

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARABIC LANGUAGE TO LITERACY IN SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

Right from inception, Arabic has demonstrated its potentiality as a language well adequate to provide the religious, economic, political and social needs of the Nigerian nation. It was in the same vein that the first Nigerian to write had to employ Arabic to do so because it was the only means of literacy in Nigeria until the introduction of Christianity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Arabic, being the language of the Qur'an, has always been considered as an immanent part of Islamic education with spiritual quintessence. It is considered as a religious obligation by Muslims to learn how to read the Qur'an and teach it to others in its original language-Arabic. The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said: "the best of you is he who learns the Qur'an and teaches it to others" Hence, the zeal to acquire literacy skills in the language with the aim of reading the Qur'an and teaching it is a social requirement and at the same time, a fulfillment of religious duty. The efforts of the itinerant and indigenous scholars contributed to the development of Arabic literacy in West Africa, especially in South-western Nigeria. Arabic, being a language spoken by a large number of speakers spread all over the world, is not only vital for any external global business with Arab organisations and consumers, but also for education and academics. Quranic schools that were established paved way for creation of many facilities for the study of Arabic at secondary and tertiary levels. This paper appraises the contribution of Arabic language to literacy in South-west, Nigeria and the efforts of Muslim scholars in the attempt to develop literacy in Nigerian institutions of learning. Data were derived from books and journal articles and were classified and subjected to qualitative analysis with historical research method. This study intends to fill the gap in the establishment of modernized Quranic/Arabic schools also known as modern Arabic institutions and formal Western institutions which gave rise to change in the system of Arabic literacy from informal to formal. The findings and suggestions provided in this work, if properly studied and adequately incorporated into the country's educational plan, will not only enhance the development of education in Nigeria but better the role of the language for the purpose of social integration.

**Keywords:** Arab Civilization, Arabic language, Literacy, Nigeria, South-west.

## **Introduction.**

South-western Nigeria is a region where the custodians of a rich and dynamic culture called Yorubas are located. The culture has earned them significant respect and fame among other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Literacy is the ability to communicate through writing and reading.

Africans had exerted efforts to read and write before the introduction of the alphabets of any language to them. They were making use of symbolic expressions, sending objects from one end to another to make instructional statements creating intelligible communication effects in form of "Aroko" in Yorubaland, etc. Some other societies developed 'Nsibi' which is a kind of ideographic writing that worked on the same principles as Chinese (Isichie, 1983). In essence, the experience portrayed above underscore the fact that literacy has always been a vehicle for socio-cultural development in any given society. Arabic language started to register its presence in several parts of West Africa with the introduction of Islam to Egypt in North Africa in 639 C.E. (Muslih, 2018). Historically, the region had commenced the use of Arabic language through the engagement of Muslim clerics by rulers of empires such as Mali, Songhai and Ghana in West Africa and likewise in East Africa. They used the language to keep records and provide other administrative purposes like correspondence with the outside world. Thus, it cannot be an overstatement to state that this attraction of being able to read and write was one of the major reasons for many people to embrace Islam in West and East Africa (Abubakar, 1972).

Furthermore, the divine instruction in Qur'an 96:1, "Read" that proclaimed the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) has always been an important aspect of the culture of Islam. The means to convey the Islamic reading culture is indisputably, Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. Therefore, Arabic is the medium of communication that escorts Islam wherever it is found. The fact that Islam antedated European colonization in West Africa, including South-western Nigeria, emphasises the truth that Arabic was the first language of literacy, still useful till today, that most parts of West Africa were aware of (Muslih, 2018).

