

AN EVALUATION OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES CURRICULUM IN SELECTED TRADITIONAL *ISLAMIYYAH* SCHOOLS IN ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE

Oni Idris A. I. (Ph.D) & Dawodu Aminat Opeyemi
Department of Islamic Studies, Crescent University, Abeokuta,
Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract

Traditional *Islamiyyah* schools known as *Madāris al-Islāmiyyah* or just *Madāris*, *Marākiz* or *Ma'hāhid* are institutions established by native clerics for the purpose of Arabic Language and Islamic training. Over the years, several such institutions have sprung up in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. However, observation shows that the curricula adopted by most of the *Madāris* usually differ and rarely provide qualities that could help attendees achieve self-dependency. Hence, this study compared the curricula of four selected *Madāris* with a view to highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, achievements and trials to proffer recommendations that might help improve their productivity and contributions to growth and development of the twin-discipline in Abeokuta, Ogun State. As a descriptive research, interview and observation served as tools for data gathering. Findings showed that the schools have produced several individual scholars who have also established Islamic institutions for the propagation of Islam. The schools have also created platforms for students to pursue higher degrees and secure good jobs in the future. However, the lack of scientific and technological informed curricula, poor attitude of the public to such schools, poor funding among others are impediments against maximising the potentials of the programmes of the schools. Thus, this paper recommended curricula review that engenders uniformity, promotes science and technology, government support, proper funding among others to improve Arabic and Islamic education in Abeokuta, Ogun State.

Keywords: Arabic and Islamic Curriculum, *Madāris Islāmiyyah* (Islamic institutions), Abeokuta.

Introduction

According to Fafunwa (2004), education is a process of skills acquisition, gaining knowledge, attitudinal change, ability to reason and perform tasks, adding value to oneself and the community, individual competence and promoting acceptable behaviours that enable individual to live successfully and contribute to the development of the society and nation. In addition, Ogbonnaya (2020), Aminuddin et.al (2010) and White (2010) explain that the development of a nation hinges on the level of her education. This shows why developed nations of the world often commit chunks of their budgetary allocations to education, thereby promoting the advancement of science and technology as a means to encouraging national development and general growth.

Arabic and Islamic education is without doubt, a religious obligation on all Muslim communities. It is indeed an obligation placed by the religion on every individual to study or

get general education that would enable him or her serve the Muslim community and others. Islam also imposes religious education that would help individuals to understand the unique position of Allah as well as their duties to Him and humanity.

Arabic and Islamic education began with Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) who often taught his companions through his eloquent speeches and the excellent rendition of the Glorious Qur'ān. With the spread of Islam, Arabic language, Islam's language of worship spreads across the world. In some cultures, it became the *lingua franca*. In others, it only became the second language of the people. Without doubt, its significance as one of the most popular languages in the world and the super position it holds in Islam made it a language that many people across the world respect.

Nonetheless, Islamic education since the medieval period has proven to be the bedrock of social development and growth. That was because Muslims did not limit their education to matters of Islamic jurisprudence or exegesis. They excelled in several sciences and became the envy of the world. Although, schools had started from the *Masājid* (Mosques), the *Masājid* gradually became great institutions of learning and embodiment of all forms of beneficial knowledge and skills. They offered education on matters of spirituality as well as the common science, jurisprudence, history and so on (Aminuddin et.al, 2010). Hence, Islamic philosophy of education aims for a system that is holistic and broad, one that is not limited to matters of faith because Islam is a religion that teaches that faith and socialisation are intertwined. Aminuddin et.al (2010: 2114) writes:

An authentic Islamic vision of education has the power to re-animate a truly holistic conception of education, which encompasses not only the higher intellectual faculties, but also the realization that human excellence is inseparable from beauty and virtue and should never be limited to an individualistic concept of personal achievement, mastery and success. This is a vision of *tauhid*, in which cognitive, moral and spiritual functions are all intertwined and interdependent, and necessarily actualized in right action.

