STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF ARABIC LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Effective teaching and learning of the Arabic language and literature has been confronted by a number of obstacles in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Such obstacles manifest significantly in the design of the curriculum as well as the availability of resources. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine these obstacles and suggest workable solutions. A sample of fifty (50) lecturers and fifty (50) students of Arabic language and literature showed several significant findings. The findings revealed the negative attitude of Nigeria government to the discipline as the source of the identified obstacles. The findings therefore will help to facilitate the development of suitable strategies for effective teaching of the Arabic language and literature in Nigeria tertiary institutions.

Field of Research: Methodology of Arabic Language and Literature, Tertiary Institutions, Arabic Education

1. Introduction

Arabic language as one of the academic disciplines offered in Nigeria tertiary institutions, is suffering from a number of serious problems which threaten its survival in Nigerian educational system. These problems affect the standard of the graduates of these institutions, who are expected to train others on graduation and they lead to a drastic fall in the level of the learners’ proficiency in the language.

This paper attempts to take a quick glance at the relevance of Arabic as a justification for its encouragement in Nigeria. It identifies the problems and provides modest suggestions to solve these problems. It stresses that Arabic language and literature should be encouraged at the various levels of our educational system.

2. Relevance of Arabic to Nigeria Educational System

The history of Arabic education in Nigeria is a fairly long one, that its treatment here would either lead to a total digression from the main thrust of this study or cause it to be too wide. We shall, however, take a glance at its importance to West Africa as well as Nigeria and see why it needs being encouraged and protected in Nigeria educational system.

Many centuries before the coming of the Europeans to West Africa, Arabic had brought its educational achievements as well as its rich literature to West African environment. The impact of Arabic on native speakers of West African languages, such as Hausa, Fulfude (Fulani) and Yoruba is reflected in the valuable works written by native west African authors in Arabic or native languages using the Arabic script. Many of these works form valuable source material for the reconstruction of
African history. In fact Dike, a reputable historian of international repute, had once observed the significance of these Arabic works and submitted that;

“It had been a revelation to the whole world of scholarship to realize for the first time that Africa before the European penetration, so far from being a “dark continent” was in fact a continent where the light of scholarship shone brightly as the Arabic works being discovered bear testimony.”

In Nigeria, the position which Arabic occupies varies from one group to another. While it is a first language (L1) of the Shuwa Arabs of Borno State, it is a second language (L2) for our local and modern Arabic learners and a third language (L3) for government school learners. The major objectives for studying Arabic in Nigeria have been identified as follows;

- Nigeria belongs to some international organizations where Arabic is a working language.
- Nigeria shares political and socio-cultural affinity and aspirations with many Arabic speaking countries.
- Nigeria can exchange experiences and ideas and, in fact, can benefit tremendously in the area of petro-chemical industry through interaction with the Arab countries which have recorded giant strides in the area.
- Nigerian diplomats in the Arab countries require at least a working knowledge of Arabic to enable them interact meaningfully and smoothly with the host countries.
- It has been said repeatedly by notable Nigerian historians (Dike 1965) that to write an authentic African history many Arabic manuscripts in our archives should be utilized.

From what we have noted above, it would be seen that the attraction to Arabic language has been influenced not only by aesthetic and religious appreciation but also by cultural considerations and by a strong historical consciousness. Giving consideration to the stated objectives also, it becomes clear that the relevance of Arabic to our educational system cannot be under-estimated. It should then be encouraged to live and flourish by addressing the following problems.

3. Government Attitude to Arabic Language

The Federal Ministry of Education as well as the corresponding ministries in the states have not shown sufficient interest in the teaching of Arabic as a language, and have, therefore, not given any encouragement to its learning and teaching even though the country expands more and more her relations with Arabic-speaking countries.

Arabic studies certainly need as much attention as French is being given. Admittedly, the role of French Government through the French embassy, in the propagation and encouragement of the teaching of the language is quite significant. Nevertheless, once the nation is convinced that a particular thing is in the best interest of its citizens, there is no point waiting for “good Samaritans” from any quarters, no matter what interests such donors have in the project.

**Location of Departments**

Arabic is combined with other disciplines to form a single department in some of our universities. Under this condition, Arabic is usually understaffed. As it is a fact which cannot be ignored that productivity and effective performance are both seriously affected when a worker is over-burdened. Arabic should be allowed to have its own separate department, while it should be staffed accordingly. The situation in our Colleges of Education is better in this regard.
Lack of Instructional Materials

The relevance of teaching aids or instructional facilities in teaching Arabic cannot be underestimated. These include visual, oral and audio-visual materials. While some institutions are adequately equipped, there are others with nothing to show in terms of facilities. It should be noted that the teaching-learning process gives some educational benefits to both the teacher and the learner as noted below;

