

Arabic And islamique educationin the contemporary world: prospect and challenge

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Abstract

The place of language in human activities is very significant as it servs as the major means of communication. It occupies a major position in the intellectual and spiritual development of Muslim communities in the world. This paper explores historical development of Arabic and Islamic Education in the world with special attention on it prospects and challenges. The paper conceptualizes Arabic and Islamic studies in the context of education. It follows the trends chronological development of Arabic and Islamic Education from the Asian continent to European; American, China and African continents. However, its relevance in contemporary educational discourse, especially in Western Nigeria, are undermined by numerous challenges. This paper examines the major impediments confronting Arabic and Islamic Education in Private Arabic Schools (PASs) across the region. Drawing upon recent literature and based on thematic content analysis, which entails the systematic review and synthesis of key emerging themes from existing literature, the study identifies critical issues such as the lack of standardized curriculum, insufficient of professionally trained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, limited local Arabic and Islamic textbooks, and poor government support. It also highlights socio-political challenges including the stigmatisation of Arabic education due to weak foundations at the Ibtidaiyah level, and restricted pathways to higher education for Arabic learners. The paper argues that these challenges stem from systemic neglect, curricular disconnection from national educational goals, and inadequate policy integration. The paper suggests curriculum reform, teacher professionalization, infrastructural improvement, and digital inclusion to enhance the quality and perception of Arabic and Islamic Education. A multi-sectoral collaboration between government, Islamic organizations, and private proprietors is also proposed to revitalize this vital component of Nigeria's educational system.

Keywords: Arabic Language, Islamic Studies, Curriculum, Private Arabic Schools, Educational Policy.

1. Introduction

Education is an essential determinant of the development of every human community. Most especially, Arabic and Islamic Education which has always been the major concern of the Muslim peoples, as it was launched by Prophet of Islam, Muhammad who was not only the preacher of Islamic Religion, but also an effective educator. Islam is a knowledge-based religion; it derives the basis of its taught from the Qur'an and the Hadith, which exist through learning. Learning began as early as Prophet Muhammad was called to the prophethood and the Qur'an was revealed gradually. The prophet started the inculcation of Islamic Education in his mother tongue, Quraysh, an Arabic family and dialect in Makkah. Sooner, mosque was recognised as the place of worship and also as the first school in Islam from where Islamic education developed its objectives and curriculum content. The method of teaching was face-to-face and read-to-ear.

This community-based system of education prevailed from Makkah to the entire world before it gained reforms due to some contemporary issues and problems. The system has been reformed from non-formal to formal system. Arabic and Islamic Education is now offered in the world today, from the primary level to the university. However, the traditional system still remains in many parts of the world as it was during the lifetime of the prophet while efforts are made to formalise it to meet up with the formal system. In this paper, effort is made to clarify the concept of Arabic and Islamic Education. An attempt is also made at looking at its current situations and problems in the world with a particular focus to Western Nigeria in the Africa. The article was anchored on sociolinguistic theory and thematic content analysis, which entails the systematic review and synthesis of key emerging themes from existing literature to follow the historical development Arabic-Islamic Education in the contemporary world and to identify the critical issues that are militating against it.

2- THE CONCEPT ARABIC AND ISLAMIC EDUCATION:

2-1-1 Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Context of Education:

Arabic and Islamic Education is a broad term used to describe the process and practice by which the skills, knowledge, value and norms spelt out in the Holy Quran and Hadith are transmitted across generations. It is the process by which, Arabic Language, Literature and Islamic-related skills, competences, attitudes, beliefs and cultural heritage are developed in learners, using technical and professionally approved method of teaching (Oladosu, 2012). Arabic and Islamic Studies are twin-disciplines. Their sisterhood began immediately after the call of the Almighty Allah through Angel



Jibril to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) at the café of Hira to read. The introduction to reading skill for learning and spiritual development marked the beginning of education in Islam as captured in Qur'an 96 v. 1-5. The verses and other related in the Qur'an imply to be educated, to be informed and to be equipped with knowledge.

Practically, the prophet began the act of teaching by calling people to the new religion and teaching them the rudiments of Islamic Education. Arabic as the immediate language of the prophet served as the channel of instruction. It was reported that the prophet has used about nine mosques in Madinah as learning centres (Oloyede, 2012).

