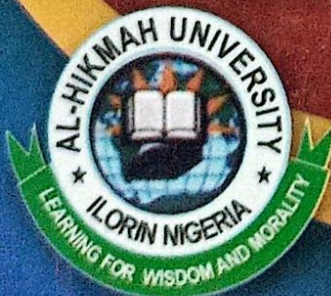


AL-ASAALAH **INTERNATIONAL** **JOURNAL**

VOLUME
6 NO 1

PUBLISHED BY:

**DEPARTMENTS OF ARABIC
& ISLAMIIC STUDIES
COLLEGE OF
THE HUMANITIES**



**AL-HIKMAH UNIVERSITY
ILORIN, NIGERIA**

➤ **OCTOBER 2016**

ISSN: 2141-6885 ◀

THE PROBLEM OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN PRIVATE ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN WEST AFRICA: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Arabic language and Islamic education in West Africa is faced with different problems. During the colonial era, insurmountable obstacles were laid on the smooth ways of the Arabic language and the Islamic education scholarship. However, in the post colonial period, Arabic language and Islamic education began to flourish and witness an unprecedented development, albeit at different pace, in every country of the region. Steps needed to be taken for the sustainability of the advancement of Arabic and Islamic education in the twenty first century are explicitly elucidated in this paper.

Introduction

Private Arabic and Islamic Schools are the institutions established by private individuals and Islamic organizations to propagate the course of Arabic language and Islamic scholarship. In West Africa, Arabic School system, until recently, has been the concern of private individuals or organizations. Government's involvement in the system is only limited, in most cases, to some states in some mostly Muslim populated states as in the case of the northern part of Nigeria. This may not however be unconnected with the Islamic religious underpinning of both its curriculum development and administration of the system. Till today, many people in the region refer to Arabic school as *Islamiyyah* schools and the two words are used interchangeably, and also do not differentiate scholars of Arabic from those of Islamic Studies.

The Islamic system of education commenced with the establishment of *Katātib*, a level where elementary education including literacy took off. At this level, instructions were given to Muslim children in Qur'anic recitation, literacy and grammar. According to Hubbard, approximately 3,000 of such schools existed in Baghdad in the 3rd century of *Higrah*, (sic) and in the 14th century, 12,000 mosques in Alexandria were used as centres of learning. In Nigeria, the British government confirmed that there were almost 13,313 Islamic schools with 205,827 pupils as at 1919 in the northern part of the country alone. The upgrade of *Katātib* level to *Madaris* system of schooling culminated from the insatiable thirst of Muslims for learning,

scholarship and general education; for *Madrasah* system was more organized than the *Katatib*.¹

It is a well-known fact that the introduction of the Arabic language in various parts of the Islamic world, including West and Sub-saharan Africa, accompanied the emergence of the Arabic school system, as distinct from the traditional Islamic education system, can be traced to 1904 when, according to Al-Ilory, one Shaykh Muhammad Mustapha Effendy introduced the first-ever Arabic School in Lagos. Therefore, Shaykh Abdul Kareem El-Tarabilsy (d. 1926) established his own in Kano. Shaykh Muhammad Labib, also known as Tajul Adab (d. 1922), established his own in Ilorin. It should be pointed out that there was no curriculum of note during this era. The satisfaction of the teacher or the proprietor then was the successful accomplishment or deep knowledge of some Arabic books, such as *Miftāhul-Lughatil Arabiyyah* for Arabic Grammar; *Al-Akhdary*, *Ar-Risalat* and *Al-Ashmawy* for Islamic Jurisprudence; and *Atbaqu Thahab* for advanced Arabic Grammar. Comprehension and erudition in these books was sufficient to make their trainee a scholar, and as a matter of fact, these books have almost gone into oblivion today; no modern Arabic schools use them anymore, and only very few old scholars have them, having inherited them from their progenitors.²