Arabic as a language and Islam as a religion played important roles in generating distinguished cultural and social identity in West Africa before the coming of the British colonialists that created a division in the cultural and social harmony that took off with ease in that part of the world. In the South West Nigeria- Yorubaland, scholars and their colleagues in the Northern part of Nigeria exchanged visits and ideas among themselves. Qur'anic/Islamic educational system ranged from the elementary Quranic classes to the higher classes where Arabic language and other branches of learning were introduced. Scholars who travelled from place to place to increase their knowledge and impact what they knew on others did so by moving from region to region. No place was remote in space for them to reach and they were prepared to make any sacrifice in the course of broadening their knowledge and disseminating theirs to others. Students travelled to North Africa from West Africa and scholars moved from North Africa to West Africa encouraging brotherhood, improving the ties of relations and building communities that were well grounded in character-molding educational system and establishing a sane society (Muslih, 2018).

Arabic language was used to write over sixty works of both poetry and prose giving a provisional account of Arabic literature of Nigeria in 1804 (Bivas and Hisket 1962). They are works of many scholars from North Africa who resided in Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara and some parts of South-west Nigeria.

*Some indigenous 'Ulama' of South-Western Nigeria who had travelled to several parts of West Africa also wrote some works on prose and poetry which covered many areas of human endeavor such as jurisprudence, ethics, theology, linguistics, astronomy, politics, inter-communal and inter-personal relations. Arabic, a 'defacto' official language was used during the pre- colonial period to record correspondences between*

*various rulers in Northern Nigeria and official administrative events and activities with neighbouring rulers and distant ones (Muslih, 2018).*

South-west Nigeria was also involved in the scholarly activities and inter regional contacts which connotes that literacy in Arabic language had satisfactorily been entrenched and that Arabic has been functioning as a language of literacy for a quite length of time. Arabic manuscripts that were later discovered around 1070 A.H (1659 C.E) as evidence of trade transactions but undated suggest that the assertion about Arabic as a language of literacy is correct.

As a medium of communication like other languages, Arabic conveys Islamic knowledge and its laws through the Holy Qur'an with the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah) both which are the primary sources of Islam. It encourages the acquisition of Islamic knowledge and therefore attaches a great importance to Islamic education. The Holy Qur'an which is a symbol of the highest linguistic achievement of the Arabic language had a great impact on Muslims' religious, social, political and intellectual life. This firm belief has facilitated the rapid development and spread of Arabic language and literature and contributed in no small measure to its transformation from a local dialect into one of the richest and important languages of modern time and an instrument of educational achievement (Malik:1980).

### **Origin and Preservation of Arabic Language**

Arabic language has its descent from a language known as proto- Semitic in literature. It belongs to Afro-Asiatic group of world languages. Arabic language is made up of two forms i.e. Modern Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic. The former is used in writing, reading and speech making while the latter is rarely used among the native speakers. Modern Standard Arabic originated from the Qur'an's language which is classical and is learned over the years. Colloquial Arabic is more often spoken at home among family members, in shops, markets and among friends. It is also used for writing informal letters and informal written communications like text messages and e-mails.

Arabic is written in Modern Standard Arabic which is a classic form taught in schools and is employed in formal communications. Its dialects vary based on the regions where people reside and the dialects are utilized for day to day communications and activities. There are two approaches to learning Arabic. They are: learning modern standard Arabic and that of the dialects. Modern Standard Arabic gives the learner the mastery of Arabic grammar and its Alphabet while learning the dialects gives the learner the opportunity to speak the way their parents do right from birth. Universities around the world teach students the modern standard Arabic for a good understanding of Arabic grammar and its wide working vocabulary. Dialects are learnt first for easy communication at home and later in the schools, students learn the formal rules of modern standard Arabic and its written form.

There are five major dialect groups in Arabic. They are:

- North African
- Levantine
- Iraqi
- Gulf
- Egyptian

However, Arabic comprises many dialects spread across the Arab world. Regional differences are to be considered as well. In the Arab world, many countries have an official dialect that is widely spoken. In Egypt, there is Cairene Arabic while Najdi is spoken in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Other dialects like Libyan Arabic, Saidi, Omani, Emirati and Kuwaiti Arabic are spoken by their native speakers. It is observed that over 12.3 million words have been adopted by other languages such as Farsi, Spanish, Turkish, and English, just to mention but a few. In essence, it is one of the richest languages in the world [<http://about.almentor.net>].