2-2-1 The Origin of Arabic-Islamic Education in the World

The Messenger of Islam, Muhammad (SAW) is universally regarded as the first teacher of Islamic education. Both in Makkah and Madinah, Arabic was used as a medium for the revelation of the Qur'an and the early development of Islamic scholarship. The Prophet, through his teachings, established in practical terms that Islamic education as a system should combine spiritual formation, moral guidance, and intellectual cultivation. From Madinah, Arabic and Islamic education spanned the globe, setting into different forms that represented varied cultures and historical conditions. According to modern scholars like Abdalla (2025), these classical models initiated by the Prophet have remained influential in pedagogical discourses within global Islamic studies and the teaching of Arabic.

2-2-2 The Evolution of Mosque and Madrasah Systems

While mosque-based education remained a hallmark during the early centuries of Islam, as it expanded to various parts of Asia, a need for more organized centers of learning was resultant to the emergence of the madrasah system. The very first madrasah known to exist is attributed to the Shi'ite Fatimid Caliphs, established in Egypt in 1005 CE. The model was later reformed by the Sunni vizier Nizam al-Mulk al-Hasan in 1067 CE, who founded the Nizamiyyah schools that became prototypes of later Islamic universities (Uzma, 2003). These institutions formalized curricula, appointed qualified teachers, and introduced structured syllabi covering Qur'anic studies, Arabic grammar, law (fiqh), and logic. In this way, mosque-based education gradually combined with formal madrasah systems, reaching its culmination in the nineteenth century in the educational model in Egypt. The Al-Azhar University, founded in the eleventh century, continues to be one of the oldest and most recognized centers of Arabic and Islamic learning in the Muslim world. It is often referred to as the "Harvard of Islamic learning" Mahmoud 2020. As time went on, Al-Azhar grew to encompass both

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religious and secular disciplines and offered programs in Islamic jurisprudence and theology, medicine, commerce, and the sciences.

The Al-Azhar system normally commences with six years of primary religious schooling, followed by three years of preparatory education. Those continuing beyond preparatory school into secondary religious school may subsequently be qualified to enter Al-Azhar University. Individuals not pursuing higher levels of religious education can attend either vocational or general secondary schools under the Ministry of Education upon completion of the six primary years. Reforms at Al-Azhar include innovations in the curriculum, instruction and professionalisation of teachers. Another area of reforms is consideration the introduction of contemporary scientific subjects to improve more on traditional Islamic studies (El-Gohary, 2022).

2-2-3 Arabic and Islamic Education in Europe

Arabic/Islamic studies started to flourish in Europe as early as the sixteenth century. Initially, these studies were pursued through orientalist interests whereby European scholars focused on translating and studying Middle Eastern texts mainly for theological or political purposes. Modern scholarship now categorizes European engagements with Arabic and Islam into two approaches. The first comprises the works of early orientalists whose contributions, although valuable historically, are of primary antiquarian interest. The second represents contemporary academic approaches whereby Arabic and Islamic studies are set within multidisciplinary frameworks, including linguistics, comparative religion, and global studies (Zikriah et al., 2024).

Recent research at European universities reflects the increasing integration of Arabic and Islamic studies within the scope of digital humanities and intercultural education. For example, universities in the UK, France, and Germany have established research centers working on Arabic manuscripts, Islamic philosophy, and language pedagogy using collaborative, technology-enhanced learning environments (Ayu et al., 2022). In this sense, Arabic is being recognized not only as a means for religious expression but rather as a method of cross-cultural communication and intellectual heritage.

2-2-4 Arabic and Islamic Education in the United States

In the American context, the late nineteenth century, when Arab immigrants arrived around 1876 marks the existence Arabic and Islamic learning. Most early immigrants came from Mount Lebanon, then part of 'Uthman of Syria, bringing both Arabic linguistic traditions and elements of Islamic culture. Historically, most of the immigrants were Christian Arabs, but by the early twentieth century, Muslim Arab communities started forming mosques and learning circles where Arabic was taught for both liturgical and educational purposes. Today, Arabic is taught from elementary



through secondary to tertiary levels as part of heritage language or world language programs. It was estimated by the Arab American Institute in 2021 that not less than 3.5 million Arab Americans inhabitants are there in the United State of America, while approximately 7 million Muslim Americans have some exposure to Arabic due to religious instruction. As recent report in Zughoul (2023). Shows that over 94% of Arab Americans have settled in major areas of the country, where access to Arabic and Islamic schools has increased. In addition, contemporary research focuses on two significant groups of Arabic learners within the U.S.: Heritage learners, who learn Arabic through home and community exposure; and Faith-based learners, who study Arabic mainly for Qur'anic recitation and religious literacy (Alghamdi, 2024).

