research has established that the more languages a person commands, the more intellectually vibrant he is likely to be (Olajide, 2004). The status of Arabic in Nigeria must be enhanced and effective teaching and learning of Arabic must be strategized. Arabic must be accorded more prominence in the national development effort. It is against this review that there is a need to give the development of Arabic language an urgent national attention in Nigeria. Hence, it is through awareness, curriculum reform on Arabic education that this observations or suggestions can be enhanced.

The Position of Arabic Language in the Nigeria System of Education

Historically, Arabic is the oldest foreign language in Nigeria. Its introduction into the country dates back to early 7th century of the Christian Era and the 1st century of Hijrah (Raheem, 2001) Abubakar (1972) notes that "Arabic language and Islamic religion were introduced into Nigeria in the 1st century of Hijrah through caravan traders and Muslim scholars who were either going or returning from Hajj".

With this casual and rather humble entry, the Arabic language and Islamic culture began to appeal to the natives who had cause to interact with those traders and scholars. This process continued gradually, though unsystematically, till the 11th and 14th centuries, especially in Bornu Empire and Hausa states. Scholars from the various parts of northern Africa, especially those from Timbuktu, also play very important roles in the spread of Arabic and Islamic culture during this time (Mohammed, 1991). The Arabic language and culture, however, reached their peak by early 19th century when Uthman bn Fudi established an Islamic empire in the present Sokoto. In this empire, apart from Hausa and Fulfulde, which were local languages, Arabic, a foreign language, was also employed for administration and education purposes.

However, with the coming of the British colonialists in the 19th century CE, there were great suppression and oppression for the language and the culture of the Arabs. The main objectives of the colonialists, according to dike (1968), were succinctly put in these words of Lugard where he proclaimed that the British people had come with the sole motive of political, religious, cultural and economic domination. Initially, the British colonialists were very cautious about religious matters, especially issues concerning Arabic and Islam. But gradually, they began to employ systematic approach to demote the Arabic language to the second position. Hitherto, Arabic was the official language of literacy in the Northern Colony (Galandanci, 1982).

The first step taken by the colonial authority in this direction was the setting up of a Translation Bureau and charging it with the responsibility of translating records written in Arabic into native languages. This was followed by translating official records into various local languages and finally into the English Language. To this end, English was made to replace Arabic, and all official transactions henceforth had to be made in English (Galandanci, 1982).

This process of elimination by substitution continued until the British authority was able to establish primary schools and made English and Christian Religious Studies the core of the curriculum. Their plan to take over the well-established Quranic schools was strongly resisted by the Muslims from the North. Instead, they established more Arabic schools where all the subjects in the curriculum were taught in Arabic. It must be noted that up till today, these traditional Arabic schools have continued to play indispensable roles in sustaining high standard of Arabic and Islamic education in the country. The outputs of those traditional Arabic schools still form the major inputs into government schools. It is even asserted by some scholars that the output of such schools have formed more than 90% of those who currently specialize in Arabic language in Nigeria and even in some foreign Universities (Bidmus, 1996).

Period of Arabic Education

Furthermore, the history of Arabic language education in Nigeria can be broadly divided into four phases, namely: pre-1804; 1804-1903 to 1960 and post - 1960. The pre-1804 was about the vanguard of the new faith that became not only teachers of Arabic and Islam, but also scribes to non-literate local chiefs and rulers with whom they were often in good standing. This was how local events and histories began to be documented in the Arabic language. Thus, Arabic became not only the language of Islamic religious activities, but also the language of judicial and political administration, of social and commercial interactions and, above all, of literacy and scholarly activities (Akinraso & Ogunbiyi 1990; Bari, 2000).

The period between 1804 and 1903 was the period of Sokoto caliphate, which lasted till 1904, when it was finally displaced by the British colonialist. The position of Arabic in the administration was a matter of interest. Arabic was the official language of religions and political and judicial administration. As the major communication tool among the scholars and rulers and all the state functionaries, competence in the Arabic language became a prerequisite for administrative and judicial appointments. Although the Sokoto caliphate failed in its military attempts to absorb Kanem-Bornu (where literacy was already high among the rulers and scholars), it eventually extended to encompass many Hausa-speaking and non-Hausa speaking states in what now constitutes Northern Nigeria. Consequently, competence in the Arabic language began to play a significant role in the administration of these emirates in addition to the primary function of Arabic as the language of Islam (Al-Ilori, 1971). The Muslim learners of Arabic when acquainted with the language to such an extent that they are skillful in arts of writing, they use Arabic to write official, religious matters as well as correspondences. It is the first language used to write Nigerian histories, it also applies to ancient Ghana (Gold coast), Mali, Senegal and other countries. Among the great scholars of the time are Ahmad Baba of Timbuktu, Uthman Bin Fodio, his brother Abdullah Bin Fodio, Muhammad Bello, Muhammad Al Amin,

Al-Kanem and many others in west Africa. Some of this scholars were also responsible for writing textbooks in Arabic (Oseni, 2006).