There are more than 14 different dialects of Arabic spoken by 85% of Arabic speakers while the rest 15% are speakers of the dialects mentioned above.

Arabic language is naturally, socially, politically and religiously very close to Africa. It is the mother tongue of many North, West and East Africans. Almost all the African languages are culturally influenced by Arabic Language. Arabic is the religious language of Muslims all over the world whether they communicate with it or not. The reason is not far-fetched. The Qur'an must be recited in its original text during Salaat (five times daily prayers), likewise the confession of faith/Kalimatu sh-shahaadah). Other religious expression which are constantly recited by a Muslim, whether he is an Arab or not are all in Arabic language. Supplications after the five times daily prayers are among those expressions to be recited in Arabic. This implies that every Muslim must have some acquaintance with the language. Muslims who are Persians, Indians, Egyptians, Hausas or Yorubas, whichever tribe you come from, the language of the Qur'an has to be used for the Islamic rituals which are incumbent on them. The caller to the prayer (Mu'adhin) while calling to prayer does so in classical Arabic wherever he may belong to.

Arabic is also the language of the prophetic traditions (Hadith) of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) which follows the Qur'an in the building up of Islamic law and theology. Islamic branches of knowledge based on the Qur'an and Tafseer (exegesis of the Qur'an) Hadith, Jurisprudence etc. are written in Arabic language before their translation into any other language. We can conclude from this submission that Arabic has become the spiritual language of all Muslims all over the world and Nigeria is an integral part of it (Owolabi: 1990). Arabic has been put into many uses which attest to its influence on Nigerian society. From the time the language spread to Nigeria until the present day, learned scholars, especially in the Hausa states of the Northern region and Kanem – Borno Empire have not only used the written Arabic for learning and teaching purpose, but have also produced valuable works of significant importance on academics in Arabic language. One can find numerous works written by Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio on subjects like religion, history, social and economic relations of his time. Arabic has penetrated into Nigeria beyond the academic class of the society. This is the reason why many Arabic schools are found in many places in the country. It has gone to the extent of being incorporated into the Nigerian school curriculum and studied as a course in Universities and Colleges of education. The language has become an increasingly widespread means of communication in Bilaad as – Sudan which is a region of Western Africa between the Sahara Desert and the Gulf of Guinea (Owolabi: 1990).

However, there are uncountable Arabic scholars who still keep the tradition of Arabic alive through their Arabic libraries that are filled up with varieties of Arabic books and Islamic publications. In addition to this, certain records were kept in Arabic especially, those of the Qadis' court. Many families in some parts of Yorubaland in Nigeria are given the appellation 'Al - Qaadi' families because their forefathers were Shari'ah court judges. The proceedings of the courts were recorded down in Arabic during the period when they were at the helms of affairs in those courts.

The Arabic Qur'an which is the message of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is universal. It is the language spoken by all Muslims on daily basis including all serious students of Islam. Unequivocally, Islam has benefited Arabic language essentially. It has kept Arabic more significantly than any other faith has done for any of its Semitic sister languages. This is the more reason why indigenous languages of communication that accept Islam borrow Arabic words into such languages. Example of this is Yoruba language which contains a large number of Arabic loan words. Commenting on why Arabic Qur'an is superior over other scriptures, Fatima V.O., A German based Isoko Muslim says: because, Allah says in Qur'an 17:88, "Say, if mankind and the Jinn gathered in order to produce the like of this Qur'an , they could not produce the like of it even if they were to seek other assistants. She quotes other

verses like Q 4:82, 54:17, 15:9,41:2-4,41-4, 41:52-53,41:37-39, to buttress her assertion. Commenting on one of the above Qur'anic verses (Q15:91) which Says:" we have without doubt sent down the message and will assuredly guard it from corruption ",Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1989) says:

The purity of the text of the Qur'an through  
Fourteen centuries is a foretaste of the  
eternal care with which God's truth is  
guarded through the ages.