2-2-5 Arabic and Islamic Education in China

For the past centuries, Chinese Muslims have developed two principal modes of Islamic education: Mosque-based education known as Jingtang Jiaoyu, and Islamic school. The former focused on Qur'anic instruction and religious studies, while the latter emerged in the early twentieth century as an advanced part Islamic education. According to Kon Dejun and Ma Liangyue (2013), Arabic first entered China through Zhang Xian's diplomatic missions in the western regions. It continued to serve as an indispensable language for trade, diplomacy, and religion. However, because of China's isolationist policy during the mid-Qing period, Arabic was mainly confined to religious functions, and thus many learners were able to read an Arabic text but could not converse fluently.

In modern times, Arabic and Islamic education has undergone rapid transformation in China. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, through the economic reforms later introduced in the 1980s, the government encouraged cultural and academic exchange with Arab countries. Arabic language departments were established in several universities with undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees. Recent works by Liu (2022) and Zhao (2023) point out that at present, Chinese universities focus their efforts on developing communicative competence, translation skills, and intercultural understanding, including digital media and mobile-assisted language learning.

2-2-6 Arabic / Islamic Education in Southeast Asia: The Case of Indonesia

Indonesia is another country where Muslims are majority in the world with a unique system of Islamic education. The education is provided through two approaches of 'Pesantren' (residential learning institutions) and through madrasah schools (Amr et al., 2006). The Pesantren system represents the traditional form of Islamic education in



the country. The instruction format is usually based on mastery of Qur'an, Arabic language, classical Islamic texts, and moral discipline under the tutelage of a kyai. In contrast, the madrasah system maintains an advanced Islamic education with the integration of the national education curriculum. It Operates at three levels-primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary-it provides extended hours of instruction in Islamic subjects like aqidah, or creed; fiqh, or jurisprudence; and akhlaq, or ethics. Their graduates may go on to higher education at either national or Islamic universities (Amr et al., 2006).

In this regard, current research underlines Indonesia's efforts for reforming Islamic education in the country. Specific curricular reforms introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs include integrating digital technologies, Arabic communication competencies, and entrepreneurship education, as Harahap and Salim (2023) indicate. Such innovations have situated Indonesian madrasahs to be models of a possible blend between religious and secular education within the wider Islamic world.

2-2-7 Global Developments and Contemporary Trends

During the twenty-first century, Arabic and Islamic education is rapidly attaining a rapid development in Muslim-majority countries. The development element involve:

- i. *Integration of secular and religious curricula.* Developing countries, including Egypt, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, incorporate Islamic studies with the sciences, social studies, and languages to yield holistic graduates (Hamid & Qureshi, 2023).
- ii. *E-learning and mobile-assisted learning:* The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the use of online Qur'anic learning platforms and mobile-based Arabic instruction to make education accessible, as Rahman & Al-Amin 2022 explain.
- iii. *Teacher Development and International Collaboration:* The partnership of Al-Azhar with the Islamic Development Bank, among others, is promoting global teacher-training initiatives focused on pedagogy, Arabic proficiency, and curriculum design. *Quality assurance and accreditation:* Initiatives regarding unification of madrasah curricula and accreditation processes of Islamic institutions have emerged in the Muslim world to ensure quality in education and recognition globally. Hence, from the early teachings of the Prophet in Makkah and Madinah, to present-day reforms in Cairo, Jakarta, and Kuala Lumpur, Arabic and Islamic education continues to be both dynamic and integral to the intellectual fabric of the Muslim world.



3- Arabic-islamic education in the west Africa:

3-1-1 Nigeria as a focus:

The existence of Arabic/Islamic Education in Africa could be generally traced back to 8th and 9th centuries when the religion of Islam reached the savannah region (Abubakar, 2004). Its earlier coverage included: The empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhay, and Kanem Bornu. Specifically in Nigeria, it is noted by Galadanchi (1993) that Islam came to Nigeria through the merchants and the preachers between 11th and 14th centuries. It spread throughout the country with the entrenchment of its slogan, education, as a knowledge-based-religion. The Arabic/Islamic school system in Nigeria operates through the non-formal and the formal systems. The non-formal system is in a form of centers, which exist in several parts Muslim dominated parts of the country. The schools are established to develop both Islam Studies Arabic Language in learners. Generally, these centres operate separate way of the formal school system. Apart from these, there are Quranic centres that are based on Quran recitaion and memorisation (Oladosu, 2012). The venues for these centres are mosques, mallams' residences and tree shades since the 11th century till today. (Abdul-Hamid, 2021). The Qur'an centres are in classified into the lower and upper levels. The lower class is called 'Makarantan Allo' in the North and in the West, it is called 'Ileekewu Waala'. The second level known as 'Makarantan Ilimi' in the North, which is synonymous to 'Kewu Itumo' in the West. By 1914, the number of these centres in the North had reached 24,756 with 218,614 students and 15,000 mallams (Abdul-Hamid, 2021).