This is because the true essence of faith will not be achieved if common necessities of life are deprived. Hence, Islamic philosophy of education provides a holistic approach that not only caters for spirituality but also the mundane needs of humankind. Nonetheless, Islam warns against excesses while also making it abundantly clear that neither a complete focus on mundane matters nor a complete focus on the hereafter alone can help humankind achieve true success. Therefore, Islam recommends *at-Tawassuṭ* (balance) on all matters (Glorious Qur'ān 28: 77; 2: 143).

Alfa et.al (2014) and Adeyemi (2016) explain that commercial contacts with people from North Africa paved way for the penetration of Arabic language into West Africa. Thus, through trade activities with North Africans, Arabic and Islamic literacy or education became a veritable tool for West African traders to enhance their commercial activities and further strengthen relations with their counterparts from North Africa. Through that, Arabic

language also became a means for documenting history and transactions. Hence, it is safe to say that Arabic language has also contributed immensely to civilization in West Africa.

Nigeria, the most populous black nation of the world and giant of Africa evidently has great number of Arabic literates whose expertise are limited to teaching Arabic and Islamic subjects like *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), *Hadīth* (prophetic teachings), *Sīrā* (Islamic history), *Sharī'ah* (Islamic law), becoming public preachers and leading as *Imām* in their communities (Alfa et.al, 2014).

Baba (2011) notes that, until recently, there was a gulf between traditional Arabic and Islamic education because Arabic language was the instructional medium for teaching and learning in the traditional Arabic and Islamic Studies schools while English Language has always been the medium of teaching in conventional schools. This in turn restricts the contact of the curricula of the traditional Arabic and Islamic Schools with the curricula of the western education based institutions. It also created a distinction between graduates of traditional Arabic and Islamic Studies schools and their counterparts in institutions of western education.

The *madrassa* curriculum, on the other hand, offers exposure to a classical Arabic and Islamic education and provides only limited space for a secular content and the use of English as an instructional or communicative medium (Baba, 2011: 17).

However, the demands for more goal-oriented education system imply that graduates of traditional Arabic and Islamic education system might find it difficult to compete for labour unless there is a reassessment that reflects the needs of the time and prepares them to be able to solve problems and contribute meaningfully to national growth and development like graduates of other disciplines.

Abeokuta, the capital city of Ogun State is today characterised among other attributes by the proliferation of traditional Arabic and Islamic schools known as *Madāris al-Islāmiyyah*, *Madāris*, *Marākiz* or *Ma'hāhid*. However, the apparent decline in moral values, lack of jobs and consequent struggle for money at public events as well as money rituals and fraud among some local clerics like *Alfa Tunde Olayiwola* as reported by the Punchng.com (2021) on December 27, 2021 imply that the education has perhaps lost its true values or became too lacking in its content. To combat these challenges, it is without doubt necessary to re-examine the syllabi and curricula of the traditional Arabic and Islamic institutions in the city with a view to making recommendations towards re-engineering Arabic and Islamic education in the society for enhanced human development and growth.

Traditional *Islamiyyah* education

Traditional Islamic education began inside the *Masājid*, where people sat around scholars who taught specific subjects of their various specializations to their students. Some of the most prominent earliest scholars of Islam studied while sitting with scholars inside the *Masājid*. Many schools throughout the world still maintain this traditional method of

education. Most notably, in the three holiest *Masājid* i.e. *Ka'abah*, *Masjid Nabawi* and *Aqṣā* Mosque in Jerusalem, Islamic scholars still hold classes while students sit around them.

In Yoruba land, several traditional Arabic and Islamic schools have existed long before the arrival of Shaykh Adam Abdullah al-Ilori and Shaykh Kamaludeen al-Adabi, The schools had functioned in Yoruba land for centuries without a particular form or established syllabus. Local Muslims were groomed to become *Ma'lim* (informal teachers of traditional Arabic and Islamic schools) or Alfa dedicated to trado-islamic healing. However, the emergence of the two scholars, Shaykh Adam Abdullah al-Ilori and Shaykh Kamaludeen al-Adabi in the 20th century led to a revolution in the education system.

