

The Arabic and French Languages: their Relevance to National Integration and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the relevance of Arabic and French languages to national integration and development of Nigeria. Methodologies employed in this paper are historical and sociological approaches. The paper discovered that with the spread of Islam in Nigeria, learning of Arabic and French languages through the acquisition of Islamic education commenced. It was also observed that Arabic and French languages had contributed immensely to the development of Nigeria as a nation in the past and that its neglect would not augur well for Nigerian development. The paper, therefore, argues that Arabic and French have a lot to offer in the development of the country, especially in the areas of religion, education, economy, socio-psychology, diplomacy and security. Finally, the paper affirms that the significance of Arabic and French languages transcend the religious sphere and concludes on the note that Arabic and French should be given their prime place and be allowed to contribute their quota to national development.

Keywords: *Languages, Nigeria, Development, Economy, Security, Education, Social, Psychology*

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Background to the Study

Arabic and French are languages of two different origins and cultures. Genetically, Arabic belongs to the Semitic origin, a sub-family of Afro-Asiatic language, while French belongs to the Indo-European languages of the West- Germanic stock. The two languages are officially taught as foreign languages in our various schools in Nigeria even though French is considered to be more foreign than Arabic. This is because Arabic is religiously closer to people in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. The peculiarity about Arabic and French languages is that they made their entry into the country through Islam and Christianity respectively. While Islam spread from the Northern part of the country along with Arabic language, Christianity, on the other hand sprang from the South with "...the Christian missionaries who came through Badagry in 1842 (Raji, 2002). Arabic language is the language of the Qur'an. Today, it is the most important language of the Semitic group spoken by millions of people and understood by many more. The Arabic writing system has an alphabet of twenty-eight consonants. Its writing system was introduced into Makkah not long before the revelation of the Qur'an. Arabic, as established by the usages found in the Qur'an and the Hadith, is still used for composing books. It is also used for journalism, broadcasting, conferences and so forth. Arabic has provided most of the special vocabulary of Islam in use all over the world (Ayuba, 2007).

In addition to religious vocabulary, vast numbers of Arabic and French words have been adopted into African and Asian languages such as Swahili, Hausa, Turkish, Malay, Urdu, Persian and Yoruba. Historically, Arabic and French are the foreign languages in Nigeria today. The reasons are that their entry into the country dated back to the seventh century of the Christian era and the first century of the Hijrah calendar. Arabic and French languages had been used for religious, social and cultural purposes. It was in recognition of their importance that Arabic and French languages are introduced into the Nigerian education curriculum as an academic discipline. In Nigeria today, three languages have been raised to the status of official languages. In addition to English, which is the nation's official language, Arabic and French are also taught in Nigerian schools as foreign languages.

Furthermore, the Government is quite aware of the relevance of Arabic and French in Nigeria – as languages of diplomacy, international relations, national historical studies, literacy, as well as the languages of one of our neighbours Shuwa Arabs and French as official languages in Chad. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to examine the relevance of Arabic and French languages in National integration and development to Nigeria. The work will, look into the major areas where Arabic and French can contribute to the development of Nigeria. The major problems facing Arabic French languages are also looked into (Ayuba 2007).

In other words, the spread of Arabic was, however, confined to the trading circles. Nigeria as a nation has a multiplicity of languages, cultures and religions. There are many Arabic schools in both Northern and Southern Nigeria. The numbers of students in these schools are so many to the extent that their activities, attitudes and behaviours have a significant impact on the larger society. The emphasis on the search for knowledge by Islam accounts for the need of Arabic schools in Nigeria, for every Muslim at any point in time must have being a student of Islam. The reason is that the primary pre-occupation of Muslim is not only to digest, but to grasp the contents as well as imports of Islam and where this could be achieved is the institution of learning known as Arabic schools. These institutions, started from the Mosque of the Prophet in Madinah while his disciples followed suit by using their homes and shops for classes, which were conducted on part-time basis.

