

TOWARDS IMPROVING THE STANDARD OF MODERN ARABIC AND ISLAMIYYA SCHOOLS: A CATALYST FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The paper examines the present Arabic and Islamic schools mostly established and run by Muslim communities with a view to addressing the shortcomings of the government schools in placing more priority attention to the teaching and learning of Arabic language. Arabic language is the pathway to the proper comprehension of the Islamic sharia and its primary sources viz; Al-Qur'an and Hadith. This is because it is only when these two sources of Islamic sharia are properly understood that the good examples and divine injunctions contained in them can be properly put into practice, so that life on earth can be useful and conformable. It is observed that the schools lack professionally qualified teachers, sufficient funds for their smooth running and facilities and equipment necessary for effective teaching and learning. In order to meet and sustain standard expected of them, the following suggestions are made; providing facilities and equipment, employing, training and re-training of their teachers and sourcing for more funds for the smooth running of the schools.

Introduction

Arabic language is one of the most widely spoken languages of the world and it occupies an important position among the languages of the world that are used for communication, scholarship, trade and diplomacy. Abubakar in Zakariyya (2000:165) is of the view that Arabic was a language of scholarship not only in Africa but in Europe and Asia during the medieval period and was a language of commerce, religion, communication and above all, the official language of so many great empires of north, west and east Africa of yester years. Arabic is a language of international trade, diplomacy and one of the three official languages of international organizations such as the United Nations and its agencies. This implies that teaching and learning of Arabic language is not only useful to our life in this world but also compulsory because it is clearly described above that it is a language of religion which means that without it

Islamic religion cannot be properly understood. Hashimiy (1994:7) quotes Hadith of the Holy Prophet in which He (the Holy Prophet) was reported saying: "Love Arabic language for three reasons: because I am an Arab, the Holy Qur'an is an Arab and Arabic will be the medium of communication in paradise by the people of paradise".

This means that teaching and learning of the language is a religions obligation because the Prophet (SAW) who was the messenger through whom all the devine injunctions sent to humanity for their divine guidance were sent to them through him and he directs us in the above quoted traditions to love the language especially, because it is the path way to the understanding of the primary sources of Islamic sharia. For the above enumerated reasons, great nations of this world have special regard for the language even though they do not claim to be Muslims but they still respect it, considering its important position and its native speakers.

Zakariyya (2000:166) gives that great Nations of the world such as the United State of America, the United Kingdom and France place special attention to its teaching and learning. But unfortunately, in Nigeria, the situation of Arabic language and its schools is surrounded by multifarious problems prominent among which is shortage of teachers in quality and quantities. NERDC (1997) conducted a study on supply and utilization of Arabic teachers in secondary schools in the country and conducted that all studies in the area of Arabic indicated dearth of teachers as a problem. Similarly, the author has been serving as examiner of oral Arabic test for NECO for the past five (5) years and observes that the performance of the students in the oral tests used to be poor, when he interviewed the students about the reason why they failed to do well in the tests; they used to respond to him that they only have interest in the language that was why they registered it but since they entered into the school, they did not use to have Arabic teachers. Furthermore, in some case, qualified Arabic teachers are forced to teach other related subjects instead of their area of specialization, i.e. Arabic. For example, the author once taught at one Federal Unity Secondary School, but despite the fact that he held Bachelor of Arts Arabic with teaching qualification, he was asked to teach Islamic Studies.

The modern Arabic and Islamic schools came into existence purposely to address the neglect suffered by Arabic and Islamic studies in government owned schools as earlier mentioned. Instead of the modern Arabic and Islamic schools to give similar attention to the teaching and learning of all subject areas, they seem to place more priority attention to the teaching of Islamic sharia and English and Mathematics that are necessary conditions to gaining admission for

further studies in the institutions of higher learning.

This implies that there is a serious need for the modern Islamiyya schools to review their curricular in order to reflect national standard so that their products can cease to suffer segregation, while seeking for admission into institutions of higher learning because some of their courses fail to measure up to the acceptable standard. Ibitoye and Daluba (1990:176) in Isiyaku (2000:2) define the term curriculum as:

Formal studies in institution of learning which stipulate the number of courses, their contents and mode of study on which graduation and award of certificates depends. A well-planned curriculum includes subjects studied in the classroom. Independent study and relevant investigation, field trips or acculturation, practical training and lectures.

This quotation implies that each and every aspect of a well-planned curriculum is indispensable and must be accorded a priority attention in order to ensure a successful completion of the course and award of the certificate in view. It also means that neglecting some aspects of the curriculum leads to unsuccessful completion of studies. Therefore, to measure up to standard, our modern Arabic and Islamic schools must accord all subjects a priority attention so that their products can be successful in furthering their studies so that they can in-turn go back and fill the vacuum created by lack of qualified Arabic teachers in our schools. In advocacy for the review of their curriculum because, its' supposed to be the duty of all stakeholders of Arabic education. Lassa in NCCE Minimum Standards (1996:3-4) writes:

The review of Minimum Standards was informed by the belief that curriculum is dynamic and that periodic review is occasional by rapid social change. Teacher education cannot therefore but move with the energizing forces of change. Education in general is a concrete edifice which draws criticism for its bureaucratic inertia. The process of producing the revised edition of the Minimum Standards had to be collaborative.