It is worthy of note that the Federal Government of Nigeria through some of her interventions have created a platform for traditional Arabic and Islamic Studies to thrive and compete with other disciplines. Among such interventions is the integration of traditional Arabic and Islamic Studies institutions to suit the current universal basic education system, providing and regulating the syllabus of Arabic and Islamic Studies for primary and secondary schools to ensure adequacy and effectiveness (Dahiru and Balarabe, 2019). The recent addition of entrepreneurial skills in the syllabi for all university students as reflected in the National Universities Commission's Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards for Nigerian University System (2022) will further strengthen the employability of Nigerian graduates including graduates of Arabic and Islamic schools.

According to Shehu (2006), the *Tsaganya* programme in northern Nigeria has developed well enough to allow a gradual integration of traditional Qur'ānic schools into the federal government's education system. This owes majorly to the establishment of colleges of Arabic and Islamic Studies to train teachers for the twin-discipline by Islamic organisations and subsequently through government intervention. However, unlike the *Tsangaya* system in northern Nigeria which has received government patronage and support, the lack of adequate synergy between the government and traditional Arabic and Islamic institutions in Abeokuta leaves the gap unclosed (Dahiru and Balarabe, 2019). The traditional Arabic and Islamic institutions thus operate on different methodologies, study materials and programmes.

The selected schools

For the purpose of this study, four (4) traditional Arabic and Islamic Studies schools in Abeokuta were selected. The schools were Zulikha Abiola Arabic and Islamic Studies Centre; Dār Ihyā ad-Dīn, Ma'had al-Baṣīrah and Kamaludeen al-Adabiy al-Egbawiy school of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

- i. Zulikha Abiola Arabic and Islamic Studies Centre: Chief Moshood Kashimawo Abiola established and managed the school through the late Chief Imam of Gbagura, Shaykh Sadrudeen Akanmu Biobaku in the early 1980s. The proprietor was said to have established it in memory of his mother. That was why he named it *Zulikha Abiola*. The motto of the school is *Al-'Ilm Nūr* (Knowledge is Light). Shaykh Sadrudeen Akanmu Biobaku also managed the school under the supervision of the

- late sage, Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilori who appointed Shaykh Shadhili Sambo as the first principal of the school.
- ii. The school runs primary (*Ibtidāiyyah*), junior secondary (*‘Idādiyyah*), senior secondary *Thanāwiyyah* while an affiliate college of the school, Zulikah Abiola College of Arabic and Islamic Studies ran diploma in Arabic and Islamic Studies. The school offers subjects in traditional Qur’ānic training and other subjects in Arabic and Islamic studies. Many graduates of the school serve in teaching capacities, Mosque management and leadership. The school does not provide students with courses or training in entrepreneurship, science or technology. This leaves every student to find means to provide for their needs after eight (8) years of learning Arabic and Islamic Studies.
 - iii. Dār Iḥyā al-adhān: the *Mufassir* of Gbagura Abeokuta Muslim community, Shaykh Dawud Amoo Toriola established Dār Iḥyā al-adhān in Isolo area of Lagos State in 1991 but later moved the school to Oja Agbo, Agura Road Abeokuta, Ogun State. Among the objectives set out for the school were to mould students into young scholars who can contribute meaningfully to the intellectual discourse of Islam and be free from extortion, which is having a high profile among young people including Muslims. However, the school across its levels of (*Ibtidāiyyah*), junior secondary (*‘Idādiyyah*), senior secondary (*Thanāwiyyah*) only offers subjects that border around Arabic language, Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic History, Exegesis and so on. The curriculum neither has a space for the inculcation of science and technology nor entrepreneurial skills needed by the students to fend for their needs or compete with others in the labour market.
 - iv. Ma’had al-Baṣīrah: it is an institution established and christened Insight Institute for Islamic and Technical Studies. Dr. Afiz Musa established the school in hope to training students to achieve their dreams of learning the rudiments of Arabic language and Islam. He also intended to sway the minds of young Muslim men away from *Jalabi* (a trado-islamic healing that in most cases involves acts of *Shirk* (idolatry and magic), deception and fraud. The school runs programmes such as preparatory (*Tamhīdī*), secondary and diploma trainings levels in Arabic and Islamic Studies. Despite taking a tour around Southwest States of Nigeria to observe some of the prominent traditional Arabic and Islamic schools with a view to understudying them and taking from their experiences and methodologies, the school could still only provide a curriculum that could enable her students earn experience and prerequisite knowledge for further study in Arabic and Islamic Studies. However, the curriculum does not prepare students to be able to compete meaningfully in the labour market or make inventions that could move the community forward or aid national growth.
 - v. Kamaludeen al-Adabiy al-Egbawiy School of Arabic and Islamic Studies: Shaykh, Professor Kamaldeen Abdul-Azeez Balogun established the school for the purpose of training Muslim children on the memorization of the Glorious Qur’ān and basic studies in Arabic and Islamic Studies. The school started as a school of Qur’ānic studies but now trains students across junior and secondary levels. The school also