The act of keeping the Qur'an from destruction by Allah (S.W.T), is apparently the preservation of Arabic language. Considering its adaptation to numerous contemporary uses, it is very sure that the classical form of the language is safe and properly secured as long as it is preserved in the Divine revelation- Qur'an. The universality of Arabic as the paramount language of the Islamic mode of worship brings about uniformity in the Islamic mode of worship.

However, the knowledge of Arabic is a prerequisite for a Muslim but the extent of it may differ from one person to another. A person may possess the basic familiarity with the language while the other has the highest possible level of specialisation. The ability to recite some basic expressions of faith i.e kalimat ash –shahaadah and the first chapter of the Qur'an (Faatihah) with some short chapters and verses of the Qur'an as required in the performance of five times daily prayers (Salaat) and occasional religious rites are the most basic requirement.

This basic requirement can be obtained through learning by heart and by persistent use during acts of worship. The ideal is the functional literacy which gives the believer the ability to recite, appreciate and impart the lesson of the scriptures and religious rites to others (Muslih 2018). Competence is desirable for the opportunity of having well informed access to scriptures and literatures written in Arabic in Islam and improve individual and collective understanding of the religion.

In essence, a believer can find his level as far as Arabic knowledge is concerned. There is always an opportunity to learn more whatever may be the level of one's knowledge of the language. Islam has a language culture that accommodates and recognises whatever language is spoken in any part of the world. Arabic plays a central role in unifying the languages of worship, religious rites and communication. It has surely been possible for the middle-class Nigerian and elites to learn and communicate with the non- indigenous English language because it is the official language introduced to Nigerians by the colonial masters. It has also been easy for millions of Nigerians to learn Arabic for the purpose of worship and religious communication. Nowadays, there are teenagers in Nigeria who have been able to memorise the Qur'an in correct standard Arabic language. In other words, it should not be a difficult task for the middle class Nigerians, elitist and people of other status to learn to speak the language better than the way they do currently (Muslih, 2018).

### **Literacy in Arabic Language in Nigeria**

*Arabic education was first introduced to Kanem by a prominent scholar, Hamed Muhammad Mani during the reign of Umme Jilmi who ruled between 1085 and 1097. Towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Kanem became a centre of education where famous teachers, from Mali visited to teach Islamic jurisprudence. During this period, through trade and Commerce, some Arab tribes migrated to Nigeria and established Islamic Empires like Kanem –Borno Empire which later became a centre for Islamic utilization. By 14<sup>th</sup> century, Kanem scholars achieved a high standard in the writing of classical Arabic language. Islamic schools were established during the reign of Idris Aloma just like those that were established in other countries by Muslims. Islam was introduced to*

*Hausaland in the early 14th century by the Arabs and scholars while carrying out their trading activities (Galadanci: 24).*

Some Fulani scholars came to Kano with some books on jurisprudence and Islam theology during the reign of Yaqub and during the reign of Muhammad Rumfa who was then the Emir of Kano, some Muslim scholars from Timbuktu travelled to Kano as Islamic preachers. One of the scholars, Al-Maghili, wrote a book on Islamic government entitled: "The obligation of Princes" during his visit to Kano. Al-Maghili later embarked on a journey to Katsina which was also a center of Islamic learning. Scholars from Sankore University, Timbuktu visited Katsina with books on etymology and divinity. Katsina produced scholars in the 17<sup>th</sup> century which developed learning through contact with Timbuktu. Among the scholars were Muhammad Dan Masina and Muhammed Dan Marina. They worked hand in hand as a group of local 'Ulamaa' and they were issuing a recognized certificate to students who performed excellently well during their course of study (Seriki: 83).