The history of Arabic schools throughout the Arab world and in the non-Arab world in particular, has been the history of the spread of Islam. Hence, Nigeria cannot be an exception for the history of these schools is as old as the advent of Islam. Since commerce needs a language of communication between the seller and the buyer, Arabic was used for communication among the traders of that time. The local traders learnt it from their Arab counterparts because Arabic was more developed than the local languages in West Africa. Moreover, the introduction of Islam and simultaneously inception of Islamic education in the territory occasioned the efflorescence of the language. In addition to this religious factor, there were also political and social factors which motivated the people to learn Arabic. The local scholars who were knowledgeable in Arabic enjoyed some socio-political privileges in the society which ordinary people could not enjoy. This greatly motivated the people to learn Arabic. Arabic, therefore, successfully competed with local languages such as Kanuri, Fulfulde, Hausa and Yoruba. In other words, Arabic language enriched these indigenous languages with hundreds of religious, political and commercial words and expressions. Arabic had reached its peak of glory in the Northern Nigeria and was adopted as the official language after the Jihad activities of Othman bin Fudi which began in 1804. This Jihad served as a catalyst for the spread and reformation of Islam. It also served as a booster for the spread of Islamic education and contributed to efflorescence of Arabic scholarship in Nigeria. The advents of the British in Nigeria, however, opened a new chapter in the history of Arabic language. Arabic and French languages are used in schools, religious gatherings, courts, medicine, scientific research and communication, among others (Akungba & Bawa, 2002).

Arabic and French in Nigeria as Foreign Languages

In Nigeria, Islam arrived in the 9th century in the Kanem - Bornu Empire during the reign of Humuljilmi (Fafunwa 1974, Doi 1992), and brought with it Islamic education. The propagation of Islam was done through the teaching and learning of Arabic which is the language in which the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him) who was also an Arab. Islam stresses the need for Muslims to acquire knowledge. That is why the significance of knowledge and its intellectual tradition from the beginning of Islam till the present cannot be underrated. Islam gives importance to knowledge while it emphasizes the intellectual learning and practices that modulate an individual into a good citizen. Jawondo (2002) opined that "Islam stresses the acquisition of knowledge to Muslims, male or female, old or young, able or disabled, rich or poor." Muslims, wherever they are, should imbibe the teachings and practice of Islam. So, if knowledge is the pillar around which the Islamic injunctions build, learning Arabic language becomes paramount in any Islamic community. Qur'an 96:1-5 asserts: Proclaim! (Or read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created; created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood; Proclaim! And thy Lord is most Bountiful; He who taught by (the use of) the pen; taught man that which he knew not.

The above quoted verses are evidence that the Creator admonishes man to seek for knowledge in its entire ramification. No wonder why conversion to Islam goes with the reading and writing of the Holy Qur'an. This becomes necessary because all Muslim prayers and supplications are said in Arabic. "The fact that every Muslim must recite portions of the Qur'an in its original Arabic version in his ritual prayers, no matter what his or her native language is, has promoted considerably the study of Arabic, both as a native and foreign language" (Malik: 1999). Hence wherever Islam is established, Arabic language must follow suit. Thus has Arabic language contributed to the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria for a long time, especially in the North. The advent of the British, however, opened a new page in the history of

Arabic language in Nigeria. Contrary to its dominant pattern in some other parts of Africa, the colonial power encouraged faith; it neither destroyed the Islamic education nor cancelled the Christian missions met in place. Nevertheless, it relied heavily on the services of Christianity to achieve its set objectives. The missions spread the ideology of westernization; hence, the European styles of development became the standard for African continent.