has special proficiency programme for adults who wish to learn the basics of Islam. The school through her affiliates so provide trainings in Shari'ah intelligence and Islamic jurisprudence. However, the curriculum of the school does not have provisions for her graduates to compete with graduates in secular institutions whose training allows them to learn some construction, technological manipulations and science.

SWAT on the curricula adopted by the schools

SWAT is an acronym for Strength, Weaknesses, Achievements and Threats. Shao-Wen (2012) defines curriculum as efforts aimed at achieving specific educational goals and objectives. He explains that it is a checklist of desired outcomes from a plan; list of events carefully outlined and designed to realize the set goals and objectives. The curriculum development process usually contains clear and specific observable behavioural objectives that the curriculum should achieve (Kelly, 2004). A curriculum is rated on its strength to produce the most desired results an enshrined in the objectives of the programme for which it was made.

This section highlights the strengths, weaknesses, achievements and threats or challenges of the traditional Arabic and Islamic institutions in Abeokuta Ogun State.

Strengths: it is to the credit of the schools that they offer subjects such as *Hifz al-Qur'an* (Qur'an memorization), *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), *Hadith* (Prophetic traditions), '*Arabiyyah* (General Arabic language), '*Arud* (Poetry), *Sira* (Islamic History), *Usul al-Hadith* (Science of Hadith), *Sharf* (Morphology), *Naḥwu* (Grammar), *Ath-thaqāfah* (Education), *Hisāb* (Arithmetic) and others. The subjects enable students achieve versatility in communication, oratory, leadership and equip them with the requisite knowledge needed to serve the Islamic or jurisprudential needs of their immediate communities. Through affiliation to some public tertiary institutions, graduates of the schools also enjoy the opportunity of pursuing degrees in Islamic Studies with certificates obtained from the school through special programmes offered by National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies (MBAIS). This has proven very essential in shoring up the shortage of Arabic and Islamic studies teachers in public and private schools in Abeokuta and Nigeria. It has also provided job opportunities in other sectors especially where competency takes precedence over certificates.

Weaknesses: it is worthy of note that the schools were established for the purpose they currently serve, however, times are changing and the challenges that are emerging with the changes imply that the Muslim community must rise to it. The traditional Arabic and Islamic institutions being the main institutions of Islamic training cannot achieve their full potentials through their present curricula. That is because the curricula do not have provision for secular or material needs of the students. Without the introduction of professional secular subjects or trainings that allow students develop fully through the three domains of learning i.e. cognitive, affective and psychomotor into the curricula, the years they spend learning core subjects in Arabic and Islam might be considered less-utilisable.

Achievements: the schools have achieved greatly as their efforts are yielding better understanding and approach to Islam. The city has also seen a surge in the rise of Islamic

organisations, *Da'wah* (proselytization) groups and others. Kamaludeen al-Adabiy al-Egbawiy's collaboration with the prestigious al-Azhar university in Cairo, Egypt opens glorious opportunity for affiliation in the future, more conducive study environment, more resources and interaction with several excellent teachers and students from across the world to students of the school who earn Azhar's scholarships. Similarly, the collaboration of Ma'had al-Başīrah with Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria affords willing students the opportunity to earn their degrees without much ado.