The first major development in Private Arabic School system in Nigeria was the establishment of *Shari'ah Islamiyyah* School in Kano in 1934. The school was co-founded by emirs in the North. Shaykh Adam Al-Ilory (d. 1992) established *Al-Markaz*, i. e. Center for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Agege in 1952. The Nigerian Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies was founded in Ibadan in 1957 by Shaykh Murtadha Abdus-Salam, while *Al-Azhar* Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies was established in Ilorin by *Ansarul Islam* Society of Nigeria in 1964.³ Probing into Problem of Arabic and Islamic education in Private Islamic Schools in West Africa in the past, present and prospects of the twin-disciplines in the future as well as series of progress made so far by these schools are the primary concerns of this paper.

The Former State of Islam, Arabic and Islamic Education in West Africa

The arrival of Islam in many West African countries in the early first century of the *Hijrah* calendar, (7th century a. d.), coincided with the proliferation of the Arabic language in this region prior to the advent of colonial rule. According to Razaq, a heavy setback befell Arabic education as well as Qur'an schools in West Africa as a culmination of Muslims' contact with all colonial imperialist leaders, except the Turks in Murzuk in the northern Sahara. The Turkish's exception is because great significance was attached to the learning of Arabic and Qur'an by both the Turkish rulers and their subjects.⁴ In other parts of the region, particularly in the coastal parts of the British

territories of Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia and Sierra Leone as well as in the Francophone countries like Dahomey (Republic of Benin), Togo, Guinea and Senegal, in addition to Cameroun especially under German occupation, there was a drastic wane in the enrolment and a sharp reduction in the pupils attendance at Quran schools.⁵

A testimony to the veracity of the above statement is the confirmation by Abu Ubaid who attested to the constant use of Arabic in the Kingdom of Ghana when he states that:

The treasurer, interpreters and most of the ministers employed by the Sultan, as well as those who held the account books of the treasury, were Muslims because they were the only learned people who could read and write. Arabic, of course, was the language they used in their writings and reading.⁶

Undeniably, Arabic and Islamic education flourished in the areas referred to by Smith as "West African Muslim aristocracy". The areas comprised Northern Nigeria, the Republics of Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia and Guinea.⁷ In the fifth century a. h., (11th century a. d.), the Kingdoms of Kanem in the then Chad, the Kingdom of Mali, the Futi Kingdom in Senegal adopted Islam in its totality, thus metamorphosing them into Muslim Kingdoms. These African nations and others adopted Arabic as their cultural, educational, religious and administrative language as well as the linguistic medium of their commercial transactions and official correspondence, and several other activities. This served well the cause of spreading its learning and extending its use.⁸

This assertion is corroborated by the availability of language correspondences between the existing communities of the time. Such correspondences between the Olubadan and the Emir of Katsina, and the Sultan of Sokoto and the Iwo community (now in Osun State) were documented by Ogunbiyi and Reichmuth.⁹ Furthermore, similar official Arabic correspondences between the Borno court and the British government, the Borno scholars and the Sokoto jihadists, and between the Sultan of Sokoto and the Iwo community were firmly documented by the two renowned scholars.¹⁰

With the spread of Islamic faith in this region, which has in modern times developed into several countries, Arabic became the language of writing and reading and the language of communication among these countries in various fields, and such was the case until the advent of colonialism. On this, El-Quadghiri states inter alia:

Thus, with the passage of time, and thanks to the spread of Quranic schools, the proliferation of scholars, authors and poets, and the use of Arabic in all fields of the cultural, administrative,

economic and religious life, this language became, par excellence, Africa's first language, since its spread was not limited to west and central Africa, but reached its eastern and northern reaches as well. In other words, it became the lingua franca of the peoples of a continent when this continent had no language for religion, culture, education, governance, etc. It served not only as a communication channel among Muslim communities, but brought together all Africans, even if only in the social, political and trading fields.¹¹

On the African Continent, countries like Algeria, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia natively speak and officially use Arabic on a daily basis. Currently, Arabic enjoys the same international recognition as English, and French. It is one of the languages used by the African Union (AU). It was adopted by the United Nations Organization (UNO) as one of its languages in 1974 after the Arab/Israeli war. It has also been used by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as a medium of interaction.¹²