- The use of instructional materials encourages active learning. A student learns faster and retains the knowledge longer, if the material to be learnt appeals to more than one of his senses. People tend to forget what they are told, but are more likely to remember the experience they gain through observation, examination and manipulation of the teaching tools.
- The use of instructional materials saves the teachers time and conserves his energy by minimizing over-verbalization. Over-verbalization means excessive use of words to communicate ideas, feeling, concepts and knowledge characteristics of the traditional teachers.
- The effective use of audio-visual materials enriches learning by adding variety to it. The variety enlivens the lesson thus getting rid of boredom. Depth and breadth of coverage provided by the instructional materials make the teaching-learning process to be pleasant and meaningful.
- The use of visual materials bridges time and space.
- For effective teaching and learning, instructional materials must be carefully chosen and used at the appropriate times.7

Poor Staffing of Arabic Units

As stated elsewhere, owing to the combination of Arabic with another disciplines in the same department as applicable in some of our institutions, the language suffers from poor staffing. Lecturers in this situation are not only over-burdened but frustrated. While taking the interest of the learners into consideration and still aiming to cope with the abnormally heavy load of courses and units per week for each lecturer, one may not expect such lecturers to be able to give their best.

A lot needs to be done in respect of the staffing of the Arabic departments Nigerian tertiary institutions. The authorities concerned should not only provide an adequate number of lecturers, but should be sure that the competent ones with sound linguistic background are employed. This is because the linguistic background of a lecturer has its own impact on the proficiency of his students in the language he teaches. The already over-burdened ones should also be motivated in so many ways as the authorities may deem fit, in the interest of dedication, commitment and efficiency.

Admissions

Effective Arabic teaching in Nigerian Colleges is seriously threatened by the caliber of learners admitted to study the language. Students are admitted either through the Nigerian Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) which is the only body which admits students into Nigerian tertiary institutions or through the Basic Studies Programme (BSP) organized by respective Colleges. JAMB admitted candidates are expected to spend three years while BSP admitted candidates are to spend four years.

JAMB candidates must have passed Arabic at ordinary or Senior Secondary level and they prove to be good materials for the Colleges’ academic programmes. BSP candidates are to undergo one-year preliminary programme and they are those with no background in Arabic whatsoever.
Many of the students in this category are the frustrated ones, who might have failed to secure the admission through JAMB and thus opted for “automatic short-cut” to the College. They are expected to cover within an academic session of 24 weeks, what JAMB candidates have covered in six or more years.

Giving consideration to the shortness of the period covered by the preliminary programme, it is often difficult to train the candidates in all the branches of Arabic language to be able to match the JAMB candidates. In actual fact, the syllabus takes not the former candidates into consideration as it is now left for individual Colleges to make the course contents flexible enough to accommodate the two categories of learners.

It is, however, our submission that admissions through the Basic Studies Programme should be redesigned in such a way that only those, who have completed the Qur’anic reading or those, who have been exposed to the language are admitted, to make teaching and learning a bit easier and keep up the expected standard of our Colleges graduates. Alternatively, the period may be increased to at least two years so as to enable these beginners have enough exposure to the language before they join the JAMB candidates.

Admission into our universities take adequate care of the quality of the candidates especially the JAMB – admitted ones

Non-availability of Suitable Textbooks

Another serious problem confronting Arabic learning in Nigerian tertiary institutions is the non-availability of suitable textbooks.

The available ones are mostly of foreign (Arabian) authorship written to teach Arabic in the first instance to the native speakers of the language. Such books are published in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and so on to teach Arabic to the native speakers. The defect inherent in the use of such books is obvious; they do not take cognizance of the environmental background of the Nigerian learner of Arabic. When Nigerian learners of Arabic are taught with the help of such books, they become more familiar with the Arab environments and subsequently find it difficult to express the Nigerian ideas, environment and culture in Arabic. It is necessary that books to be used are graded in accordance with the learner’s level. These must also have bearings to a large extent on the background and culture of the learners, if they are to mean anything to them.

However, the problem is not insoluble. Lecturers should show more dedication by replacing these unsuitable textbooks with their own contribution based on the learners’ different levels and environments. The authorities should encourage these lecturers by accepting any reasonable academic input made at least for promotion purposes. In this regard, emphasis must be shifted from the fame of the publisher to the value of the academic input as the country have few standard Arabic publishing companies and the charges of the foreign publishing houses may be too high and beyond the capability of the poor lecturers.

Pronunciation

This problem is closely related to the absence of adequate instructional materials as discussed earlier. There are certain letters in Arabic alphabet which create problems for both the teacher and the taught. Difficulties occur at the phonological level where certain Arabic sounds are not found in Nigerian languages. When a Nigerian learner of Arabic attempts to pronounce any of the sounds, two things emerge; First there is the emergence of language idiosyncrasies, whereby the learners resorts to substituting some words which he cannot pronounce.
Secondly, (and this is a direct result of the substitution) the meaning is adversely affected. This is because whenever a given Arabic word had any of its sounds substituted; the word will either become meaningless or convey a meaning different from the intended one.¹¹

This issue should be properly addressed in Nigerian tertiary institutions by the provision of adequate facilities taking the linguistic implications of the problem not only on the would-be teachers, but also on their learners into consideration.