It is pertinent to mention that the system of education was non-formal because it started with unplanned curriculum, there was neither syllabus nor instructional material. The holy Quran and Hadith were the sources of the learning and instruction (Abdul-Hamid, 2021). The teaching method were based reading and grammar translation approaches.

The attempt to formalise Arabic and Islamic traditional schools was firstly marked with the contribution of the former Emir of Kano, Alhaji Abdullahi Bayero, when he returned from pilgrimage in 1934 and facilitated the establishment of the Northern Province Law School with the objective of producing Muslim judges for the Sheria courts and the school was developed to the level of a university known as Bayro University today (Abdul-Hamid, 2021).

In Nigeria system of education, Arabic is officially treated as a foreign language in the National Policy on Education (NPE) and placed in the second position an elective subject at all levels of the Universal Basic Education. Although the study of Arabic does not receive adequate recognition in the Nigerian National Policy on Education, obviously, the real status of the language shows in its historical, economic, social-

cultural, diplomatic, social linguistic, religious and academic relevance. (Abdul-Hamid, 2021). Thus, Arabic studies goes beyond its status in the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC).

3-1- 2 Challenges of arabic/islamic education in nigeria

At this present moment, Arabic /Islamic education in Nigeria, particularly in the southwestern part, continues to grapple with multi-faceted challenges despite its long-standing historical and cultural significance. The challenges vary in form and intensity, depending on whether the education is given in government-owned conventional schools or PASs, which will be the major focus of discussion in this discourse. Challenges that beset PASs can be categorized into pedagogical, infrastructural, administrative, and socio-political dimensions.

1. *Lack of Adequate, Well-Planned, and Standardised Curriculum:* A well- schematized curriculum serves as the backbone of any effective educational system. Tyler (1949) conceptualises curriculum as all the planned learning a student receives under the direction of the school to achieve a goal of education. Similarly, Taba (1962) dichotomises it as a plan of learning containing statements of aims, content, and methods of implementation. In many Private Arabic Schools, however, the absence of a uniform, standardized, and contextually relevant curriculum remains a critical problem. Oladosu identified such inconsistencies as early as 1992 and as recently as 2013, when he noted that most Arabic institutions adopt outdated or foreign models that do not represent the socio-cultural experiences of Nigerian learners. In addition, most of them do not include relevant contemporary subjects like science, civic education, and digital literacy. Recent studies (Adebayo, 2021; Abdullahi & Musa, 2023) indicate that due to a lack of innovation in the curriculum and its non-periodic review, the graduate's competitiveness and employability had been restricted within the Nigerian educational system.

2. *Lack of Professionally Trained Teachers:* Teachers are the indispensable parts of curriculum implementation. However, most teachers at private Arabic schools lack formal pedagogical orientation and relevant teaching certification. This shortfall militates against teaching effectiveness and the academic performance of the students of students. It is further affected by a lack of in-service teacher training programs and limited access to higher institutions offering Arabic Education (Oloyed, 2012).

3. *Poor Learning Environment Facility:* Another major challenge is the poor state of learning infrastructure. Many private Arabic schools operate in uncompleted buildings, poorly ventilated classrooms, or temporary structures lacking basic facilities such as electricity, furniture, and sanitation. In a survey by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in 2020, it is reported that over 60% of registered Arabic



schools in southwestern Nigeria lacked adequate infrastructure for effective teaching and learning. The poor environment demotivates both learners and teachers.