The period between 1903 and 1960 was the period which approximately coincided with the colonial era in Nigeria. The period witnessed a decline in the fortune of the Arabic language, as it was denied support which it had enjoyed throughout the preceding century. The colonialist did all what they could to change Arabic for English, they used English instead Of Arabic for their new educational and religious activities e.g Oseni (2006). Galandanci (1982), summarizes the situation of Arabic during this period in the following words:

The colonial authorities realized the importance of the Arabic language in the North as the language of administration and the language of culture and thus tried everything within their power to replace it with their own language. They, therefore, made English the official language so that government offices and registries, except the Shariah Courts, would use English instead of Arabic (p.5).

In spite of this negative attitude of the colonial government to Arabic, the urge among Muslims to learn and use Arabic primarily for religious worship did not diminish and these continued with the traditional Qur'anic education system. Some schools, such as the School of Alkalis (Al-Qadi), were established in Kano by 1934. It was named the Northern provinces law school. In 1947 a programme meant for training teachers was introduced in the school.

A number of provincial Arabic teachers' training institutions were also established in different parts of the North. In the South West, some individual Muslim schools were also in existence. One of such Arabic schools that have played a significant role in the spread and improvement of Arabic education in the South West is Adam Abdullah al-Ilori's Markaz at-Ta'lim al-Arabi al-Islami, which opened first at Abeokuta in 1952 before it was re-established at Agege, Lagos in 1955. These institutions complemented the efforts of the traditional Qur'anic schools of different levels in keeping alive the flame of Arabic education, which regained its vitality in the post-independence period (Ogunbiyi, 2006).

The fourth period was 1960 up to the present time. During the period that followed Nigeria's political independence, number of factors contributed to the revitalization of Arabic language education and its wider usage. Prominent among them were political and cultural contracts with Arab-speaking nations in Africa and the Middle East among other nations of the world. According to Oseni (2006), citing Bidmus (1996), the Arab nations has diplomatic relation with Nigeria, by sending their ambassadors to Nigeria and Nigeria also send theirs to them. With this relationship, learning activities coupled with political, economic and civilization waxed stronger. This period makes student from Nigeria to have a proper learning of Arabic and literature. Students from Nigeria were sent to Cairo

to learn the art of translation even though the Nigerian government did not strengthen its learning.

These made it easy for Nigerians who had a first-rate knowledge of these countries through a study of their language and culture to promote and sustain contacts in Nigeria's diplomatic establishments. Also, Arab embassies in Nigeria needed to employ Nigerians who were literate in Arabic as bilingual secretaries and administrative staff to supplement their own nations posted to Nigeria. Consequently, opportunities for learning Arabic were enhanced with the gradual integration and realignment between the traditional Qur'anic education system and the formal education system through various federal and state government policy guidelines for the primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Hunwick, 1965; Akinnaso & Ogunbiyi, 1990; and Ogunbiyi, 1990).

The post-independence period saw the inclusion, for the first time, of Arabic as a separate subject in the West Africa Examination Council's syllabus for GCE ordinary level; the introduction of BA honours in Arabic at various Universities such as the University of Ibadan (1963), Bayero University (1977), Kano; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria(1962); University of Ilorin (1976); University of Jos(1972), University of Maiduguri(1975-1976), Usmanu Dan Fodiyo University, Sokoto (1975); and Lagos State University(1984).

In the last decade of the 20th century, a number of private Arabic schools in the South-West became affiliated to some universities so as to acquire official recognition for their graduates who could then gain direct admissions to the affiliated institutions for degree programme. This increase in the locations and avenues for the teaching and learning of Arabic gave rise to the need to produce more professionally and academically qualified teachers of Arabic language. Kogi State University is one of the most recent institutions to join the train of tertiary institutions with full NUC accreditation to prepare Nigerians learners of Arabic to fill these roles (Ogunbiyi, 2006).

Centers for Arabic Education

Despite all the efforts of colonialist to relegate Arabic language to the ground, private Arabic Schools were established by committed Arabic specialist which if not because of their tremendous effort it must have been totally crippled. Some of the Arabic scholars in places of high learning are the products of those private Arabic schools established by voluntary private individuals.

