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جَامِعَةُ وِلَايَةِ نَصَرُوا بِكِنْفِي

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The articles in this publication examine many topical issues and cover quite a variety of areas which include Islamic law, Jurisprudence, Humanities and others that contribute to the growth of Islamic Studies as an academic discipline.

The articles are informative and educative. The contributors are distinguished, versed and authoritative in the respective areas they have written on. They are also drawn from various Universities across Nigeria.

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LITERACY IN ARABIC AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL ISLAMIC STUDIES CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA

B. Abdul-Raheem

Abstract

Literacy in Arabic language is fundamental to the study or practice of Islam because Arabic is the language of liturgy recognised in Islam. Furthermore Arabic is the only means of accessing firsthand and unadulterated information for good understanding of Islam. The rationale behind this is that the Qur'an and Hadith which provide comprehensively unadulterated information about Islam are documented in Arabic. Accessing them through other means by ignoring Arabic will end up in misinformation. So, literacy in Arabic is regarded as the first step in the study or practice of Islam. It must be pointed out that there is a wide gap in teaching and learning Islam studies between *ilmiyyah* schools and conventional schools most especially in Nigeria. Literacy in Arabic is de-emphasised while Romanisation of Arabic script is encouraged at primary school level to tertiary level. Though both Arabic and English share some linguistic features which make Romanisation of Arabic script feasible, nevertheless, there are areas of difference. The implication of this is that the problem will arise where a particular Arabic linguistic feature lacks equivalence in English. It is noteworthy that the language is very sensitive in the sense that when a word is mispronounced it might produce unintended or wrong meaning. This paper examines the negative effect of encouraging transliteration as alternative means to literacy in Arabic in the teaching and learning of Islamic studies most especially the Qur'anic Arabic. In view of this, a strong question mark is put on the absence of a section for literacy in Arabic in the junior secondary school Islamic studies curriculum in spite the fact that the curriculum emphasises the role of Arabic language in understanding of Islamic studies. The paper suggests that a

section for literacy in Arabic should be included in the junior secondary school Islamic studies curriculum if the objectives must be completely achieved.

Key word: literacy in Arabic, Romanization of Arabic script, Islamic studies curriculum, Qur'anic Arabic.

Introduction

Reading, writing and Arithmetic are the major components of literacy. Oladapo and Daniel (2005) aligned with this assertion by regarding literacy as the skill of reading, writing, and computing¹. It is to be noted that literacy is multidimensional which implies that it is acquired for different purposes as demanded by different contexts. Olagunju (2001) cited in Oladapo and Daniel (2005) avers that literacy is acquired as a means of social development². When literacy is situated in this context it therefore goes beyond mere ability to read, write or compute. However, narrowing it down to language literacy, it is more encompassing as it incorporates skills such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, and viewing.

Considering multidimensional nature of literacy, it will be very difficult to tie literacy down with a definite definition. The rationale behind this is that experts in literacy have different reasons for acquisition of literacy when different contexts are focused. Oladapo (2016) sees the following reasons as some of the factors responsible for that;

- ✓ Diverse literacy language;
- ✓ Availability of different types of literacy;
- ✓ Different attainment of levels of literacy and;
- ✓ Different intentions and purposes of literacy to the recipients. (Oladapo, 2016:22)³.

Language as a Means of Spreading of Religion

Customarily, study or practice of any religion begins with literacy in the language of that religion. Each religion has a language of liturgy and for full understanding and full participation in the act

of worship in any religion, the adherents will first acquire literacy in the recognised language of that religion. This is understood in the practice of two prominent religions in Nigeria namely; Islam and Christianity. Starting with Christianity for example, it will be recalled that the Christian missionaries who brought Christianity to Nigeria with sole aim of converting indigenous people of Africa to Christianity had to educate African people. Though, the language spoken by these missionaries was English, so their Bible is in English language. In order to achieve their objectives, schools were established where African people acquired literacy in English language for the purpose of reading the Bible and singing of hymns (Fafunwa, 1974)⁴. Olukoju (2015) brings to mind the efforts put in place by Christian missionaries whereby formal educational institutions were operated to provide different forms of education such as adult education, vocational training, and the translation of Bible into various indigenous languages. He opines that all these efforts were primarily driven by the desire to advance the spread of Christianity. He thus submits that;