Threats: this represents the challenges that bedevil the traditional Arabic and Islamic schools in Abeokuta. Among such challenges are:

- i. **Curricula inadequacy:** the curricula of the schools discussed in this study show great inadequacy because they do not contain contents that could help students improve their cognitive and psychomotor abilities. Without provision of training in crafts and innovative ideas, graduates of the school would be left with the challenges of wealth creation. This has led many of them into systematic extortion in gatherings and several others have resorted to fraud under the guise of *Jalabi* and recently, internet fraud (Afiz, 2015).
- ii. **Labour:** with skills and ability to render quality services, graduates would be more valuable. The lack of required skills makes graduates of the traditional Arabic and Islamic schools unemployable, as they do not receive special skills that could complement their knowledge and consciousness on morality and faith.
- iii. **Lack of sponsorship:** scientific and technical training requires heavy financial commitment. While most of the schools are managed through charity or free of tuition or meagre tuitions that hardly cater for the least needs of the school, it would remain largely impossible to improve on that *status quo*.
- iv. **Attitude to religious education:** the attitude of Muslims to Arabic and Islamic education in the region is discouraging. This is partly because most people rarely see the values in that system of education because students are only meant to become clergymen or traditional healers after their education. As a result, both teachers and students of the institutions are often looked down upon.
- v. **Government attitude:** the government does not recognize most traditional Arabic and Islamic studies schools in Abeokuta because they are often unregistered. This implies that the government does not recognize the certificates of such institutions. Hence, it becomes quite difficult for graduates of the institutions to seek employment, compete in government, or corporate enterprises. It also implies that the school would have neither government's protection nor government's financial backing.

Conclusion

Traditional Arabic and Islamic education is the bedrock of ideal Islamic understanding, practice and propagation everywhere in the world. This paper has established that the two are inseparable from each other. While also noting that challenges abound, this paper affirms that traditional Arabic and Islamic education has contributed remarkably to faith and job creation. The paper notes that traditional Arabic and Islamic schools in Abeokuta are yet to reach their full potentials due to the deficiencies in their curricula, lack of uniformity, pitiable funding, poor public attitude and poor marketability of graduates of the institutions. The paper thus recommended a revamp of the curricula to reflect the reality of time, better funding, government recognition, science and technological schemes and skill-oriented training for improvement.

Recommendations

Having identified the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional Arabic and Islamic education curricula in the selected schools in Abeokuta, the paper recommended the following:

- i. Scholars of Arabic and Islamic studies through organisations such as National Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS) in collaboration with traditional scholars and clerics teaching in the grassroots or traditional Arabic and Islamic Studies schools in the city should have constant symposia to discuss the differences in the curricula of the school to create a uniformed system that allows for maximization of the years of study in the traditional Arabic and Islamic institutions.
- ii. The schools should begin to prepare students for the reality of the immediate environment by ensuring that crafts and skills are included in their curricula and seek funding for their institutions.
- iii. The schools should begin to seek further affiliations and sponsorship deals to help relieve their financial burdens and allow them broaden their objectives and contribute more meaningfully to growth and development.
- iv. Muslim organisations should promote public sensitization and mobilization for improved attitude towards Arabic and Islamic education. Improved goal-oriented objectives that clearly cater for both the material and immaterial needs of students would improve public perception and attitude to Arabic and Islamic education.
- v. Imams should use their pulpits as a means to reaching out to people, informing them about the significance of Arabic and Islamic Studies for Islam, Muslims and national growth and development.
- vi. Muslim leaders and political representatives should use their status and connections to the advantage of the Muslim community by lobbying influential members of the community and government to make favourable policies for the improvement of the traditional Arabic and Islamic schools. This would make them more marketable,

improve overall attitude to it and secure the future of Arabic language and Islamic studies in the city.

- vii. National Body of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NBAIS) should see the regulation of a unified curriculum for all Arabic schools as her statutory assignment.

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Interviews:

Name	Age	Date	Venue
Professor Kamaldeen A. Balogun	70+	15/6/2022	Kamaldeen al-Adabiy al-Egbawiy School of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Abeokuta.
Shaykh Dawud Toriola	50+	16/6/2022	Gbágùrà Central Mosque, Oke-Ido, Abeokuta.
Dr. Afiz Musa	40+	17/6/2022	Mahd al-Basīrah, Oke-Lantoro, Abeokuta.
Dr. Khidr Mustapha	70+	18/6/2022	Zulaykha Abiola School of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Abeokuta.