**Teaching Arabic through English**

Teaching Arabic language through the medium of English is one of the problems noted in some of our tertiary institutions. This problem is a direct result of the poor academic background of the learners admitted to study the language. The overall consequence is the production of half-baked Arabic graduates. It is rampant nowadays to see not only NCE holders but also University graduates, who cannot read and translate a simple Arabic passage fluently and correctly.

Teaching Arabic with English kills the beauty, eloquence and majesty of the language. The very rich taste of Arabic is set aside. This is a serious danger which requires immediate attention for the survival of Arabic in Nigeria.

**Learners’/Parents’ Attitude to Arabic**

Due to the religious bias that people have against the language, some learners of Arabic feel ashamed to identify themselves as Arabic learners.¹² The linguistic relationship between Arabic and Islam is noted as the root cause of this wrong notion. Furthermore, as a result of the various problems enumerated in this paper, some Arabic students tend to become frustrated. Their response is either dropping out of the course which is common, or a display of lukewarm response. In such a situation much depends on the teachers.¹³ He should devise means of motivating the students and creating the interest for the language in them.

Some parents have their share too in their nonchalant attitude to the progress their children make in Arabic Studies. Many a time, students are not given adequate encouragement by their parents, who themselves may even be Arabic scholars.¹⁴ For proficiency to be attained in any given language, the learners should not only be enthusiastic to learn it but also deserve being encouraged by the parents.

**The Syllabus/Curriculum**

The present National Commission for the College of Education (NCCE) syllabus for Arabic needs some amendments. It has been noted that Arabic syntactic complexity, its morphological structure, its orthographical patterns, its rhetorical attributes and elegant eloquence, its embrace of various kinds of knowledge of Arts and Science are all detrimental to the liking of lazy students.¹⁵ the NCCE syllabus could be reviewed to take these into consideration and be presented in a simple and attractive way to cater for the standard expected of College graduates in Arabic Studies.

The syllabus is loaded with classical period data, which, in many places, fail to be meaningful to the Nigerian students.¹⁶ In Arabic literature, for example, focus should be shifted to the Arabic works of Nigerian authors, who have made a lot of contributions, which even outweigh the writings of foreign authors to which much attention is now being paid. Though one is not advocating a total
neglect of the works of the foreign authors, but learners should be made to know what abounds in their immediate environment. The same argument goes for Arabic courses in Nigerian universities.

**Environmental Hindrances**

The environment, especially in the Southern Nigeria, is not all that conducive for Arabic Studies. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, probably out of religious bias, Arabic lecturers are looked down upon and Arabic language is also considered unfit as a course of study in these schools. A colleague once confronted me with a question as to why Arabic should be offered in a College where Islamic is being offered. To him, Muslims have been favoured for as the twin disciplines cater for them.

A point needs clarification here. Though Arabic is the *lingua franca* of Islam, yet it is a language just like French, English and German. Studying Arabic is not studying Islam just as studying English, which is the language of the Bible mostly in our possession, does not mean pursuing Christian Studies. It is even remarkable that the first Professor of Arabic in Southern Nigeria and Arabic Chief Examiner for West African Examination Council (WAEC) is a devout Christian. He remains a Christian despite his invaluable contributions to Arabic scholarship at global level.

Arabic learners in our tertiary institution, consequent upon the environmental factors, develop such an inferiority complex that they prefer identify themselves with other disciplines. This inferiority complex hinders group discussions, frequent use of the language and it leads to backwardness and lack of proficiency. All these have a bearing on the learners as these affect their productivity on graduation. As enthusiasm is needed on the part of the learners, the environment needs being made conducive.

4. **Conclusion**

Considering the importance of Arabic language not only as the language which has made an immense contribution to the early history and civilization of West Africa but also taking cognizance of its position as one of the most important world languages of international politics and diplomacy, it is considered profitable for a country like Nigeria with an abundant supply of willing potential students of Arabic to produce her own experts to represent her interests in several international fora involving the Arabic-speaking nations.\(^1\)

Having noted the status of the language, this work has examined the desirability of its inclusion in our educational system, with some sad observation on a number of obstacles, confronting this language in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Not only do these problems endanger the standard of the products of these institution, but also of the learners whom they are to teach in our primary and secondary institutions.

We have offered a number of modest suggestions to tackle these problems. The problems are not permanent - they can be removed if only the various people and authorities concerned with the teaching can cooperate to generate interest and encouragement. The teacher, the governments and Arab countries all have a great role to play for Arabic language and literature to be effectively handled in our tertiary institutions.
References


5. Malik, op. cit. p.33


8. Bidmos, op, cit, p.3


10. Ibid, p.46

11. Bidmos, op, cit, p.3


13. Abdul, op, cit, p.51


16. Abdul, op, cit, p.50.