The French language came, not with colonialism, but with Christianity which was earlier established by the Roman Catholic missionaries. Imasuen (1988) confirmed that the Irish catholic priests taught French in seminaries to seminarians as part of their religious education. But then, that was not official. It was taught as a foreign language in some missionary schools at the time. However, the teaching of French started gaining more ground in Nigerian schools after independence, when Nigerians suddenly realized that they were surrounded by francophone countries and therefore saw the need to communicate with their neighbours since they do not want to live in isolation. French was officially introduced to Nigerian schools after the establishment of O.A.U. (now A.U.) in 1963, when it was decided that English, French and Arabic would be the official languages of the organization. It was also resolved that Francophone and Anglophone countries should include each other's official language in their school curriculum. Thus did Islamic education in Arabic and French through the government efforts spread from north to south and vice versa in Nigeria? Having said much about the historical background of the two languages in Nigeria, this study shall look on Mubi which is the town of reference.

The Role of Arabic and French Languages in National Development

The role of Arabic and French languages in building a nation of our dream cannot be over-emphasized. The term 'development' means different things to different people. Therefore, there have been divergent opinions between the economists and social scientists as to what constitutes development. The emphasis that is laid on what constitutes development to Economists is not the same with that of Agriculturalists. For instance, Economists lay much emphasis on increase in per capital income, while Agriculturalists accept increase in agricultural output for measuring development.

In the context of this work, we adopt the definition given by Hutchinson Encyclopedia that defines "development" in the following words:

The acquisition by a society of industrial techniques and technology; hence the common classification of the "developed" nations of the first and second worlds and the poorer, "developing" or 'underdeveloped' nations of the third world.

"Development" also signifies an increase in the ability "to regulate both internal relationships" Walter Rodney observes that more often than not, the term 'development' is used in an exclusive economic cause, the rationale behind this being that the type of economy a society has "is itself an index of other social features". Based on this assertion, we would therefore examine the areas in which Arabic and French languages can contribute to Nigerian development.

Religion: Religion can be defined from various points of views. According to Abe, (2007), it may be viewed from philosophical, cosmological, ontological, anthropological, sociological, political, ethical, scientific, physiological, psychological and archaeological perspectives. A more general definition of religion spreads over the concepts of system of faith, belief, worship and practice, which make dynamic impact on the control of human life.

Religion is derived from the word religion, which means 'to bind'. It is that which binds man to the truth. Moreover, a history of human civilization will show that religion has been the supreme force in the development of mankind to its present condition. The moral and ethical development of man to his present state, if due to any one cause, is due to religion because true and lofty morals are inspired only by faith in God. Love, concord, sympathy and kindness to one's fellow-man have been the message of every religion. Islam, being a complete way of life, affirms God's sovereignty over the entire gamut of man's life. Its teachings cover all fields of human activity, spiritual and material, individual and social, educational and cultural, economic and political, national and international.

Since Arabic is the religious language of Islam, early introduction of the Muslim children to the Arabic education helps them to understand the teachings of Islam and the words of the Qur'an as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad. Arabic language establishes the fear of God in the minds of the pupils because the courses taught in it help the pupils to have respect for their elders, teachers, parents and God. It also helps the learners to develop good moral and ethical behaviour in the society. When members of the society imbibe good morals and translate them into positive societal norms, it greatly helps in bringing about the much desired development of a nation. In a nutshell, Arabic in conjunction with Islam has played this moral role in the past effectively and can still do the same if given the needed encouragement (Ayuba, 2012).

Education: Education is said to be coined out of two Latin words, educere which means 'to nourish', 'to raise', 'to bring out', and educare which means 'to draw out', 'to lead out'. Education is seen by Adesina (1989), as a tool for the integration of the individual effectively into a society so that the individual can achieve self-realization, develop national consciousness, promote unity and strive for social, economic, political, scientific, cultural and technological process.

Education as a social service is the responsibility of the Government which must not be shirked under any guise. It should constitute the standard upon which a Government may be assessed. Educational development is imperative and urgent. It must not only be treated as a national emergency, second only to war, but must also move with the momentum of a revolution.