Subsequently, Quranic schools for the intellectual, moral and religious training of Muslim children and adults were established in the Northern Nigeria. This was later replicated in the Southern Nigeria and part of Edo and Delta States of the former Mid-West especially Agbede and Auchi. The Arabic schools were also named Quranic schools where Arabic and Islamic studies were taught concurrently with the objective to provide moral and religious training. The Arabic and Islamic studies teachers were highly respected in the Northern Nigeria and they were employed as administrative officers for their ability to correspond with the North African Muslim rulers. Education of women within the Hausa Muslim community was one of the most noticeable reform of Shaykh Uthman bn. Fudi. He was a decent Muslim scholar who was well known for his piety and devotion. He laid much emphasis on women education and advocated the right if women to education which worked so well that female education became a matter of pride among the Northern Nigerian Muslims. It should be noted that the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was reported from Abu Musa to have encouraged women education when he says:

Whoever have a slave woman and teachers her good manners and educate her, then set her free and marry he, will have two rewards.  
(Sunan Ibn Majah, 1956)

It will not be inappropriate to conclude that the Federal Government of Nigeria might have deemed it fit to establish Federal Government Girls' Colleges in each of the state in Nigeria apart from the Federal Government Colleges which accommodate both Male and Female students just in accordance to the Prophet Muhammad's injunction and Shaykh Uthman bn. Fudi's struggle as regards women's education. The Jihad of Shaykh Uthman bn. Fudi later witnessed literacy resurgence. Very big libraries emerge at Sokoto and literacy became a requirement for high office. With this development, Arabic became the official language of literature and correspondence. Books became an essential commodity and classical Arabic books authored by North African Egyptians and Arabs were demanded for and therefore gained wide circulation. African Muslim scholars later followed suit by providing their own books with great scholarship which are in conformity with the rhetorical, sociological, geographical study of their environment. An example of this is the book tittle al-Kashf wal-Bayaan authored by Ahmed Baba. The influence of Timbuktu became well pronounced especially in Hausaland from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Sankore University continue to draw the attention of students from the Muslim world, especially almparts of Western Sudan for providing education. Students from Hausaland travelled to other citadels of learning to further their Arabic and Islamic Studies. They travelled to Al-Azhar University, Cairo in Egypt which is one of the best and oldest Universities in the world. Schools of North Africa in Morocco and Tunisia were also patronized by students. Until the arrival of the

Colonialists in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the efflorescence of Arabic and Islamic education continued without abeyance (Seriki: 85).

Arabic Education was an informal system of education before the coming of the British in Nigeria. It started in Bornu and Hausaland and later extended to Yorubaland and other parts of the country where Muslims reside. In Hausaland, there were elementary Quranic schools (Makaranta Alo) and higher schools (Makarants Ilmi). Yoruba Muslims of Southern Nigeria also adapted this system. The Quranic School is the foundation of Arabic education in Nigeria. Broadly speaking, Quranic/Arabic schools could be categorized into three: elementary or primary school, the secondary stage (Ilmi School) and post-secondary stage (post Ilmi School). There were neither regular classes nor curriculum of study. Pupils convey at the houses of their teachers or in the sitting room or verandah of the teacher's Muslim neighbour or in mosques as venues for learning with pupils sitting together on big mats spread on the floor. Learning normally took place from morning till evening. Every student had to wait for his turn to receive learning. There was no limit to the year of graduation (Lateef, 89). No tuition or other fees were paid by the pupils and teachers did not receive any allowance or salary. Their services were mainly meritorious and humanitarian. The pupils at certain stages of their learning in Quranic schools were directed to prepare feast of different cooked foods like beans, hen with soup and pap which was called lesser graduation (lesser Waliimah). The great waliimah was to mark the completion of the whole of the Qur'an when relatives, friends and well-wishers were invited by the parents for an elaborated ceremony. This always served as morale booster for teacher and a stimulating factor for young pupils in the Quranic schools. These feastings assisted the teachers to have a means of sustenance and contributed to the survival of those Quranic schools. After the graduation, the pupils married to the secondary stage which was known as Ilmi School. This stage was meant for the learning of the meaning of what was learnt at the first stage. The pupils would have memorized some verses of the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition (Hadith) to serve as motivation for the pupils to develop more interest in the pursuance of Quranic education. Later the pupils were introduced to other subjects like Tawhiid (Unity of Allah) Tajwiid (Recitation of the Qur'an with its rules), Nahw (Arabic Grammar), 'Aruud (Prosody), Sarf (Morphology), 'Al-Adab, Al- 'Arabi (Arabic Literature), Siirah (Biography of the Prophet) and al-Balaagha (Rhetorics) (Seriki:87). The next stage of Arabic education was the post Ilmii stage where a student choose a specialization. The most common area of specialization at the stage was exegesis of the Qur'an (Tafsiir). The exegesis of the Qur'an authored by Jalal ad-Din al-Mahalli in 1459 which was completed after his death by his student, Jalal ad-Din as Suyuuti in 1505 thus its name: Tafsiir al Jalaalayn (exegesis of the Qur'an authored by two Jalals) was the famous text used for the purpose. This work is recognized as one of the most popular exegeses of the Qur'an today because of its simple style, conciseness and it is one volume in length. At this level, it was generally assumed that the student had become a learned scholar with the ability to read, write and interpret the Qur'an and other Islamic writings.

