

**ARABIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL
OVERVIEW**

A PAPER PRESENTED BY:

TAIWO, B. M.

*DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS,
KWARA STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, ILORIN.*

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ABSTRACT

With the current popularity that Arabic as a language is gaining in Nigeria, in particular and worldwide in general, it becomes important that the history on the spread of the language in to Nigeria needs to be known. This paper therefore focuses on the spread of Arabic language right from Northern Nigeria to southern Nigeria emphasizing the roles of some individual scholars including Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio and others. Conclusions were based on some current problems of Arabic Schools and suggestions were proffered on how to improve the situation of Arabic education in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Language refers to the medium of expression of a group of people. It means the tongue of a people. Arabic language originated from the Arab, but history shows that many other tribes have been motivated to learn the language which has made scholars of the language to keep multiplying year in year out. One major reason why the users of the language increase is subject to the growth and spread of Islam as a religion. Although non adherents of Islam learn the language, but it is becoming obvious that both Arabic language and Islam are inseparable. Malik (1988) pointed this out when he wrote on the impact of Islam on classical Arabic literature that:

Although Arabic literature originated in pre-Islamic Arabia, with the advent and spread of the Islamic religion, it became the literature of all the regions that comprised the Islamic world. Thus Islam has played a very important role in the dissemination and durability of the standard literary Arabic, (p. 39).

Arabic language spread from Arabia to other parts of the world getting to West Africa through trading activities between the Arabs and North Africans/west Africans. Many Scholars both individually and collectively have helped in this direction. They taught many students, established Arabic/Islamic Schools where Arabic Education is taught. These (local) Schools are existing presently but without no shortcomings in their organisation and control.

The shortcomings need to be addressed to have better management and achieve the aims and objectives for which they were established

Early Spread of Arabic / Islamic Education

The spread of Arabic language education to Nigeria cannot be completely divorced from the introduction of Islamic education to Nigeria. This is because, although Islam is a religion and its education has to do with learning of the religion, but the religion came with Arabic language as its language, so, the religion was followed with Arabic language. Just as Christianity as a religion was followed to the Country with English Language as its official language (at the initial stage). It is against this background that one can say that Arabic language got to the Savannah region of West Africa as early as eighth Century A.D. through trading activities with the Berbers of North Africa who had already accepted Islam from the Arabs that had conquered the coastal strips of North Africa and installed Arab rulers there.

Islam and Arabic education was said to have been introduced to Hausaland around fourteenth century during, the reign of Ali Yaji of Kano. Sarki Ali Yaji was converted by forty Muslim missionaries from North Africa. Ali Yaji then built Mosques where prayers were offered and Arabic language was taught. From here, Islamic education cum Arabic language began to spread to other parts of Hausalands and the Marvel of Scholars reading and writing in Arabic language began to surface in large scale. This was supported by stride and Ifeka (1971) when they said:

With Islam came a now and important form of Arabic education. Muslim studies covered an international field of theology, politics, law, history, geography and the natural Sciences. Above all, Islam introduced literacy in Arabic and the art of-academic criticism. The work of scholars reach an outstanding level of academic achievement. Arabic language became important (pp. 141-142).

By fifteenth century, some scholars came to Kano with some Arabic texts, also during this period, Muslim scholars from Sankore University, Timbuktu visited Kano for the purpose of spreading Arabic education and Islamic religion, Al Maghili, one of the scholars wrote a well celebrated book in Arabic language and sent to other centres of learning like Katsina for Arabic learners to read. Later, by seventeenth century, the learning of Arabic language had got to a stage that native scholars had began to surface. for instance, Muhammadu Dan

Masina and Muhammadu .Dan .Marina were native Arabic and Islamic scholars produced at Katsina. As the native scholars were increasing in number, they organised themselves into sections and started teaching other interested young and old, student who were given a certificate known as Ijazah at the end of a prescribed course of study. As at that time, Arabic centres and schools were to be found in all the Hausa-Fulani towns and villages (Nwosu 1985). General desire for knowledge and acquisition of Arabic letters was the order of the day in Hausa land of Seventeenth Century. This is probably because of one of the Traditions of the Prophet of Islam that:

"Khairukun - Manta'alama-l-Kurian Wa 'alamau" "the best man among you is one who learns the Quran and cares to teach it." Little or no wonder then that the early elementary Arabic schools were called Quranic schools hence learning the Arabic Alphabet was aimed at enabling learners to read the Holy Quran. Thus two type of Arabic school Quranic Schools developed in Hausaland as at that time, the first one is called Makaranta Alio or Tablet-School and the second one is called Makaranta Limi or the high school (Fafunwa 1974). One characteristic of these early Arabic Schools was that the teachers were not paid by anybody. They therefore depended on charity from the Students' Parents or from the students themselves. This characteristic Undoubtedly reduced the status of early Arabic teachers in Hausaland to mere dependants who occasionally sent his students out to go and fend for his (teacher's) living. Despite this low status, the scholar were gaining more popularity among the populace because of their knowledge in Arabic language and Islamic Education.