However, when an individual is being educated he becomes sound physically, mentally, emotionally, morally, spiritually and socially. Arabic as the medium of formal education in the Northern Nigeria had played the above mentioned role effectively even before the introduction of English. Though Arabic scholars have emphasized the need for an improved method of teaching Arabic, it can still be argued that Northern Nigeria would have reached what Arabized North African countries attained in their educational development, if it had been allowed to continue with Arabic medium in her educational pursuit. The average Nigerian Muslims, both in the South and the North, even till today prefer acquisition of Arabic language to English. This is the reason why Arabic schools have continued to spring up and compete favorably with the English ones in terms of encouragement from parents and pupil's enrollment.

Sociology-Psychology: Arabs were known to have reached a high level in the use of Arabic language as an art before the advent of Islam. In other words, Arabic and French, as languages, have highly developed literature which is evident in the life of the Arabs, right from the pre-Islamic era to the present day. At all levels of Arabic education, the students learn many Arabic poetic verses that teach social norms such as self-reliance, sincerity, bravery and generosity, to

mention just a few. Therefore, the learners of Arabic and French cannot avoid being influenced by the culture, sociology and psychology portrayed in such literature. Arabic had been used to write many works range from Acts of Worship, Islamic Jurisprudence, Health Education and Ethics to Sociology, Economic, Public Administration and Political Science. Such works were also taught at schools and discussed at public gathering specially organized for the enlightenment of the masses, male and female.

Economy: Arabic and French had also been the languages of commerce for centuries. As mentioned earlier, there was commercial link between North Africa and West Africa before the said languages in West Africa. This explains why the historical developments of Arabic and French languages were tied to the commercial activities. Moreover, there is a strong commercial link between Nigeria, Arab and Francophone countries in Asia, Europe and Africa. Since Nigerian citizens transact business in Egypt, Cameroon, Benin Republic, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, France, Canada, among others, the knowledge of Arabic and French ability to speak the two languages will assist in boosting Nigerian economy. Therefore, the introduction of Arabic and French in Nigeria also create a situation of positive economic life of living because it guaranteed a good source of income for both indigenous Arabic scholars and francophone foreigners. They became employers by establishing Arabic or French schools and employed Arabic or French specialists, thereby reducing the rate of unemployment in the country.

Nigeria is a strong member of Organization of Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC) – an organization established to ensure the stability of the price of the petroleum in the international market. As many of the most influential member nations are Arab countries, Arabic language will create opportunities to enter into agreement with them and there will be better interaction between us.

Diplomatic Relationship: Diplomacy can be defined as practices and institutions by which nations conduct their relations with one another. It means that countries all over the world move closer to one another for many benefits such as economic, political, scientific or technological gains. Since Nigeria has diplomatic relations with some Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Syria, Libya, Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, among others, she, therefore, needs Arabic scholars to ensure mutual understanding and exchanging of ideas between them. Besides, Arabic is one of the official languages of the United Nations Organization (UNO) of which Nigeria is a member, others being English, French, Italian and Russian. It also constitutes the strength behind the solidarity and harmony found among the members of African Union (AU) because it is one of its three official working languages alongside with French and English

Security: Security, according to 'Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary', means safety, freedom from danger or anxiety. Security is sometimes as the whole range of measures affecting the economic and social welfare of a population, as well as protection against internal or external aggression. In the world today, the security of nations, societies and individuals is of great concern to all, as criminals have resulted to modern scientific methods in executing their crimes against humanity. It has been established that there are many Arabic scholars, using Arabic as their medium of expression in Nigeria today, the Governments at all levels should, therefore, take the security of their citizens serious by encouraging the learning of Arabic to help them in the security services. The Governments should employ Arabic scholars

to assist in the security of Nigeria. They will be able to report any issue of security interest from Arabic schools or gathering where Arabic is the medium of expression to the Governments.

Problems Facing the Teaching and Learning of Arabic and French Languages in Nigeria.