Several organizations got convinced by the attachment and commitment of the African people to Arabic and Islamic education in spite of insurmountable hindrance created by colonial administrations in the region. These organizations use Arabic script in their campaigns as well as literacy programmes. Thrilled by this strong attachment, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) entered into an agreement with the Islamic Development Bank to finance a programme for the eradication of illiteracy in Africa using the Arabic script for its campaigns. The programme is being financially supported by the World Islamic Call Society and the Institute for Arabization and Research in Morocco.¹³

Problems of Arabic and Islamic Education in Islamic Schools in West Africa in the Early Twentieth Century

The uninterrupted use of Arabic continued in many West African countries until the emergence of colonial administration in the various parts of the continent after which the Arabic language and its script were ferociously fought and the teaching of the Qur'an and Arabic language were truncated. The Arabic script was supplanted with the Latin alphabet and was imposed on the peoples of the continent.¹⁴

In Nigeria, for instance, the proliferation of the Arabic language was hampered in a number of ways one of which is the colonialists pouring of financial and moral assistance on the activities of Christian Mission Schools which were rivals to the

Muslims' to gain more patronage.¹⁵ Moreover, in Yorubaland, according to Nasiru (cited in Ibrahim), payment of a handsome monthly salary and emoluments to the teachers in secular schools was arranged for by the parent body of the mission from Europe. Owing to the uninterrupted financial flows to the Christian Missionaries from abroad, free education policy in which books, slates and writing materials were freely distributed to those in their schools. More importantly, lucrative appointments in the government offices awaited graduates of this missionary schools.¹⁶

Conversely, Muslim scholars then only relied on voluntary gifts from the public for their livelihood. Graduates of the Muslim schools then were so concerned over their future where no labour markets expected them upon graduation. Their services were circumscribed to merely Islamic social gatherings and functions such as naming, wedding and funeral activities and ceremonies.¹⁷

With great perseverance and stiff resistance of the Muslims to all Christian Scheme, the Muslims remained glued to their religion as well as to the Arabic language and Islamic education. The Christian evangelists forged ahead to lure them into accepting their religion and education by adopting series of cunning approaches and sophisticated means by embarking on, according to Gbadamosi (cited in Ibrahim), house to house evangelical campaigns, engaging in series of dialogue with Muslims leaders and dispatching freely Arabic Bible to the Muslims. Apart from these tactics, influential religious personalities such as Rev. M. S. Cole, Rev. James Johnson, Rev. T. A. J. Ogunbiyi and Rev. M. T. Euler Ajayi went into a total immersion of the Arabic language learning to enable them tackle the Muslims.¹⁸

The unfortunate state of feebleness, backwardness and stagnation which befell the Muslims in Africa at the end of the nineteenth century led to a considerable set-back experienced by Arabic and Islamic education during the colonial era. During that time, the Arabic language and Islamic education went through a phase of regression culminating from the poor political, economic, social and cultural conditions of the African Muslims.¹⁹ Corroborating the above statement, El-Quadghiri said:

In fact, the statistics available, though very scarce, proved beyond doubt that African Muslims remained attached to the language of the Quran and religious education to the last moment. Once they realized the dangers posed by such invaders as missionaries and colonizers, to their religion, faith and Qur'anic language, they even became stauncher in their attachment to this language, and to the schools that dispensed a Qur'anic education and taught the basics of the Islamic faith. They fought colonialism and the missionary campaigns with all their might and refused to enroll their children in the colonizer's schools. Some of them are still

attached to these principles though they have paid a dear price for this, been fought, marginalized, besieged from all sides and kept aside in all vital fields.²⁰