This implies that the issue of effecting some changes in school curricular and syllabi when need arises is normal and that it should not be left in the hands of few individuals but all those concerned should participate in providing constructive criticism on any curriculum or syllabus which needs to be reviewed. It also means that change of curriculum content requires the contribution of stakeholders of education especially teachers who have first-hand information on its implementation, from which they can observe the lapses inherent in it and based on their observation offer constructive criticism that can go a long way in improving the standard expected of it. This is necessary if the objectives of teaching the language are to be realized. The objectives of teaching the language to Nigerian students at secondary school level include the following:

- i. To help students acquire spoken and written competence in the Arabic language.
- ii. To acquaint the students with the socio-political and cultural lives of the speakers of the language, with a view to promoting international understanding.

- iii. To prepare the students for the task of teaching the language at the primary and junior secondary school levels.

Arabic Teachers Production and Supply

According to the provision for Colleges of Education and Universities (Faculty of Education/Institutes of Education) are the only institutions authorized to produce teachers for primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. This means that unless a person successfully completes an approved course of study in Arabic and Islamic studies from one of the above-mentioned institutions of higher learning, such a person cannot be regarded as qualified Arabic and Islamic teachers. This condition therefore makes most Arabic and Islamic teachers unqualified, especially when one sees that the history of training Arabic teachers who are qualified to teach the subjects in our schools can be traced to eighties. According to Zakariyya (2000:168):

The production of Arabic Teachers at Colleges of Education dates back to (1982/1983) session when a department of Arabic studies was opened at the Federal College of Education, Kontagora, with enrolment of three (3) students, but before this department came to existence, some Colleges of Education situated in the Universities especially ATC, ABU, Kano and some state owned Colleges of Education offered Arabic in combination with Islamic Studies.

With regard to the training of Arabic teachers at Universities, Zakariyya (2000:167) writes: "The training of Arabic teachers commenced in 1963 when the first set of Arabic students to be trained as

qualified teachers were admitted into a special one-year intensive course for the award of certificate in Arabic at the Institute of Education, University of Ibadan.

Considering the above quotations, one therefore sees that the training of Arabic teachers who are qualified to teach in our schools is new and discouraging.

Facilities and Equipment at the Modern Arabic and Islamic Schools

Provision of facilities and equipment to modern Arabic and Islamic schools relies solely on communal efforts made by interested parents and philanthropists. This means that the environment for the teaching of the subjects is not conducive and once the learning environment is inimical, there is the tendency for the students to run away from such unconducive atmosphere and look down upon the subjects and teachers that teach the subjects. That is why the morale of both the teachers and the students is low. The author once taught at one of such schools during his National Service in Kwara State and the impression he received from the school was that only those parents who were seriously committed to the religion of Islam and were not thinking of what the worldly future had for their children could send their children to such schools. Coming back to which part of the country, Arabic subject teacher are despised among all categories of teachers of other subjects because of the relegated position of the subjects in the nation's policy.

Factors Responsible for the Standard of Modern Arabic and Islamic Schools

Unfavourable learning environment as earlier mentioned. The atmosphere in most Arabic schools is highly unconducive.

Learners' Attitude: Students of Arabic language, to some extent do not help themselves by combining their usage of the language to classroom.

Low enrolment in Arabic at the modern Arabic and Islamic and secondary schools.

Status of Arabic in nation's policy. Arabic as a non-vocational elective subject at the JSS level, and one of the elective at the SSS level, has made relevant agents not to pay enough attention to its teaching and learning (Abdul, 1981).

Insufficiency of qualified Arabic teachers

Recommendations to Address the Problems that Hinder the Progress of Arabic Schools

More efforts should be made towards the provision of facilities for modern Arabic and Islamic schools because they help in assisting our youths to be useful citizens. This can be done by government and private organizations. More efforts should be made towards producing appropriate, modern and effective materials for the teaching of Arabic language.

Arabic students should try as much as possible to speak in Arabic with their colleagues and teachers wherever they find themselves.

Arabic teaching should be made to attract prestige in the society by giving the teachers improved remunerations.

The curricular and examinations of Arabic and Islamic schools should be standardized with a view to giving them necessary recognition.

There should be training and re-training of those teachers already in the system who are unqualified.

Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing that Arabic studies are surrounded by problems. It was also discussed that facilities, equipment and materials related to the teaching of Arabic are grossly insufficient for the effective teaching and learning of the subjects. Since the nation is already in the

new millennium, concerted efforts should be made by the community and its agencies, the teachers, the learners as well as the government in order to improve the standard of Arabic schools in the society.

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