### **Establishment of Modern Arabic Institutions in Nigeria.**

Many Quranic/Arabic schools have been modernized and developed into modern Arabic institutions. They have been organized in stages. Primary (Ibtidāiy), Junior Secondary or intermediate ('Idādiy and Senior secondary (Thānawiy) are the three stages. At the pre-primary stage, pupils are organized in mosques where benches are provided to sit on. Pupils have the opportunity to go through their lessons in a soberly impressive manner unlike the traditional Quranic School where pupils chanted their lessons in loud voice at the same time via rote learning method from their different slate/tablets. Teachers introduce text books to individual pupils and use chalk for writing on the chalkboard. In this modernized Arabic institutions, Arabic language and Islamic studies are the two main subjects that are offered at

the intermediate and secondary levels. They are broken into other subsidiary subjects like Grammar (Nahw), Reading (Qiraa'ah), Essay or composition (Inshaa), Dictation (Imlaa), Etymology (Sarf), Arabic literature (Adab) and in Islamic studies we have Islamic law (Sharii'ah), Jurisprudence (Fiqh), History (Taariikh), Prophetic Traditions (Hadith) and Quranic studies. Among these schools that exist in some parts of the country are: 'Al Adabiyyah Institute of Arabic studies, Ilorin, Institute of Arabic studies Elekuro, Ibadan, Aamin Arabic school, Iwo, Kharaashi Memorial Arabic school, Arabic Training Centre, Agege, Lagos and a host of others. The product of these Arabic institutions were able to excel and they perfectly understood the language and adequately used it for communication, correspondence, educational instruction and documentation of proceedings, history, research and transactions in addition to religious purposes (Lateef:89) They were also able to utilize it for composing literary works like poetry in different for composing literacy works like poetry in different themes and different forms of prose, especially during the Jihad period between 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries which was regarded as the golden period of Arabic literature in Nigeria ( Ibraheem:550).

There has been great improvement in the study of Arabic language and literature in Nigeria with the establishment of some Colleges of Arabic and Islamic studies in some states of the nation. Diploma certificates in Arabic and Islamic studies are given to students with the provision to further their higher studies in institutions in Nigeria and abroad. Some of the Colleges are affiliated with universities within and outside the country. These Colleges introduce some secular subjects in their curriculum apart from Arabic and Islamic studies which are treated as major courses. Examples of these institutions are: Kano State College of Arabic and legal studies Ilorin ( in affiliation with Ahmadu Bello University, Abu Zaria), Zulikha Abiola College of Arabic and Islamic studies, Abeokuta ( in affiliation to Usman Dan Fodio University (UDUS) Sokoto) and those affiliated to University of Ibadan which are Mufutau Lanihun College of Arabic and Islamic studies, Ibadan, Institute Arabic and Islamic Studies ,Ibadan, Ansar-Ud-Deen Institute of Islamic Studies, Isolo, Lagos and Sulaiman College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Ososa, Ijebu-Ode,Ogun State. Some of these institutions are still fully operating while some are partially becoming moribund today because of ineffective administration.