Centers for the study of the Arabic language abound in many parts of Nigeria. Wherever there is a Muslim population, some kind of Quranic School exists. Many centres for the study of Arabic language operate independently of the formal school system. Besides the Quranic school which concerns itself with the art of reciting the Qur'an, there are private Arabic schools established by voluntary Muslim organizations or interested individual proprietors. In such schools, students pass through distinctive stages of Arabic education: the *Ibtidaiyyah* stage (Primary School) and *Thanawiyyah* stage (Senior Secondary School) (Oladosu, 1992).

It is pertinent to observe here that proprietors of most Arabic schools are skeptical about the introduction of English Language as part of school subjects. They fear that English may divert students' attention and therefore jeopardize their original interest in Arabic and Islamic scholarship which is the focus of these schools (Abubakre, 1984). In addition to such system of Arabic education, Arabic has been incorporated into the formal school system in Nigeria. Balogun (1985) notes that the first time that school candidates were presented for the West Africa School Certificate (WASC) Examinations in both Arabic and Islamic Studies was in the late fifties, and that an approved Arabic language syllabus designed under the auspices of the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) came into operation in 1974. In 1976, an Arabic studies syllabus for Higher School Certificate (HSC) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level Examination was designed (Balogun, 1985).

Position of Arabic in the National Policy of Education

The 1977 National Policy on Education makes Arabic an elective subject at the Junior and Senior School levels. Consequently, the Federal Ministry of Education has published an Arabic language syllabus for both the Junior and Senior Secondary Schools. This is part of the measures taken to implement the 6-3-3-4 system of education (National Curriculum for Junior Secondary School, Vol.4, 1985).

In the new dispensation, Arabic is formally introduced at the Junior or Senior Secondary Level. At the end of their senior secondary education, students with credit passes in Arabic, Islamic studies, English language and two other subjects, one of which should be an arts subject were eligible to major in Arabic in the university. The subject combination also allows candidates to major in other relevant areas of their interest provided specific admission requirements are met (JAMB Brochure, 2011/2012). With the incorporation of Arabic language into the formal secondary school system in Nigeria, some state governments in the northern part of the country established Arabic teachers' colleges.

Examples of such colleges are Government Arabic College, Jebba, established in (1980) in Kwara State; Arabic Teachers College, Gwale, Kano established (1973) in Kano State; and Shaykh Gunmi Memorial College of Arabic Sokoto, in Sokoto State established in (1965). The Colleges run a five-year programme which leads to an Arabic Teachers' Grade II Certificate. These colleges provide professional training in methods of teaching Arabic and Islamic Studies backed up with Educational Psychology and the Principles and Practice of Education. Successful products of these colleges who pass the required papers at the credit level are eligible for admissions into higher institutions (Oladosu, 2011).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper examines the history of Arabic Education in Nigeria, how Arabic came to Nigeria through traders and scholars. It also examine

the position of Arabic Language in Nigeria system of Education that Arabic is rated as elective despite its historical, cultural, diplomatic, international, political, economic, international and religious relevance which resulted in the spread of Arabic schools among those who are committed to the language. This also form part of the justification for its learning across various educational levels. The paper also examine the periodization of Arabic language education in Nigeria which are broadly divided into four periods, namely, pre-1804-1903, 1903-1960 and post- 1960- till up to date. The paper also examined centers and position of Arabic in National Policy on Education.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the historical, economic, international and cultural and religious relevance of the language it is suggested that;

1. the position of Arabic must be elevated from elective to compulsory status.
2. The learning and teaching of Arabic in various places of institution must be strategized.
3. Periodic workshops and seminars must be organized for trainee teachers, teachers and lecturers of Arabic.
4. Due to the fact that the more language a person commands, the more vibrant he becomes, Arabic language must therefore be taught along with English language because of its historical record.
5. People must be properly oriented that Arabic is a language and not a religion.

Tertiary Institutions that offer Arabic Education

Nineteen Nigerian universities award Bachelor's degrees in Arabic language and Literature and in Arabic/Education. They are Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria' Bayero University, Kano (B.U.K); University of Ibadan (UI); University of Ilorin (UNILORIN); University of Jos (UNIJOS); University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID); Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Lagos State University (LASU); Kogi State University (KSU); Bukar Abba Ibrahim University (BAIU), Damaturu, Al-Hikmah University (AL-HIKMAH) Ilorin, University of Abuja (UNIABUJA); Fountain University (FOUNTAIN); Osogbo; Kaduna State University (KASU); Ibrahim Badmasi Babangida University, Lapai; Kwara State University Malete (KWASU); Nasarawa State University, Nasarawa Keffi, and Umaru MusaYaradua University, Katisina. Some of these universities also award higher degrees in Arabic language and Literature / Education. Arabic is also offered in some advanced teachers' colleges and colleges of education (JAMB Brochure, 2012/2013).

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