These literal efforts were a means to an end; to enable converts and prospective converts to read and understand the Bible in their own languages. (Olukoju, 2015:142)⁵

In the same vein, literacy in Arabic language is a first step in the study or practice of Islam. This fact can be traced to the first verses of the Holy Qur'an revealed;

Read: In the name of your Lord Who creates, creates man from a clot. Read: And your Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teaches by means of the pen, teaches man that which he knew not. Surah al-'Alaq (Q96): 1-5.⁶

These verses of the Holy Qur'an are very instructive on the importance of literacy as they emphasise both reading and writing. In addition, they serve as impetus whereby the Prophet made literacy in Arabic language his priority as the only means of understanding Islam. Mandating the captives of battle of *Badr* (624 A.D) to teach the Muslim children reading and writing of

Arabic language as a means of ransom was a demonstration of priority that the Prophet had for literacy in Arabic.⁷ This practice gathered momentum during the era of Four Orthodox Caliphs, Umayyad Dynasty, and Abbasid Dynasty up to the present time. Hence, it becomes apparent that literacy in Arabic language is the first step in the practice or study of Islam. Salisu (2009) affirms that "the history of Qur'anic schools world over has been the history of the spread of Islam" Salisu, (2009).⁸

It is equally noticed that the spread of Islam in West Africa which dates back to 11th century began with literacy in Arabic language⁹. From the north to the south, Nigerian Muslims give much recognition to Arabic because of its indispensable role in understanding of Islam. As part of effort to achieve literacy in Arabic was the establishment of non-formal Islamic schools called *Kuttāb* (pl. *Katātīb*) in the Arab world, *Makarantar Allo* and high schools (*Makarantar 'ilimi*) in Northern Nigeria and *Ile Kewu* (Traditional Arabic School) and *M'ahd* (i.e. Islamic Institute) in South-Western Nigeria. The former is basically for the Qur'an, Hadith and some rudimentary knowledge of *Shari'ah*. But in case of the latter it is a bit higher because it comprises *Ibtida'i*, (preparatory) *I'dadi*, (primary) and *Thanawi* (secondary) (Salisu, 2009).¹⁰

Ibrahim (2005), remarks that the *Mallams* who spread Islam in South-western Nigeria, used their houses, mosques or the shade of trees as centers for teaching Arabic¹¹. It is noteworthy that the Qur'an functions as the foremost primary source of information in Islam and a basic vehicle of Islamic education. The research has shown that its translation into other languages can only produce approximate meaning (Ali, 2001 & Bidmos 2010)¹². The need to arrive at a precise and accurate understanding of its message precipitated the emergence of Arabic philological and literary studies. More importantly, reading the Qur'an as a means of worship is highly meritorious. However, its recitation is guided by the rules rooted in *Tajwid*,

the Science of Qur'anic recitation. It must be pointed out that accurate application of the rules of Qur'anic recitation relies heavily on the correct articulation of Arabic sounds which is part of the scope of Qur'anic Arabic.

Similarly, Hadith, the second primary source of Islam preserves the traditions of the Prophet, his biography, supplicatory prayers, exhortations, theological statements, and counseling endeavours. It provides details regarding the events mentioned briefly in the Qur'an without which information contained in the Qur'an will remain obscure. Like the Qur'an, extant literature on Hadith studies remains in an Arabic prose that Muslims cherish. (Speight, 1995).¹³

In view of these glaring linguistic needs and challenges, Arabic is generally considered as an integral part of Islamic studies. Oladosu (1985) has rightly posited that the interwoven relationship between Arabic and Islamic Studies has accorded Arabic the status of official language of Islam and for this reason he submits that "Arabic for religious purposes is theoretically acquired by some if not most Nigerian Muslim as second language¹⁴." Similarly, Oloyede (2012) avers that