### **Establishment of Formal Western Institutions.**

With the coming of the Christian Missionaries and their attempt to take control of Nigeria between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, Arabic language and literature suffered a setback. The colonialists employed coercive measures and seductive strategies to abolish Arabic and its ornaments. In pursuit of their ambition, rulers and emirs were held hostage. Some were killed and thereby weakened their influence and seized their authority. Eventually, English became the official language of Nigeria and formal education was introduced by the colonialists through their Missionaries. They funded the schools and created marvelous and attractive job opportunities for their graduates. Muslims rejected this development initially for fear of being converted to Christianity and many of them refused to send their children to Western schools while in the Southern part of the country, a large number of Muslim children/wards abandoned their religion and Quranic/Arabic schools to join the new faith and Western schools (Raheem:2004). The suspicious of the Muslim parents soon became a reality when Muslim children that attended Western-oriented schools became Christians. Subsequently, there was a noticeable reduction in the number of Muslims who had Western education. The few intellectuals among the Muslims at the time soon became aware of the importance of Western oriented education which was an avenue to compete favourably with their Christian counterparts in the administration of government. Their desire was to have a school not under the canopy of Christianity but would serve the dual function of acquiring Western education and sound Islamic learning without any change of their identity. In order to rescue this



situation, a number of Islamic organizations took up the challenge in the second and third decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to provide Western education alongside Islamic training. From 1937, private Schools and colleges of Arabic and Islamic studies were established. These schools laid a solid foundation for Arabic education in Nigeria by changing the system of education from informal to formal, inviting Arabic teachers from countries like Egypt, Saudi-Arabia, Sudan etc with importation of Arabic text books from Arab countries. Among the Islamic organizations are: Ahmadiyyah Muslim movement, Nawarudeen Society of Nigeria, Jama'atul-Nasril Islam, Kaduna Ansaru-ul-islam Society, Ilorin, Ansaru-ud-deen Society in Lagos, Jamaa'at Islamiyyah, Lagos, Ahmadiyyah Muslim Jamaa'at, Anwarul Islam Society in Lagos and Muslim Mission in Ijebu ode, Ogun State, just to mention but a few. These Islamic organizations started the establishment of primary schools for Muslim children in their various locations with the approval of the colonial government. Some Muslim communities and Philanthropists also added to the effort of these Islamic organizations by establishing schools. The free primary Education Scheme in 1995 in the old Western region gave the abundant opportunity to the Southwestern Muslims to establish many schools in the region. This also gave rise to the establishment of Secondary and Teacher Training Institutions for the Primary school pupils after their graduation. This development was possible in the late 1940 and early 1950. In the schools established by Islamic societies, students developed interest in Arabic and Islamic learning and later pursued them in the University up to postgraduate level. It is noteworthy that Christian Religious knowledge was made available to Christian students who attend Muslim schools without forcing them to embrace Islam. This is in accordance to the teaching of the Qur'an which emphasizes that there is no compulsion in religion (Q2:256). The Muslim private schools' proprietors and Islamic organizations created a conducive environment to make the art of writing and speaking Arabic easier for the students. This was so beneficial to the country as products from the schools were all equipped with the wherewithal to take up responsibility of teaching the next generation, produce Imams for Muslim communities, preacher with sound knowledge of Islamic teachings, authors of Arabic books that are relevant to our environment (Lateef, 89). Later on, scholarships were given to the graduates of these private Arabic schools to study in Arab countries immediately after Nigeria's independence in 1960. This gesture increased enrolment of candidates in these private Arabic schools. It also boosted Arabic education as those graduates were employed to teach in government establishments. There was a new development in the evolution of a new set of Arabic scholars who are sound in Arabic education and were able to conduct their various programmes like Walimah (Graduation), naming (Aqeeqah), housewarming, Nikkah (Wedding) ceremonies in pure Arabic Language.