Besides, the subjugation of the language of the Qur'an and the Islamic education was supported by the Christian church, making the colonial masters to nearly succeed in burying the learning of the language. They fought the Muslims in several ways, and according to Gbadamosi (cited in Ibrahim), derogatory utterances were reported to have been made by the missionaries against the Muslims and their faith. They were depicted as primitive, "obstacle to the progress of civilization and all that is pure, holy and noble." Defiantly, Rev. M. J. Luke was quoted to have said that Islam is a religion that did not do any good for the country (Nigeria) and did not teach the people anything whatsoever.²¹ El-Quadghiri further states that the colonial masters prevented the African Muslims from studying Arabic, Qur'an and other religious related matters, inhibited its proliferation and sharply reduced the existing ones. They went further by supplanting the use of Arabic with French in the Francophone domains, in all administrative, political, juridical, legislative and cultural fields. Ferocious attacks against the use of Arabic script were also launched by the colonial masters, changing the transcription of native languages from Arabic into the Latin alphabet. Furthermore, another severe crusader war was waged against the spread of Arabic and the Islamic education by the colonial masters by distorting the image of Arabic, equating it with backwardness and barbarism.²²

By the time the stiff resistance and strong opposition exhibited by the Yoruba Muslims against the Christian education was going on, Islamic education was uninterruptedly flourishing in the Hausaland, because the northern part of Nigeria was un-accessible to the Christian missions. When they eventually gained access to them, they found Islamic education there well entrenched and unshakable. As a result, Arabic language continued to be used as a medium of instruction in the few schools established and controlled by colonialists in the region.²³

Indeed, in the early years of colonial rule, British colonial officials in Northern Nigeria were fascinated by the existence of a formal system of Islamic education. According to the 1931 census figures, two-thirds of Northern Nigeria's 10 million inhabitants were Muslims. It also had, the government estimated, 30,000 to 35,000 Islamic schools enrolling 200,000 to 360,000 pupils.²⁴

As the Muslims in the north accepted and finally adopted the Western education, the Qur'an and 'Ilm schools were relegated to the background and Arabic language was supplanted by English as the language of instruction.²⁵ Commenting on

the agonies of Muslim educational systems caused by colonialism, Abdul 'Alim narrates that:

Approximately 200 years of colonization led to a situation such that the Muslims could not even recall what their educational system was. The public was brainwashed that the main light of knowledge and the technological advancement was a gift of colonization.²⁶

The adoption of Islamic education by the Muslims was stigmatized by their missionary opponents as inimical to progress and development and that it was the reason for their backwardness. To their opponents, western education is synonymous with prosperity of life. This assertion was even substantiated by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the late Sardauna of Sokoto, while addressing a group of students at the London Constitutional Conference in 1957, regretting the conspicuous backwardness in the North and ascribed it to the lateness of the Northerners to embrace western education stating that:

We are now paying the penalty for the reluctance of our forebearers to accept modern education methods. But it has been a good lesson to us and has made us strive to greater efforts to make up for this lost time.²⁷

The situation in Nigeria was similar to that of Ghana because of the similarities of the Muslim societies in both countries. Both were colonized by the British, using the indirect rule. The Muslims in Ghana are to a large extent also Hausa-speaking, and are also found in the Northern part of the country.²⁸

Regarding Guinea and Senegal, they were both colonized by France. Unlike the British, the French did not practice indirect rule. However, the pictures of the Muslims remain the same as in the Anglophone countries. In the Francophone communities, the colonial authority introduced forcefully the frenchification of education at all levels, the administration as well as public life. They even allocated an astronomical sum of budget for the opening of public, community and specialized schools under various forms, and facilitated everything with bountiful fortunes on these schools.²⁹

In the end, missionary organizations were permitted to establish schools in every nook and cranny of Africa, bestowing on them the state funds, and providing them with maximum security, protection and encouragement to spread their mission by competing with the remaining Islamic schools. These missionary organizations were also galvanized into intensifying their efforts to raise new generations of people in the continent to a religion other than that of their parents and culture.³⁰