Islamic Studies cannot be successfully studied and learnt without Arabic. This qualifies Arabic to be paired with Islamic Studies in the quest for sound Islamic Studies. It is therefore necessary that Arabic Studies must be intensified in order to have good grasp of Islamic Studies. This additional requirement creates enormous obstacle for entrants into the field of Islamic Studies. Oloyede (2012:22-3)¹⁵

Hanga (2007) depicts the relationship between Arabic and Islamic studies as akin to inseparability of soul from the body because there is a strong relationship between the language and religion¹⁶. Traditionally, every religion has language of liturgy in which the traditions or cultures of the religion is preserved.

Undoubtedly, linguistic substitution of liturgical language is capable of rendering the act of worship ineffective. In Yoruba belief system, a mastery of Yoruba language is a prerequisite for an accurate interpretation of the delicate language of the *Ifa* corpus (Abiodun, 2008 & Olajubu, 2015)¹⁷. Linguistic substitutions in chanting Yoruba incantations affect the efficacy and potency of the chants. Akin to this is the observation made by Chidume (2015) about the indispensability of Igbo language as liturgical language in Igbo belief system;

The consecration of *kolanut* is done in Igbo language hence this phrase "*Ojianaghi anu asusu ozo*" (*kolanut* does not understand foreign language). The indulgence of non-Igbo guest is craved during consecration; however, what was said during consecration can be explained to him later (Chidume, 2015:7)¹⁸

On this note, Cardinal Albert Malcolm Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo, Sri-Lanka, declares that

The use of sacred language is a tradition in the whole world. In Hinduism, the language of prayer is Sanskrit, which is no longer in use. In Buddhism Pali is used, a language that today only Buddhist monks study it. In Islam, the Arabic of the Koran is used. The use of a sacred language helps us to live the sensation of the beyond (Anwesha, 2013:1)¹⁹

Adoption of Transliteration as Alternative Means for Arabic Language

Unfortunately, emphasising literacy in Arabic is not so much upheld at all levels of Nigerian educational system where English language is used as mode of instruction. Instead of emphasising literacy in Arabic language, Romanisation of Arabic script is adopted as alternative means for Arabic language. The main reason for the adoption of transliteration was to facilitate reading of Qur'anic Arabic using the language that the students are already familiar with. Secondly, perhaps the thinking that Islamic studies can be studied without recourse to Arabic language. The

second reason is not tenable considering the inseparability of Arabic language from Islam.

Adoption of transliteration as alternative means for Arabic language had been criticized by different researchers on the basis of its inadequacy in teaching the Qur'anic Arabic. Musa (1998) avers that relying on transliteration to teach the Arabic texts of the Qur'an will only result in "grave consequences for the semantic content and textual integrity of the Qur'an"²⁰. This observation is true considering the fact that all languages are phonemic. Obviously, languages share certain sounds in common and at the same time they differ in others. Maduekwe (2007) opines that "each language contains two systems rather than one, a system of distinct sounds and a system of distinct meanings" (Maduekwe, 2007)²¹. This implies that a wrong realisation of sound can produce wrong meaning.

Admittedly, Arabic and English have certain sounds in common while they differ in others. Al-Gazzi (2014) discovers that the following Arabic letters have no close equivalent in English (ص, ض, ط, ظ, ع, غ, ق)²². The indication therefore is that when transliteration is used definitely wrong pronunciation of these letters becomes inevitable and this paves way for realisation of wrong meaning.