The Influence of Uthman Dan Fodio

Upon completion of one stage of education, a student sought more qualified teachers under whom he could further his study, he might also begin to gather pupils to learn under him, at the same time, attending education centres where scholars meet to have discussions on the affairs of Hausa land and Muslim world generally. Two types of scholars were present in Hausaland. Some settled in the cities of Western Sudan (West Africa) and enjoyed high positions of power and wealth, married into the aristocracy and lived in

luxury, they lived close to the throne. This position gave them opportunity to see the difficulties involved in ruling a mixed population of Muslims and pagans as it was the case in Hausa land then. The second set of scholars were those that preferred to wander alone, teaching from one place to another. They were closer to the people and consequently critical of the ways and manners by which Hausa rulers were ruling, these scholars then became people's spokesmen by making the grievances of the Muslim Community known to the aristocracy. They objected to the practice of selling Muslims into slavery, mixing Islam with paganism, luxury and sinfulness of rulers e.t.c.

The most popular of the scholars was a Fulani man from Gobir known as Uthman_Qan Fodio. He studied Arabic and Islamic Education under various teachers and ended up at Agades under an accurate and devout scholar Jibril b. Umar. He left this teacher (at the age of twenty) for Hausa land where he began to impart the knowledge of Arabic Education and Islamic Studies to his students in Kebbi, Zamfara and Gobir where he graduated many students who also returned to their various homes to engage in teaching Arabic and Islamic education.

Uthman was said, to have gone to Degol in the year 1790's from where he continued the spread of Islamic and Arabic education. Buah (1981) while giving glory to Dan Fodio over his efforts in the spread of Arabic education at the early stage in Nigeria said "The converts to Islam had to be taught to read the Qur'an in Arabic language. Thus right from the beginning of Muslim contact with the Western Sudan, the people were taught to read Arabic Apart from spreading Arabic and Islamic education, he also preached against oppressive and unjust government. Later he withdrew from Degol to Gudu on the western frontier of Gobir. This was the hijra or holy flight in imitation of Prophet Muhammed's flight from Mecca to Medina.

His Jihad and the Spread of Arabic/Islamic Education

At Gadu, he was made the Amir al-muminin. (Commander of the faithful) and declared a Jihad against the Unbelievers in 1804. The Major areas of Gobir, Kebbi, Zamfara and other areas of Northern Nigeria were occupied by the Jihad army and governed from Sokoto, the new headquarters of the Jihad. From here, the teaching of Islam and Arabic education started to spread more quickly following the areas touched by the Jihad. He also gave flags in form of approval to students and warrior to represent him in teaching and fighting jihad and consequently, spreading of Islamic and Arabic education. For instance, Zaria, Kotoi, Kano and Bornu fell under the Jihad. In 1841 Mallam Adama a highly educated Fulani founded Yola as the capital of the emirate of Adamawa and started the teaching of Islamic and Arabic education at Adamawa Emirate while Abdullahi another scholar was placed in charge of Nupe and Ilorin to continue with the teaching of Islamic and Arabic education. Webster and Boahen (1967) supported the influence of the Jihad in the spread of various Arabic education when they said "Great libraries grew up. Literacy became necessary for high office, Arabic developed as the official language of literature and correspondence.

Women education was also held in high esteem by Uthman Dan Fodio. He believed that the Hausas were treating their wives and daughters like utensils or household materials that are to be used and abandoned when exhausted. He therefore wanted women to receive education that is similar to that of men. His message on women education was so successful that women education developed greatly in Northern Nigeria. Fafunwa (1974) while commenting on the efforts of Uthman Dan Fodio on women Arabic education mentioned that Uthman started women Arabic education right from his family. He asserted:

The Shehu's two daughters were highly educated and their literary contributions have come down to us as specimens of learning among Muslim women in Islam in West Africa. His elder daughter gave religious instruction and lesson of Islamic studies. The Shehu allowed women to attend his lectures and preachings.

This high standard of Arabic and Islamic education continued until the coming of the British to Nigeria in the middle of the nineteenth Century (pp. 56-57).

While writing on the consequences of the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio, Ade Ajayi and Crowder (1974) explained that the jihad led to a state that was governed by Scholars for scholars and that Arabic education was not given selectively as all children

received elementary instruction while women and captives also received Arabic education. Generally therefore, Islamic and Arabic education became not only widespread but also more sophisticated in Hausaland as a result of the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fod±om. They concluded that "Tradition (in the North) gave way to Islamic law and the tenor of society at all levels become gradually, although never completely Muslim-Arab.