At the inception of the second half of the nineteenth century, various stringent recommendations were issued by French officials in charge of implementing France's linguistic policy in West Africa to their leaders as to the necessary steps to be taken to ensure the success of their schemes. Reports and recommendations were also dispatched to the French government by the France representatives in the region as to measures that are likely to guarantee the implantation of their linguistic policies.³¹

Citing synopses from several recommendations and reports of officials and representatives of the French government in the region, El-Quadghiri states that in 1856, France's governor for Senegal, Mr. Faidherbe, wrote to the Minister of French Colonies a report saying:

The desire shown by Negroes to learn Arabic is a real disaster for us and we should exercise utmost caution. We should in no way encourage this desire. French is the language that we should teach them, in our own interests.³²

In May 1856, Mr. Barbier, the High Commissioner of missionary expeditions, wrote to the said administrator of French colonies a report where he said: "We should strictly censor the teachers of the Arabic language in Senegal, irrespective of their category and religious affiliation".³³

In 1857, the French administration in Senegal issued a law stipulating the followings:

- (a) All Qur'anic school teachers should send their students who have reached eleven years of age and more to catholic mission schools for two hours a day to attend French classes.
- (b) All teachers in Qur'anic schools should obtain special dispensation when they wish to open a new school.

In 1886, another directive was issued, known as the Multivers Decision, calling for the closing of Arabic schools in Senegal for the first hours during which French schools are open, in order not to compete with them.³⁴

The suppression of the Arabic language by the Christian missionaries as well as colonial powers continued unabated against all Muslim establishments viewed as aiding the spread of Islam and the proliferation of its education and language. Assessing Islam, paganism and Christianity in Africa, the *Revue de Paris*, says:

Islam is advancing at a phenomenal rate, winning on the average half a million new adherents annually, not on the ground of its ancient roots, but of the new conditions of life developed in the last century, so that a conservative estimate might reckon 50% of black Africans as in some measure Muslims. . . In 1950 four graduates of El-Azhar opened Muslim schools in Mabaku, which

were making lightning progress until the French government stepped in and swiftly closed them down.³⁵

Reacting with temperament to the delivery of judgment in the court of law in the Arabic language, William Ponto, France's governor for West Africa decreed on May 8, 1911 saying that:

Arabic only penetrated in Africa with the call to Islam, it is the sacred language in the eyes of the black. I am therefore forced to give the order that, as of now, all judgements made by the local courts must be drafted in French only. The copies of the judgements handed over to the concerned parties must also be written in our language. You are summoned to give the same instructions when drafting administrative documents, whatever may be their nature that has to be brought to the attention of the natives, whether they are letters or posters. For the same purpose, you are invited to instruct the district administrators to inform the locals that for their requests and complaints drafted in a language other than French they shall receive no response.³⁶

In 1912, Robert Arnault, Head of the Islamic Affairs Division of Dakar wrote a report in which he said that "France's policy must be firm in West Africa, and an end should be put to the activities of Qur'anic school teachers and of the Murabitun (religious scholars) in the country".³⁷

The Present State of Arabic and Islamic Education in West Africa

In the post direct colonial presence in West Africa and the Sub-Saharan region, precisely in the sixties of the early twentieth century, the Arabic language and the Islamic education began to witness tremendous progress. Muslims in West Africa started the reopening of Arabic and Qur'anic schools which had been maliciously closed. There was an influx of African children to the Arab world to study the Arabic language and the Islamic education, thus, rejuvenating their desire to regain their culture as well as their real identity. Presently, the establishment of Arabic and Islamic schools is flourishing. Although it may be very difficult to pinpoint the exact number of the existing Arabic schools in Nigeria, the infatuation and influx of people to study Arabic and Islamic Studies in today Nigeria is a living witness to the progress, prosperity and development of this field of knowledge, albeit the progress has been slowly.³⁸