On this note, Badmos (2007) opines that transliteration does more harm than good because there is no unified transliteration format; therefore, most teachers and students write transliteration in different ways and this does not convey the correct pronunciation²³. According to Badmos, one of the problems that both teacher and student encounter with the use of transliteration is the lack of uniform format. This is an undeniable fact because there are various existing bodies that specialise in the Romanisation schemes among which are Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft established in 1936, The Encyclopedia of Islam, new edition established in 1960, and

British Standards Institute established in 1968 among others. Each of these organisational bodies has its own technique of transliteration²⁴. A cursory look at some of these techniques will suffice here. The word ظالم can be realised in the following ways; *ẓālim*, *zālim* or *dhaalim*. Another example is the word النَّار which has the following two realisations; *al-Naar* or *an-Nār*. Either teacher or student who has no knowledge of Arabic will find the technique of transliteration confusing. This buttresses the fact that accurate Romanisation of Arabic script depends heavily on the knowledge of Arabic.

A Critique of Junior Secondary School Islamic Studies Curriculum

A critical examination of current junior secondary school Islamic studies curriculum reveals that using of transliteration as alternative means for Arabic is encouraged at expense of literacy in Arabic. The curriculum is partitioned into six sections which include; the Qur'an, Hadith, *Tawhid* (Islamic Theology), *Fiqh*, (Islamic Jurisprudence), *Sirah* (Biography), and *Tahdhib* (Islamic Moral Instruction) without a section for literacy in Arabic language despite the fact that each aforementioned section requires literacy in Arabic language. This is nothing but an insinuation that studying Islamic studies without recourse to Arabic language is feasible.

De-emphasising literacy in Arabic at junior secondary school level is aberration considering the position of junior secondary school between primary and tertiary levels. According to the National Policy on Education, fourth edition (2004)²⁵, secondary education provides opportunity of higher education for primary school leaver. Islamic studies curriculum at primary level has a section for literacy in Arabic while at tertiary level, two units course in Arabic is mandatory for Islamic studies students. This could be per session or per semester depending on the programme of each university. This is an indication that a vacuum has been

created for the continuation of literacy in Arabic between primary and tertiary levels.

The experts in curriculum had advocated three criteria for effective organisation of curriculum experiences. Tyler (1950) cited in Onwuka (1996) identified continuity, sequence, and integration as *sine qua non* for effective organisation of curriculum experiences. Continuity is reinforcement and reiteration of certain major curriculum elements. Therefore, the task of continuity is to ensure that the learner is provided with opportunity to practise, reinforce and improve upon the type of knowledge, skills, and attitudes the learner is expected to acquire (Onwuka, 1996). He further emphasises that the current experience undergone by the learner must be built on the previous ones because each experience affects the succeeding experiences²⁶.

Discontinuation of literacy in Arabic at junior secondary school level is an indication that the learner has been denied the opportunity of practising, reinforcing, and improving upon the literacy in Arabic acquired at primary level.

Sequence as second criterion is not also considered in junior secondary school Islamic studies curriculum. Sequence involves building on what had gone on before, so that one idea is preparatory for the next (Onwuka, 1996). He added that "sequence and cumulative learning are major factors in vertical organisation"²⁷. Deducing from Onwuka's opinion it is a clear indication that junior secondary school Islamic studies curriculum was not effectively organised especially in relation to literacy in Arabic. Assuming literacy in Arabic continues at junior secondary school level it would have been built on what the students had acquired at primary school level. Ideally, effective organisation of curriculum experience demands vertical relationship between learning experiences. Integration as third criterion "refers to the utilization of curriculum element from one

subject area to other subject areas of the curriculum so that they buttress one another" (Onwuka, 1996)²⁸. Integration helps the learner to apply learning experiences already acquired in one subject to assimilate another subject. Every section of junior secondary school Islamic studies curriculum requires knowledge of Arabic. If student is literate in Arabic this will facilitate the understanding of all other sections.

By and large it is very clear that de-emphasising literacy in Arabic at junior secondary school level is a clear indication of ineffective organisation of Islamic studies curriculum. Unfortunately, this has resulted to abysmal performance of Islamic studies teachers and students which indicates that objectives of implementation of Islamic studies curriculum are yet to be completely achieved.