Ta'lim which means imparting knowledge is the Arabic word for teaching. Other words that is synonymous with Ta'lim are Ta'dīb, Tadrīs and Tarbiyyah. According to the Qur'an, the art of teaching was first undertaken by Allah when He taught Prophet Adam about his environment. Qur'an 2: 31 tell us that Adam was taught the names of all things. As Allah did to Adam, He also taught Prophet Muhammad (Q. 96: 3-5). Other Prophets, such as Ibrahim, Nuh, Musa and 'Isa were also taught by Allah. It is, thus, known who the first teacher was. According to Bidmus,(1996) teaching is defined as the process of equipping the learner with the right knowledge and skills.

Consequently, Arabic and French have not enjoyed the same degree of Government or institutional respect given to English. There is a dearth of teachers in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary institutions in many parts of the country, because the Governments did not employ teachers to handle these two languages. Some schools do not have any teacher, while some have only one. This has been a lamentable one for long. Society's Poor Attitude People look down on the Arabic and French teachers because our people were not talked about the importance of these languages. This is the reason why pupils are not given adequate encouragement and support to study Arabic and French school. Some parents believe that the studies of these languages are just a waste of time. They do not know that there are many Doctors and Professors of Arabic and French languages and literature. Even some Arabic and French languages teachers behave as if they had studied Arabic and French out of frustration. They maintain poor attitude towards the future career of these languages by believing that only available career for it is teaching. Therefore, dedication of such teachers towards the advancement of the subject or course is regrettable. They forget that the knowledge they acquire at the Higher Institution of learning is meant to prepare them for national development. The higher education provides an objective view of human capacity to bring about positive change in an individual that will enhance productivity that the society needs (Ayuba 2006).

Inadequacy of Teaching Materials

Another major difficulty facing the teaching and learning of Arabic and French languages in Nigeria is the issue of teaching materials. The nonchalant attitude of our Governments and teachers to provide these materials for effective teaching and learning of Arabic and French languages has adverse effect on the subjects. The materials such as pictures, real objects and sketches, among others are very important in teaching the meaning of some words like cup, football, banana and so forth. Tape recorders, videotapes and language laboratory are also helpful in supporting the teacher's oral instruction in Arabic and French pronunciations. Lack of suitable textbooks also contributes a lot to teaching and learning of Arabic and French languages in Nigeria. In other words, very good textbooks are very useful in learning process in order to facilitate quick understanding of the languages. This is because they are linked between the teacher and his teaching (Ayuba, 2011).

This is the reason why the teacher has to apply intelligent in the choice and use of textbooks. Textbooks must have bearings, to a large extent, to the background and culture of learners, if they are to mean anything to them. Even though, Arabic and French teachers have taken up this challenges of inadequacy of suitable textbooks, but the cost is on the high side and not easily available in the market as there are few Arabic and French bookshops in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In this work, a modest approach has been made to highlight the relevance of Arabic and French languages to Nigerian development. Religion, education, economy, sociology-psychology, diplomacy and security are the areas examined. Also observations revealed that the participation of the Arabic scholars in political administration in per-colonial Nigeria greatly assisted the rulers. In other words, the power of literacy in Arabic which the scholars were privilege to possess was needed by the rulers to develop the land and enhance the smooth running of their administrative machinery. Therefore, the impetus for the direct involvement of the Arabic in the administration seems to be its relevance to the maintenance of social justice. Arabic language was used as a vehicle of enlightenment before, during and after the Nigerian independence. It was also used to record history. It had also served as a foundation for the development as well as a tool for the spread of education.

The work also condemned the Government's nonchalant attitude towards Arabic and French by not giving it adequate moral and financial supports. The paper called on the Government to encourage the teaching and learning of both Arabic and French languages in Nigeria. Its effect on the teachers and learners are also explained. Since it is part of the responsibility of the Governments at all levels to look after the general welfare of the citizenry, the work conclude on the note that, it is not only desirable but incumbent on them to ensure that no problem is placed in the way of Arabic and French languages and individual wishes to study any, because it could not do any harm to adherents of other subjects. The Governments should recruit more Arabic and French teachers in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary institutions in the country and assist in providing instructional materials that will assist in teaching and learning them. The Government should also help in providing current Arabic and French textbooks for the schools.

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