4. Lack of Relevant Local Textbooks and Teaching Materials: *Most of the textbooks used in private Arabic schools are imported from the Middle East and North Africa; these text books often use classical Arabic and are meant for their own children. This means that they do not address the linguistic, cultural, and educational realities of Nigerian learners. Recent scholars (Azeez, 2019; Mustapha, 2023) have emphasized the urgent need for localized Arabic instructional materials that integrate African contexts, modern terminologies, and technological relevance.*

5. Government's Lukewarm Attitude to Arabic and Islamic system of Education: *The marginalization of Arabic as a language in the National Policy on Education (NPE), where it is positioned as a non-vocational elective subject demotivates the learners (Oladosu, 2013; Muhammad, 2020).*

6. Misconceptions and the Stigma of Terrorism: *some non-muslims erroneously associated Arabic and with radicalization and extremism. (Suleiman, 2018; Balogun & Ibrahim, 2022). This perceived stigma within the community discourages parental support and reduces the number of students enrolling in some communities.*

7. Lack of Learning Resources of and Libraries: *Knowledge development are appropriately facilitated by functional libraries. Unfortunately, most of the Private Arabic Schools have no well-structured library facility or relevant Arabic resources. Many books are outdated, not sufficient, no e-library.*

8. Lack of Modern Language Laboratories: *Arabic teaching needs language laboratories and other digital facilities that can easily facilitate the teaching and learning of listening, pronunciation, and communicative competence. Such facilities remain unavailable in most PAs. Adebisi and Ahmed (2023) noted that only a few Arabic schools in urban Lagos and Ilorin have multimedia learning aids or CALL systems. This makes the digital divide even greater and increases the pedagogical gap separating Arabic from other modern languages in Nigeria.*

9. Poor Foundation at the Ibtidaiyyah/ primaryLevel: *In the end, a lot of students are struggling at the Idadiyyah level due to the fact that their foundation was weak at the Ibtidaiyyah stage. Poor instructional quality, inadequate teaching materials, and inconsistent assessment practices contribute to low proficiency among learners concerning Arabic and Islamic Studies, according to Azeez (2022). This often carried forward problem could lead to the reduction in literacy and comprehension levels. Conclusion The challenges confronting Arabic and Islamic Education in Western Nigeria are a reflection of broader structural, pedagogical, and policy-related issues. It thus necessitates an approach where government intervention, curriculum reform,*

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teacher professionalization, infrastructural improvement, and public re-orientation must be combined in multi-stakeholder mode. Above all, placing Arabic education within the socio-linguistic and digital contexts of Nigeria would guarantee its relevance, sustainability, and contribution to the country's development.

4-1-1 Implications

1. *Private Arabic Schools should improve their programmes to meet up with the standard level of formal education, as a step, by developing an adequate, well-planned and uniformed curriculum with common educational objectives, common learning experiences, and common educational contents that would cater for the needs of the society and the learners. Furthermore, the learners should be exposed to common evaluation and there should proper supervision of the schools' programmes to ensure standard and uniformity.*
2. *The Muslim Community should ensure that sufficient qualified and well trained Arabic teachers are employed to teach their Children at Private Arabic schools.*
3. *Conducive learning environment should be provided for effective teaching and learning.*
4. *Sufficient relevant text-books should be selected and recommended for teaching the developed content to the learners. Nigerian Arabic writers should also be encouraged to prepare relevant textbooks for Arabic and Islamic Studies.*
5. *Muslim Community should keep the government aware of their lukewarm attitude of the towards the studies of Arabic and Islamic Education and corrections should be done to put it in its right position.*
6. *Awareness should be created that Islam is a knowledge-based and peaceful religion. Therefore, it does not encourage ignorance and terrorism.*
7. *There should be adequate libraries Equipped with relevant Arabic resources and material: most of the Private Arabic schools ' libraries are not well furnished with advanced relevant Arabic text books.*
8. *Effort should be made to establish language laboratory in our Private Arabic schools for effective pedagogical achievement.*
9. *Sound English and relevant Western subjects should be introduced into Arabic and Islamic Education curriculum. And also, effort should be made to affiliate Private Arabic schools with Nigerian universities, such as University of Ilorin, ABU, Zaria and other universities where Arabic and Islamic Education is given concern and students with Thanawiyah/ NBAIS SISEC are admissible.*
10. *A relevant curriculum that would focus the learners from Ibtidaiyyah level (primary), should be developed in order to equip the learners with the rudiment studies of Arabic and Islamic knowledge from the early stage.*

5-1-1 Conclusion



In this paper, we were able to analyse problems of Arabic and Islamic Education in the contemporary world with the Western Nigeria (Yorubaland) as a focus. In the course of discussion, the concept of Arabic and Islamic Education was defined. Furthermore, it took us to review the development activities and the current situation of Arabic and Islamic Education in the world. Down to Nigeria, a chronological history of Arabic/Islamic Education was presented and some major challenges that hinder its development were discussed. It was recommended that adequate curriculum, sufficient qualified teachers, conducive learning environment, relevant text-books, libraries and language laboratories among other things that can be done to improve private Arabic Schools were discussed.

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