Abysmal performance of some Islamic studies teacher particularly those found wanting in literacy in Arabic and students have been a great concern to some researchers. Musa and Ajidagba (2011) have discovered that teachers of Islamic studies find the Qur'an and Hadith more difficult to teach than Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and Islamic History (*Ta'rikh*) because of the linguistic demands of the former²⁹. Emphasising reading of the Qur'an using the Arabic script is premised on the Qur'an being the words of God. Yusuf (1989) identifies teaching Arabic texts of the Qur'an as one of the major challenges faced by some Islamic studies teachers³⁰.

The pertinent question at this juncture is: What is the justification for the non-inclusion of literacy in Arabic in the junior secondary school Islamic Studies curriculum? Musa (2004) opines that the assumption of the designers of the curriculum is that, since there is a separate Arabic curriculum at secondary school level which is taught concurrently with Islamic studies, it is assumed that Islamic studies students will offer Arabic as an independent subject³². But one obvious mistake in

this assumption is the lack of consideration to the perennial problem of dearth and paucity of Arabic teachers at the secondary school level. Oladosu (1986) declares that the scarcity of Arabic teachers has paved way for recruiting untrained personnel to teach Arabic in our secondary schools³³. This is exacerbated by the low turnout of trained Arabic teachers by higher institutions of learning.

Furthermore, Arabic unlike French, according to the National Policy on Education, fourth edition (2004), is grouped among non-prevocational electives at JSS level along with Religious Knowledge and Physical and Health education³⁴. Ironically, students can only offer one subjects out of the three. The implication of this is that the students cannot offer Islamic studies and Arabic simultaneously. However, in the sixth edition of National Policy on Education, Arabic is now optional (NPE, 2014)³⁵.

He further opines that the designers of the curriculum presumed that the scope of the method of teaching Arabic which pupils have been exposed to at primary school level has adequately prepared them for Islamic studies at junior secondary school level. This assumption can also be faulted on the premise that the paucity of either Islamic studies or Arabic teachers is worse than that of secondary schools because, at primary school level there is no room for subject teacher.

It must be emphasised that this anomaly has created enormous problems for students of Islamic Studies as regards the acquisition of requisite competence in Arabic language that will bring about effective teaching and learning of Islamic Studies.

Moreover, the ripple effect of this is that students would be deterred from choosing Islamic Studies as career at tertiary level based on the fact that Islamic Studies cannot be properly studied without the knowledge of Arabic. Consequently, this could lead

in the dearth of personnel to teach Islamic Studies at all levels of educational system in Nigeria on the long run.

It is noteworthy that the omission of literacy in Arabic from junior secondary school Islamic studies is not accidental. Since the inception of the curriculum into Nigerian educational system, in spite the fact that the curriculum has been reviewed in 2010 and 2017, there was no any attempt to include a section on literacy in Arabic. Therefore, it is suggested that the junior secondary school Islamic studies curriculum is due for total overhauling so that literacy in Arabic can be incorporated.

Conclusion

It is a fact that the Qur'anic Arabic is a big challenge for some Islamic studies teachers and students even some Islamic studies lecturers at higher institutions of learning are not exempted. Unfortunately, teaching or learning of Islamic studies with literacy in Arabic is like Siamese twins. Although, it has been argued that proficiency in spoken and written Arabic is not essential but every Islamic studies teacher as well as learner should be able to read the Qur'anic Arabic fluently because the importance of reading the Qur'an and Hadith in teaching and learning Islamic studies cannot be ignored.

However, the Islamic studies curriculum at primary school level has a section for Qur'anic Arabic assessment which reveals that it is not adequate to enable the pupils acquire the skill in reading the Qur'anic Arabic fluently. Ideally, this effort should continue at secondary school level but Islamic studies curriculum at this level leaves a gap which has been impacting negatively on the teaching and learning Islamic studies to the extent that an attempt to close this gap at tertiary level has become a futile exercise. This gap has been on over three decades without any attempt from any quarter to close it. It is noteworthy that the study is a welcome idea because it has been long overdue and it is hoped that if it receives a deserved attention from the curriculum designer and the government, the teaching and learning of Islamic

studies will be revolutionised for better efficiency and thereby achieve one of its objectives.

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