A cursory look at the pace of the development of Arabic and Islamic education in countries like the Republics of Niger, Mali and Senegal reveals the statistics collected by a local expert in 2001, as to the number of formal schools— public owned

and community run – has reached 310, offering Arabic and Islamic education with students approximated to be 55,165 between 1995-2001, irrespective of the Qur'anic schools which are densely populated and estimated at 50,000 schools. It is noteworthy that the Islamic University of Niger established in 1986 by the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) is full of Arabic students.³⁹

In order to further boost the proliferation of Arabic and Islamic education, the Islamic Bank for Development has generously granted a loan of \$1.4 billion US dollars to support the training of Arabic/French education and equip human resources, provide curricula, construct classrooms, provide infrastructures and other necessary equipment in order to improve the Arabic language teaching and learning.⁴⁰

Regardless of its incorporation into the curriculum of the national university of N'djamena, the capital of the Republic of Chad, Arabic is also being offered in the King Faisal University since its inception in N'djamena in 1991 as well as in the newly established Libyan Faculty of Islamic Da'awah in the country. In the same vein, Arabic department exists in the University of Dakar, Senegal, in addition to its study in the Higher Islamic Institute in Louga, Senegal, established by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1987, and affiliated to the Islamic University in Al-Madinah under the supervision of the Saudi Ministry of *Waqfs*. Fortunately enough, the Libyan government has recently established another branch of the Libyan Faculty of Islamic Da'awah in Dakar.⁴¹

Furthermore, there are strong departments of Arabic in the universities of Conakry, the Republic of Guinea, and Bamako, the Republic of Mali. In the Republic of Benin, the World Islamic Call Society built a Higher Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies. As at year 2003, the same organization proposed the establishment of an Islamic faculty in Burkina Faso and Gambia.⁴²

Arabic language has achieved progress in many dimensions. It is used to write many Nigerian languages in what is known as "*Ajami*". Such a development is commented on by Oloyede as thus:

A domestication of the Arabic language was later witnessed in the writing of local languages using Arabic letters. This is what is being referred to as '*Ajami*'. An example of this is the Arabic inscription on the Nigerian (Naira) currencies to indicate the value in Hausa language but using Arabic script. In the southwestern Nigeria, Arabic became a means of documenting herbal materials and medicine. It was not a surprise to find Arabic inscriptions on herbal bottles like *Agunmu iba, agunmu narun* etc. Some herbal accounts were also kept using '*Ajami*' method. Ignorance was behind the campaign against and the elimination of the Hausa

meaning from the notes under the erroneous belief that it was an Islamic symbol.⁴³

The realization of the impressive contributions of Arabic and Islamic Studies to the knowledge of world civilization in general and West African history and culture in particular made some universities in the world to introduce Arabic and Islamic Studies into their respective institutions. The fortunes of Arabic and Islamic Studies came to a lime-light in the Western world when the twin-disciplines got incorporated into some Western colleges and universities. As far back as the seventeenth century, Arabic had successfully crept into a university curriculum in England. At the start, its study was in tandem with other Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Syriac to facilitate the comprehension of Biblical exegesis. In early colonial America, Arabic was offered. In 1654, it became a course of study at Harvard College, while it was introduced at Yale in 1700, at Dartmouth and Andover in 1807 and at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1822.⁴⁴

In another tremendous development recorded by the Arabic language, it received a terrific boost in 1957 having been granted the sum of \$176,500 by the Ford Foundation via a consortium of five universities in an answer to the request from a Social Science Studies (SSRC) committee on Arabic instruction. The five universities are Columbia, Harvard, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) Johns Hopkins, Michigan and Princeton.⁴⁵

Although the field of Islamic Studies came late to be sought for by Western universities, it became prominent in the United States due to the upsurge interest of the Americans to probe and understand the historical sources of Islam as well as to document encounters between American society and the Muslim world. Among the historical events that motivated the study of Islam and Islamic Studies include:

The founding of the Republic, diplomatic and economic relations of the U.S with Muslim countries, migration of millions of Muslims into the country over the last century and a half, conversion of a large number of Americans to Islam, U.S. interests in the Arab oil resources, involvement of Muslims in the American public square; challenges of the Cold War, and the rise of international terrorism in America and elsewhere in the world.⁴⁶

In the same vein, Nigeria, which has a large number of universities and tertiary institutions, and in which Arabic language is believed to have gained much ground, the language, alongside Islamic Studies, are well entrenched in the country's national university curriculum. The twin-disciplines are offered in universities situated in the North and in some of its South-West counterparts up to the Masters and Ph. D degrees.