Islam and Arabic Education in Southern Nigeria:

The Yoruba race of Southern Nigeria was said to have been exposed to the knowledge of Arabic language, through the introduction of Islam long before the Jihad of Uthman Dan-Fodio. Fafunwa (1974) mentioned that by 1830, some learned scholars, like Ahmad Qifu and Uthman bin Abu Bakr came to Southern Nigeria like Ibadan, Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta to teach Arabic and Islamic education. By that time, Ilorin had already become a Centre of Islam and Arabic education. Scholars like Sheikh Harun studied Arabic education and spread it in Ibadan to the extent that students came from far and near to study Arabic education in his Arabic school.

Abdullah (1978) mentioned that among the early scholars that were prominent in the spreading of Arabic education especially before the coming of Shehu Alimi are:

Sheikh Muhammad al-Sansi, Sheikh Muhammad Yanbau, Sheikh Musa Al-Bornu and Sheikh Abubakar popularly known as "Bube. Bube came to Ilorin around 1245 A.H. and established Arabic School in Ilorin where a number of students like Sheikh Malik and Sheikh Mamud-children of Shitta, the second Emir of Ilorin studied Arabic education. Bube died in 1270 A.H. and was succeeded by three children - Muhammad Thani, Uthman and Al-Amin who later became great scholars of Arabic education. Sheikh Abdullahi Al Dendi, Ahmed bn abubakr bn. Ikokoro were other great scholars who spread Arabic education in and around Ilorin. Al-Dendi died in 1921 while Ikokoro died in 1936. Sheikh Labib Muhammad bn. Abdulkadir bn. Salih, popularly known as Taju-li-Adab also influenced the teaching and learning of Arabic language in Ilorin. He introduced the use of visual aids into the teaching and learning of Arabic language before his death in 1922. He was the teacher of our prominent scholar - Alhaji Kamaldeen Al-Adabi (Alhaji Agba).

Sheikh Uthman Abubakar Al-Deniii and Sheikh Abubakr bn. Sahihul Al-Kariz were great scholars who spread the teaching and learning of Arabic education in Ibadan and its environs. The latter had a number of students e.g. Sheikh Harun, Sheikh

Abdullah bn. Uthman and Sheikh Malik bn. Tahire e.t.c. Sheikh Daud was the greatest scholar of his time in Iseyin who spread arabic education in iseyin. in lagos however, great scholars, that spread the learning and teaching of islam and arabic education included A.lhaji ahmad Shaki (1892-1267) who wrote many Arabic books on arabic songs, as well as Alhaji Abubakar Aotan 1886 - 1936) who had an Arabic library it Lagos. Alhaji Adam Abdullah also spread the knowledge of Islam and Arabic education from Ilorin to lagos and ogun states. he spread the knowledge of Islam and Arabic education under Ansar-ul-deen for many years, he wrote many books in arabic language including islam fil Nigeria. He produced many scholars in Islam and Arabic education including Dr. abdulraheem Hamzat, Ahaji S.A. Ahmed Professors Abubakar Aderemi and Isiak Oloyode

Conclusion and Recommendation

This piece has historically revealed the activities of some individuals in the spread of Arabic and Islamic education as the two are inextricably interrelated and they are like two faces of a coin that one can not eschew from another. The paper has shown what operated in the northern Nigeria before coming to southern Nigeria concentrating on Yoruba land of the south. Probably because no much development has been made in the eastern part of the south. Some problems do exist in the (local) Arabic schools existing in the areas mentioned. the first is the location of schools and sitting arrangement of the pupils. Fafunwa (1974) opined that those schools are usually found in or outside a mosque or in private houses, under a tree or in the teachers parlour or veranda with the teacher holding a long cane while pupils squat in a semi circle before him to learn.

Another issue is that of the low status of teachers because they are depend on sadaqa or charity from their students for a living or from their parents and other well wishers. This is what Ado-Agbetola (1988) quoting Alkali (1967) said that the Quranic (Arabic) School teachers depended on charity- Sadaqa for their living because the teachers are one of the people to whom sadaqa is prescribed in Fi Sabil 'Allah (in the way of Allah).

To this end, the presenter shall like to make the following recommendations towards the improvement of the existing local Arabic schools in Nigeria:

- a) the schools should be well financed by both the governments organizations and private individuals, this will make the teachers to depend less on charity from

their students and consequently raising their status;

- b) Modern standard school buildings with enough facilities for teaching and learning should be erected for those schools in order to improve the location of schools and make the modern sitting arrangement available in the schools.
- c) The recruitment of teachers should be based on certain criteria in form of qualifications and experience. Teachers in those local arable schools should be made to go for refresher and in-service courses. Seminars, Conferences and workshops should be organised for teachers on modern methods of teaching in order to make them less parochial in their job. If these are adhered to, it is hoped that the condition of local Arabic schools in term of organisation and control will improve tremendously.

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