This development extended to the establishment of the Department of Arabic and Islamic studies in Nigerian Universities. The pioneering University in this regard is the University of Ibadan in 1962. From the introduction of a one-year certificate course to Diploma programmes which were mainly for the purpose of filling the gap experienced by private Arabic schools' students in their use of English language. In order to remedy their deficiency, some of the institutions were affiliated to the Universities offering Arabic and Islamic studies. A year abroad programme in an Arab country was also a criterion for the aim of improving the quality of the language and experiencing some of the Arab cultures. This programme was replaced with a year acculturation programme at Arabic Village, Ngala in Borno State, Nigeria introduced by Nigerian government. At this village, a group of people speaking Arabic as their native language is situated. They are known as Shuwa Arabs. The village is not well funded by the government just like most Nigerian institutions of higher learning. Despite the benefits derived from the learners and graduates of Arabic Private Schools in Nigeria in the preservation of manpower to the development of our society, adequate recognition and motivation in terms of grants are yet to be given to Arabic

education by the government. English and French are well recognized to the detriment of Arabic language and this apathy is negatively affecting Arabic education in Nigeria especially in the Southwestern region of the country. Until and unless there is a change of attitude by the government, Arabic education may remain where it is today without any development.

### **Conclusion**

Arabic was clearly the first sustainable language of literate communication that was introduced to the people of West Africa. The language was used to exchange correspondences before the European colonialists among Northern scholars and with the outside world. Today, Yorubaland/South-west Nigeria boast of the world class scholars who can go places and measure up to global standards in learning and dissemination of literacy via Arabic language. If properly employed, Arabic has the potentials of becoming a unifying language which Muslims all over the world could resort to for inter-communal and international communication as an appropriate option to in whatever the official language of their specific nations might be.

The functionality of Arabic as a language of literacy in South-western Nigeria during the colonial period is an unchallenged historical fact that has been subject of research by scholars to a great extent. An interesting phenomenon was the significant wide use of Arabic scripts to write the Yoruba language by the Muslim scholars. The script had been so adapted to write indigenous Oriental languages such as Malay, Kurdish, Urdu, Persian and Turkish. The Muslim scholars in the South-west Nigeria have always bewailed the overturning of the Arabic scripts in writing Yoruba language, as the practices had been with Yoruba Muslims, through the influence of Colonialism (Al-Iluri 1972). When the missionaries were closing a special convened conference in 1875, to finetune and adopt the Romanised script to write the Yoruba language which Samuel Ajayi Crowther and his cohorts had earlier worked on for decades, they were aware of the strong attachment of the Muslim world to Arabic language and the Arabic scripts. Predictably, their objective in searching for orthography for the Yoruba and other languages was to make the Christian scripture and literature readily and easily understood to the indigenous people in their own language which they did not find comfortable (Ogunbiyi, 2003).

Based on the foregoing discussion, it could be concluded that literacy in Arabic knowledge in Nigeria which has been in use for the acquisition of knowledge since its introduction to Hausaland in the early 14th century should be made to take its rightful position among other professions and more attractive by providing the necessary incentives. Government has to increase the present level of facilities for staff development programs such as sponsored seminars, conferences and workshops in addition to granting them permission to attend courses to update and upgrade their knowledge.

### **Recommendation**

In order to enhance literacy in Arabic language in Nigeria and to create a robust environment for research activities, scholars in the subject should explore the world of information and communication technology (ICT) to widen their academic horizon. Also, Arabic students should be exposed to modern technological challenges. There should be collaborative efforts from non-governmental organisations in the provision of internet facilities in Nigerian academic institutions. Government should play its role by providing internet facilities especially in our tertiary institutions. Above all, libraries should be computerized for online exploration in order to reduce time spent in the library and effectively too.

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