Among these universities are Usmanu Dan- Fodiyo University, Sokoto; Ahamadu Bello University, Zaria; Bayero University, Kano; University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri; University of Ilorin, Ilorin; Kwara State University, Malete; Kaduna State University, Kaduna; University of Ibadan, Ibadan; University of Lagos, Akoka; Lagos State University Ojo; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba; University of Jos; University of Abuja; Kogi State University, Anyingba, and others. In line with the Kwara State University's linguistic policy, Arabic, French and Portuguese languages are offered as general studies (GNS). Every student compulsorily takes a language of his/her choice for an academic session.⁴⁷ Another large university (Manarat Al-Gaddafi), according to El-Quadghiri, is now under construction in Kano, fully financed by Libyan Arab Jamahiriyyah.⁴⁸

Interestingly, it is worth noting that there had been two departments of Arabic and Islamic Studies in two different universities in Niamey, the capital of the Republic of Niger before the establishment of a third one in 2001 exclusively for girls majoring in the Arabic language and Islamic Studies. Besides, an African Centre for the revival of Islamic heritage has also been established in Niamey.⁴⁹

It is an undeniable fact that Arabic language has also made an unprecedented inroad into the official arena. Countries in West Africa like the Republics of Chad, Niger and Senegal have constitutionally recognized Arabic as one of their national languages. Corroborating this claim, El-Quadghiri notes that "Soon after independence, a Senegalese government magazine *Al Massira*, was published in Arabic, followed by *Al Afkar*, a newspaper of the national union of Arabic speaking authors and journalists, both followed by a number of another magazines and newspapers".⁵⁰

The progress of modernization could be said to have motivated the Muslims in Mali to embark on the publication of two newspapers namely *As-Sahaja* and *Al Mustaqbal*.⁵¹ Several bulletins, academic magazines, periodicals and books are published in Arabic by many universities in the northern part of Nigeria. Taking all into account, we can agree with Dr. Yusuf Al Khalifa Abu Bakr's view that "If we are to choose one of the many African languages to become Africa's official language, we will find that of the three main languages, Arabic has the more chances of obtaining this honour".⁵²

The Future Career of Experts of Arabic and Islamic Education

Sentiments apart, the knowledge of Arabic is very essential in the world. Events in the Middle East affect our daily lives, and only through the study of Arabic can one gain necessary insights into the cultural, religious and political forces that motivate the inhabitants of this vital region, insights that our monolingual media seldom provide.⁵³

The Middle East is the birthplace of the three monotheistic religions and contains some of the world's greatest archeological and religious sites. It is also the locus of two-third of the world's known oil reserves. A good knowledge of Arabic will greatly enhance one's enjoyment of his travels there and his ability to work and interact effectively with Arabic speaking-people.⁵⁴

As to job prospects, the diligent study of Arabic can lead to exciting careers in various fields. Of many positions open to the Arabic speakers is the opportunity of working as a foreign correspondent, a reporter, a translator, or an ambassador, or a teacher, or a lecturer, etc. As one of the official languages of the African Union (AU) and other international organizations such as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the United Nations Organization (UNO) and all its agencies, there are places for qualified translators and bilingual secretaries with competence in Arabic and English languages.⁵⁵

Furthermore, Although English has a monopolistic status on world languages in different fields of knowledge, a language such as Arabic, which is spoken natively by approximately 20% of the world's population, has a lot to do in world's affairs. Experts in Arabic can be managers of government relations for oil companies or market analyst for export companies.⁵⁶ At this juncture, Ogunbiyi asserts further that:

Industries, companies and banks with corporate links or headquarters in the Arab world still prefer to employ people who are bilingual in English and Arabic for some sections of their operations. Documents, reports and letters meant for the Arab world are prepared by Arabic literate staff and secretaries. In the contemporary world, computers with Arabic software are in wide use in addition to the traditional manual Arabic typewriter. It is noteworthy that many trade items such as electronics, foods and medications now have their manufacturers' instructions in major world languages including Arabic.⁵⁷

Additionally, other government employment opportunities for learners of Arabic are foreign-service officers, development programme officers, intelligence analysts, government relations specialists, translators or interpreters. Similar benefits can be enjoyed by both the Nigerian diplomatic mission in the Arab countries as well as Arab embassies in Nigeria. Competence and proficiency in the Arabic language can also be the basis on which Nigerian embassy officials and emissaries to the Arab world are screened before they are dispatched to their different offices in order to understand news about Nigeria in their local newspapers and critically digest and react to it whenever incorrect news about this country are broadcast and spread. All these job

opportunities are realizable and achievable provided experts of the Arabic language are well exposed to the official language of communication, English, and attain high level of proficiency in it.⁵⁸

Therefore, there is no room for apprehension of limited job opportunities after graduation for Arabic specialists reckoning with the current global trends. The United States government, the European Union countries as well as other developing nations are currently giving Arabic a befitting consideration and regard it as a critical language and many scholarships are available.⁵⁹

There is no doubt that more meaningful utilization of Arabic in religious worship for those who are Muslims abounds. There are also openings for qualified teachers of Arabic at all levels of the Nigerian education system.⁶⁰

Recommendations and Suggestions

Problems of Arabic language and Islamic education in West Africa can be greatly ameliorated if the following steps are taken: Firstly, an astronomical sum of money is required from the Arab and Islamic nations, religious organizations and associations and all interested individual stake holders who are concerned with the sustained advancement of the Arabic language including local, state and federal governments. There must be provision for all necessary basic infrastructures, befitting working tools, sufficient and relevant textbooks, qualified human resources, standard and modern instructional materials, and well designed educational curricula. This assistance may be sought for from both the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference which most of the African countries enjoy the membership. Arab nations should do what it takes to revive the lost cultural ties with African countries and explicitly condition their good bilateral ties on the basis of the level of support the Arabic language and Islamic education receive from each nation.

Secondly, great efforts should be exerted in the updating and reviewing of the curricula of private Arabic and Islamic education schools in the region. Deficiencies that are always observed in the Qur'anic schools should be looked in to. There should be the incorporation of all scientific subjects, modern languages, mental development programs which are lacked in the curricula into the school system. The introduction of new and updated teaching methodology should be one of the priorities so as to demystify Arabic language which is invariably seen as an enigma. Sufficient quantities of teachers and books which describe our immediate environment must be made available for students. All these can be achieved if the sustained contacts and collaboration are maintained with the ISESCO, ALESCO, and the World Islamic Call Society as well as with the Arab World.

Conclusion

We have discussed various insurmountable problems encountered in the study and proliferation of Arabic and Islamic education in the West African region before, during and after the colonial era. We have also seen how firmly was the stance of the earlier Muslims in their fight for their faith throughout this dark- age where they were denied of their basic rights.

The study has revealed the long term history of the study of Arabic and Islamic education, pointing out how an astronomical sum of money was earmarked by the successive United States governments for the study of Arabic then of the Islamic education in their most referred institutions of learning.

In West Africa, Arabic and Islamic education have been spontaneously welcome and successfully made inroads into every nook and cranny of the region. At this juncture, suffice to say that the spread of the twin disciplines is evident in many Nigerian universities where they are either both studied independently as two different degree courses or jointly offered as a combined degree course, particularly in the northern and western parts of Nigeria.

The paper has thoroughly discussed various job opportunities nationally, regionally and internationally for those who major and successfully complete their studies in the field of Arabic as well as Islamic education.